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For some 650 years, it has been fun to recount how Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta, Lord of Rimini (1417-1468), was three times burned in effigy and damned to hell by Pius II, the reigning pope. No one like him had been seen before or after. Yet at the same time, Sigismondo was responsible for two of the most noble and solemn works of art from the fifteenth century: the Tempio Malatestiano and Piero della Francesca's fresco of Sigismondo Kneeling in Prayer before his Patron Saint. The duality voiced in this simple description points to an even deeper duality in the aspirations of the man, expressed visually in the works of art he inspired.

This is the third time I have been given the opportunity to praise Diane Cole Ahl. The first was when I was sent her book on Benozzo Gozzoli (1996) for review in the early part of her career¹. The second, almost 25 years later, was at the symposium held at Lafayette College that honored her retirement from an extraordinarily successful career that has known no bounds. On that occasion I decided to celebrate the event by reflecting on how we both have come to spend our lives concentrating on works of art. In this *Festschrift*, I will first retrace how I discovered an idea and then developed, published, defended, republished, and expanded it over a period of almost 45 years, and now present it in a smoothed out and updated form. I do this to show that, like Diane, we art historians never really retire.

I start with graduate school, New York University, the Institute of Fine Arts, 1950. I was invited by the Graduate Student Club at Columbia University, our competing institution, to give a talk. In complete naïveté I said yes and then worried for months about what I would have to say. With great presumption I decided to talk about Piero della Francesca's fresco *Portrait of Sigismondo Malatesta before his Patron Saint* (1450?; fig. 1), a paper I had to finish anyway for one of my classes. I went immediately to my mentor, H.W. Janson, and asked for bibliography. He suggested contacting Barbara Lane (then at the University of Pennsylvania) whom he knew was working on donor portraits. Barbara was very forthcoming and shared with me references rich in examples, both medieval and Renaissance, from northern Europe and from Italy. I still thank her profusely for the help she gave me². However, the examples all seemed to fit a not-very-interesting pattern: someone, quite small, kneeling to the side of someone, usually much

bigger and more important, standing or seated. I gave the talk, describing how Piero's painting differed from his models. The Columbia students were polite, but not dazzled.

As time went on, the quite boring repetition of elements in the donor tradition made me take the differences in Piero's fresco more seriously. I realized slowly that the differences themselves were dramatic: his was a large-scale fresco (Piero's first), isolated and not part of a multi-scene cycle as, for example, the donor scene in the Saint Martin Chapel in Assisi³. As opposed to the usual format of a tall, vertical rectangle in which a tiny donor addresses a looming patron saint, Piero's format is a wide, horizontal rectangle, and the saintly figure and human devotee are equal in size⁴. Moreover, there are large hunting dogs lying behind the donor in watchful, symbiotic poses. Most out of the ordinary, there is a painted hole in the wall surrounded by a molded frame, much too low for a window, but oddly giving view to a distant building in a blue-sky landscape. An inscription on the circular frame gives the name of the building. Another inscription at the base of the overall composition identifies the painted figures as well as the painter. Both inscriptions carry dates that differ. Suddenly the composition went from a routine subject to a strikingly new image full of challenging questions. At that point in time (early 1960s), Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta (1417-1468) was still considered an offensively cruel tyrant, hanged in effigy three times in Rome for blasphemy, and uniquely damned to hell by the pope⁵. Yet I saw no trace of the villainy he was accused of in the painting. It was puzzling. It was also obvious that the man and his fresco would come together at some point when innovations and historical facts would interact. I saw that I would have to chase down each element in its turn. The questions became a subject; an article began to form.

About 1961 I began living on and off in Rome where I could work on a daily basis at the Vatican Library. This facility provided me with material I could not have expected. Sigismondo began to emerge as an ambiguous character, blasphemous for sure: he was ruthless in war and lived openly with his mistress for many years before marrying her. But he seemed to me also rather magnanimous, highly cultivated, erudite, and the progenitor of some of the noblest monuments – architecture, painting, illuminated manuscripts, metalwork, literature, music, and on and on – of the fifteenth century. Outside, on both flanks of the Tempio Malatestiano, which he had Leon Battista Alberti re-design beginning in 1449 (left unfinished in 1454), Sigismondo had mounted two identical stone plaques that articulated the dedication of the new building. The inscriptions are not in Italian nor in classical Latin, but in eloquent Greek, securing a statement of the superb level of humanistic learning to be expected inside the building. The content of the

inscriptions, as I understood it, revealed a deep, heartfelt commitment to what he believed to be his calling as a ruler: a two-fold dedication to Immortal God and to the City (*polis*), or the people he ruled. This dual dedication was the subject I then began to pursue. Not long after I had come to this conclusion, I found an article (1971) by Maria Rzepińska whose subject was the same fresco but propounded the precisely opposite point of view⁶. The author had, as she said, set out to decipher hidden, symbolic meaning in the «immense» pair of dogs represented in the painting which, she posited, led to astrology, Plato's philosophy, and mythical, Hellenistic-Egyptian-Oriental cosmology. I took note of this opposition, and since I disagreed with almost every word, decided to respond when it came time for my own publication.

While I continued to work on historical material, I had a growing sense that there were some underlying proportions that ruled the fresco's composition, but that I could not put my finger on. I was living in the American Academy in Rome in this period, and I beseeched several young architectural fellows there to look at my photographs and tell me what they could see that I did not. I projected an image of the fresco on the wall enlarged to the size of the original, about 3 x 4 feet. Two fellows, Peter Miller Schmitt and James Guthrie, became interested. They set about analyzing various measurements and soon discovered the coordinates Piero used to stabilize his configuration. The diagram of what they found can be seen in Figure 11.

At length I put all my thoughts and discoveries into an article and submitted it to «The Art Bulletin», which after the not unusual but annoying wait, appeared in 1974⁷. When I had the actual issue in hand, I saw that reproductions of a previously unpublished object, the *sinopia* (final preparatory drawing) of the fresco found under the painting when it was removed from the wall, were so small as to be unreadable. Therefore, less than a year later, I persuaded the «Bulletin» to give me a full page to reproduce the precious object on an intelligible scale⁸. Following that act of generosity, in the same volume in a *Letter to the Editor*, I personally and my article were attacked by Maria Rzepińska. I was attacked because I had at my disposal «both financial means and unlimited access to the richest special libraries and archives» (*magari!* if only that were so!), and my article was attacked because it claimed that «the fresco [was] a traditional votive painting in the spirit of orthodox theology». My response, in the same issue, was to her publication's lack of visual evidence in the fresco for Sigismondo's legendary «interest in occult philosophy and his fabled evil-doings», which seemed to me, in this context, irrelevant⁹.

I found new relevant material two years later. It came in the form of a brief article by the eminent scholar of Italian humanism, Augusto Campana¹⁰. Because

Campana discussed an ancient source of the Greek inscription on the Tempio Malatestiano in a periodical on classical archaeology, I felt it would be appropriate to alert art historians to his contribution with a brief note¹¹. A decade later, to my great pleasure, my efforts found some acceptance in Italy, and I was invited to produce an Italian translation of my 1974 «Art Bulletin» article to lead a celebratory volume (1984)¹². Here I had a chance to incorporate post-publication information I had assembled and correct a number of misstatements.

The penultimate step in this Riminese saga was taken 34 years later (2017) on the occasion of the 600th anniversary of Sigismondo Malatesta's birth. A two-day colloquium celebrating Malatesta literary and visual culture was organized at the Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies (University of California, Los Angeles). This august center was headed by Massimo Ciavolella, distinguished scholar of Italian and comparative literature, a native of Rimini, and friend of mine for many years. For this occasion, held jointly at UCLA and the J. Paul Getty Research Center, Ciavolella invited several of his compatriots, specialists in Malatestiana, along with a battery of scholars from all over Europe, Canada, and the United States to participate. Their work on the literature and visual arts at Sigismondo's court fills the three-decade gap since my own publication, and I will outline briefly a few of the most pertinent examples of that discussion.

Perhaps the biggest surprise was the laying to rest – once and for all – of the ghost of Sigismondo as the devil incarnate and reestablishing him as no better or worse than most of his contemporaries. He, like several other Renaissance *condottieri*, was the victim of not unusual nineteenth-century mythmaking¹³. This definitive act was carried out by Ferruccio Farina, founder and Director of the Centro Internazionale di Studi Francesca da Rimini, in his publications and in updated material in his talk¹⁴. His comparative reports on the aristocratic courts in Milan, Mantua, Ferrara, and Urbino, among others, all rich in culture – and ruckus in love and war – showed that Sigismondo was perhaps the worst, but only in a legal sense, since he refused to pay taxes he considered unreasonable and drew the ferocious enmity of the reigning pope. Anthony D'Elia (Queens University, Kingston, Canada), both a classicist and historian, demonstrated his amazing translation skills in dealing with difficult Greek and Latin works of the humanists in Sigismondo's court: encomia of various sorts by Basinio Basini, Il Porcellio, Roberto Valturio, and the lesser known Giovanni de' Chocchi. In this way, D'Elia has opened stimulating views of what he calls one of the central problems of the Renaissance – whether or not the recovery and imitation of classical pagan culture created a fundamental clash with Christian values. Asking this question while making sources newly available allows a reorienting the

depths of searching Sigismondo's activities, ideas and actions, and his true role in Renaissance society. Daniel Zolli (Department of Art History, Pennsylvania State University) demonstrated his development of a unique method of analyzing sculpture, studying both materials and techniques. By very close observation and historical comparisons, Zolli examined the reliefs of Agostino di Duccio in the Tempio Malatestiano. And with original vocabulary revealed the relationship between the subtle complexity of the sculptural style and erudite significance of the obscure Riminese subjects. Ulrike Bauer-Eberhardt, art historian and librarian at the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich, discussed the first large-scale exhibition of illuminated Malatesta manuscripts now in preparation. Scheduled to be shown in Europe and at the J. Paul Getty Museum, it will provide not only the opportunity to see examples of Roberto Valturio's great work, *De Re Militari*, commissioned by Sigismondo and published in 1472 (Verona), but the exhibition will also include manuscripts of the many other masterworks created for the court, to be seen in public for the first time. My contribution to the colloquium was a shortened, re-written version of *Piero della Francesca's Fresco of Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta before Saint Sigismund* (1974), which seems to me to have withstood the test of time.

Now comes *Celebrating Magnificenza*, and a happy opportunity not only to present these ideas to a different audience, but also, more importantly, for the third time, to highlight for Diane and her own work, the skillful and progressive activities of the new generation.

* * *

Leon Battista Alberti's church of San Francesco in Rimini, later called the Tempio Malatestiano, is like a large reliquary, built over and replacing the thirteenth-century church, burial ground of the Malatesta clan for centuries (fig. 2). It took some time to get the project started, but foundation medals dated 1449 were found under the pilaster at the entrance to the Saint Sigismund Chapel, the first on right as you enter. Piero della Francesca's first recorded fresco was painted for that chapel, separated by a wall pierced by a large, barred window (see fig. 18)¹⁵. On the exterior northwestern and northeastern flanks of the church are the virtually identical Greek inscriptions (figs. 3a-b) that translate as follows: «This expensive building represents a Thank Offering for answering my prayer for survival and victory. The means I was given in the face of dangers were fitness and courage. My offering is directed To Immortal God and to the City, who make manifest my fame and piety»¹⁶. This dual dedication, in *expressis verbis*, is the theme of Piero della

Francesca's painting of Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta before his onomastic saint Sigismund.

Immediately after the bombing of Rimini (28 December 1943), in early 1944, experts removed the fresco from the wall and discovered what was left of the underlayers of the painting, or the *arriccio* (rough plaster) and *sinopia* (fig. 4)¹⁷. It revealed that Piero had sketched on the plaster, establishing the positions of the main elements: Sigismondo's profile and chest, the saint's leg, the classical pilasters, escutcheon, floral swags, and a great deal of the decorative frame that borders three sides of the rectangle. There was also a badly damaged inscription below the scene identifying both figures and, in smaller letters, naming the artist: «PETRI DE BVRGO SANSEPOLCRO OPUS» with the date of 1450¹⁸.

I turn now to the subject of the fresco, patently Christian, in an ecclesiastical building, in spite of the donor's manifest interest in antique history and pagan religion¹⁹ (see fig. 1). Occupying the center of a tripartite arrangement, Sigismondo is represented kneeling in strict profile, his hands in an attitude of prayer. He is flanked on the left by his patron saint enthroned on a dais, and on the right by two reclining dogs facing in opposite directions, and a circular view of his fortress-castle, which also bears his name. The underlying structure is a rising diagonal, starting with animal forms on the lower right, moving up to the human donor, and completing the hierarchical progression with the haloed figure of saintly stature seated on a raised, rug-covered dais.

A fundamental question I did not ask when first I confronted this painting is: what occasioned Sigismondo to make this commission? Put another way: what in Sigismondo's life motivated him, and why now? Why was Piero chosen, and what was he asked to do? The archival work of James Banker has provided a viable connection between Rimini and Borgo San Sepolcro (later called Sansepolcro), Piero's home, in the appointment of Jacopo Anastagi as secretary to Sigismondo's court. Anastagi was a relative of Piero's sister-in-law, Giovanna, his brother Marco's wife. He thereby may have been in a position to suggest his *paisano* for the project²⁰. This fact is helpful in suggesting how Sigismondo learned about Piero, but has nothing to do with why Sigismondo commissioned the painting.

In this context, the location of the fresco in the Chapel of the Relics is important. Positioned on the interior wall and raised above the floor, it continues beyond the top of the wall onto the base of the barrel vault that forms the ceiling²¹. The field measures 257 x 345 cm (ca. 3 x 4 feet). The chapel's altar is on the opposite wall, facing the fresco. The room is closed off from the nave of the church by a monumental, double-locked bronze door, surrounded by an elaborately carved pediment and door jambs. Thus the room was not open to the public, and the

fresco was meant to be seen only in private²² (fig. 5). As opposed to most fresco donor portraits, the representation is not part of a large cycle, but is presented in isolation, and, for this rather traditional subject, out-of-the ordinary in format. In the long history of devotees kneeling in obeisance to a haloed saint, the most frequent shape is a vertical rectangle; see, for example, *Bishop Teobaldo Pontano before the Magdalene* (fig. 6), often attributed to Giotto, in the Magdalene Chapel, Lower Church of San Francesco in Assisi²³. A hundred years later the vertical rectangle with small-scale donor format was still in force, as in the central doors of Saint Peter's in Rome, and Filarete's bronze relief of *Pope Eugenius IV before Saint Peter* (fig. 7) put in place in 1449, contemporary with Piero's fresco²⁴. Another element with a history in scenes of devotion is the pair of dogs, which Piero again changed. For example, in the Duc de Berry's prayer scene (1388), where the Duke kneels before the Madonna, are two small animals. The Duke's canines (fig. 8) are small and docile, far from Piero's strong, hunting variety²⁵. Unique is Piero's horizontal format and the fact that the suppliant is portrayed in the same scale as the superior being and emphasized in the central position. Beyond these elements, the composition as a whole is oriented toward the left, toward a window in the wall between the two chapels that was built, torn down, and rebuilt at a different height²⁶. As it is, the figure of Sigismondo appears at a height from which – were he a real person – he could see through the window into the adjacent chapel of his patron saint and observe the Holy Mass taking place there.

Sigismondo was the second of three illegitimate sons of Pandolfo Malatesta, a successful Riminese *condottiere*, who died in 1427 when Sigismondo was ten. Within a few months, Pandolfo's brother Carlo, who was childless, successfully petitioned Pope Martin V (r. 1417-1431) to legitimate the boys and then adopted all three. The move not only solved Carlo's inheritance problems, but also raised the rank of the boys and gave them social standing. Following Carlo's death in 1432, the 15-year-old Sigismondo outshone his brothers and ascended to the position of Papal Vicar²⁷. The following year, 1433, he was knighted by the recently crowned Emperor Sigmund of Hungary in a huge, three-day ceremony in Rimini²⁸. The fact that Sigismondo shared the onomastic patronage of Saint Sigismund with the Holy Roman Emperor was enriched by reference to the saint's important cult in Lombardy, specifically in the province of Brescia where Sigismondo was born. Incidentally, another Lombard basilica dedicated to Saint Sigismund in the not-too-far-away Rivolta d'Adda also had a dual dedication, to Saint Sigismund and Santa Maria Assunta. I also note here that in the first month of that same year of 1433, Isotta degli Asti, the lady who was to shape, to some extent, the fortunes of Sigismondo, came into this world.

In 1437, after a brief period of excommunication because of his refusal to pay the taxes due to the pope, Sigismondo was pardoned and appointed Commander of the Papal Army. There followed: his many military victories; two political marriages; several children, legitimate and otherwise; and then, in 1445 the famous switch from the side of Naples to Florence at Piombino and his greatest victory in the Tuscan Wars²⁹. The following year, 1446, a year that became an emblem in their lives, he took the now 14-year-old Isotta to bed – and kept her there for the rest of his life. Their first child was born within a year, a boy named Giovanni, who died an infant and was buried, although illegitimate, in San Francesco with splendid pomp. During the next four years, Sigismondo rose to the height of his fame, and in 1450, Pope Nicholas V (r. 1447-1455), in a papal bull dated 20 August, confirmed his vicariate of Rimini, Cesena, Fano, Bertinoro, San Leo, and so on. Ten days later, Nicholas issued a second bull, granting legitimation to the couple's son, Malatesta, who thrived and would become Sigismondo's *prediletto*. At this point, Sigismondo's affair with Isotta was public knowledge, and he had solved problems that had plagued his family: he was master of his territories and, even more importantly, he had a legitimate heir with, although still unmarried, the woman he loved³⁰. He had every reason to celebrate. I believe that these events – professional and personal – lay behind his commission to Piero della Francesca.

With this idea in mind, I ask how Piero responded to the task of visualizing success. I have already mentioned the change of scale he introduced; that is, the devotee is in the same ethereal realm as the saint, although we know he was very much alive. Piero began with a full-scale preliminary study for the likeness (fig. 9), in tempera with some oil, on wood panel³¹. The image is rather tougher and more realistic than what became the broader, more idealized fresco profile, though he still enlarged the back of the skull on the wall. In both paintings, and in spite of Sigismondo's vaunted pride in his military superiority, Piero represents him in civilian dress. Other soldier-devotees had shown themselves ready for battle. For example, the Cavalli brothers wear chain mail before the Virgin in their votive fresco in Sant'Anastasia, Verona (1369-1375; fig. 10), and later, Piero painted Sigismondo's neighbor/competitor Federico da Montefeltro in his glorious suit of laminated steel armor in the *Brera Altarpiece* (1472-1474)³². But Rimini's lord comes dressed in a high collar, unbelted *gonella* (a fancy, unpleated coat) made of damask, and wearing long red *calze* (stockings), as he would be seen holding court or at a ball³³. In fact, as we shall see, he is at court. His pose is a strict profile, in the manner of a medal, but includes his full body in a kneeling position. It was the isolation of the figure, the strictness of his pose, and his centrality that led me to question an underlying structure for the composition.

Piero had been moving around before he came to Rimini about 1450: study in Florence; home to Sansepolcro; assignments in Ferrara, then Ancona. His interest in mathematics had not yet manifested itself in his paintings. He was to write three important mathematical treatises, the first of which was the *Trattato d'Abaco* – an elaborate variation on algebra textbooks; it seems to date perhaps a decade after Rimini³⁴. So he must have been thinking about and teaching algebra and geometry for some time when he arrived in Rimini. I put this thought together with the fresco since in it, his later fundamental emphasis on perspective – that is the method of representing three dimensions on a two-dimensional surface – seems not a major concern. On this basis, I asked two young architects to analyze the surface geometry of the field, and their results revealed just what Piero had done (fig. 11).

The wall behind the figures is articulated by white marble fluted pilasters with intercolumniation clad with dark, veined marble veneer or *specchiatura*. An expanse of patterned floor pavement is visible, but not the ceiling. Since the orthogonals in the pavement do not converge at a single point, or create an uninterrupted view into depth, we may assume they have expressive rather than spatial value. On the contrary, Piero seems to have had something else in mind, namely lateral extension. Remember, he was faced with carrying out his task on a curved wall. He apparently created the desired effect by using two strict linear measurements as the basis of his design: one of these is the width of the side *specchiatura*, which I designate as B. Making squares of this measurement we find that the height of the side *specchiatura* panel measures precisely four B. Continuing with this measurement it becomes apparent that the total height of the fresco equals six B. By extending the sides of the B squares horizontally, the lines correspond to several major points in the composition: the bottom of the swags; the donor's chin; and most important, as tangents to the top and bottom of the inner circle of the oculus. The diameter of this circle thus, importantly, equals B.

The second basic measurement is the width of the three-sided frame, designated as C. This measurement is identical to that of the pilasters with their strips³⁵. Further, B plus C, designated as A, equals precisely half the width of the central *specchiatura*. The central *specchiatura*, therefore, equals A+A. The overall width of the fresco is thus a combination of these set measurements in rhythmic, interlocking units: for example, C+B+C+A+A+C+B+C, or A+C+A+A+C+A, and so on. While these dimensions are mathematically linked, I cannot see that they represent the Golden Section or have any other symbolic value. They are, however, responsible for the composition's harmonious balance, and more importantly,

make it possible to continue the sequence in both lateral directions, spreading the space sideways, far beyond the areas hidden by the frame.

And this feature brings the composition into the realm of another well-known tradition, this time secular, namely scenes in audience halls. A precisely contemporary prototype appears on Filarete's bronze doors of Saint Peter's, in the small scene of *Pope Eugenius IV Crowning Sigmund of Hungary as Holy Roman Emperor* (fig. 12), an event that took place just before the emperor journeyed to Rimini in 1433. Sigmund kneels before the enthroned pope in an audience hall adorned with pilasters and repeated leafy swags. Piero's arrangement follows this pattern, intensifying the extension by showing quarter swags passing behind the frame, as does the oculus frame, as well as the tail of one of the dogs, which disappears and then comes back into view.

Thus, we have a duality in the essential form of the scene. The cast of characters is clearly based on the tradition of devotional obeisance and religious patronage, but its structure implies secular fealty and aspirations of imperial authority.

The same duality is apparent in the figure of the saint. The haloed personage represents Saint Sigismund of Burgundy (d. 524), the first Christian king of the Gauls, who, after an unspeakable crime (he had his drunken son drowned in a well), was so filled with remorse that he abdicated his throne, died a martyr, and became venerated throughout Southern France and Northern Italy³⁶. It has long been recognized that Piero gave him the countenance and northern-style lappet headgear of the same Holy Roman Emperor (fig. 13), who had knighted his namesake, thus multiplying the allusions, both spiritually and politically³⁷. At the same time I emphasize that the scene is not historical. There are no appropriate gestures, no sword, no spurs, or other chivalric signs. Even more to the point, the saint's face is not a portrait. His features are more patriarchal than the emperor's. His beard is not a single flowing shock, but stiff and forked in the apostolic manner. He is haloed and holds an orb and scepter, purporting universal saintly dominion, in the same manner as the later sculptured figure of Saint Sigismund in his adjacent chapel³⁸.

There is also dual meaning in the image of Sigismondo's fortified castle, a visual neology and another namesake, but with a twist. What is striking is the naturalism, enhanced by the consistent flow of light and shadow, and by the blue sky and clouds, which strongly support the impression of an open vista. Yet, because of its low position in the architecture, as noted, it cannot be normal fenestration. In contrast, Piero's molded frame suggests three-dimensional reality because it passes into the space behind the painted frame and then returns to view. From a morphological point of view, however, we may ask to what does this

oculus refer? I believe the inscription on the frame is the key. A circular, isolated architectural representation framed by a curved inscription joins another long-standing tradition, which, surprisingly enough, is numismatic, specifically that of medieval seals and coins. Civic seals throughout Italy took this form, showing a building characteristic of the locale from the front and a leonine poetic verse inscribed in the outer circular frame³⁹ (fig. 14). In fact, the reverse of the golden seal of Emperor Sigmund of Hungary, with its abstract image of Rome (fig. 15), has this form and was known well in Rimini from the 1433 affidavit he left confirming Sigismondo's knighthood⁴⁰.

The image is that of the Malatesta Rocca, as Sigismondo called it, which he started to refurbish in 1437, according to the prognostications of his astrologer⁴¹. In its new form it would withstand artillery fire. Serving as residence as well as bastion, the castle was ready for habitation in 1446, though not fully complete. This is the year recorded in the inscription on the frame, which reads: «CASTELLUM SISMUNDUM ARIMINESE 1446»⁴². The gorgeous Matteo de' Pasti medal that displays the same name and date is now believed to have been struck about 1450 while showing the retrospective anniversary date of 1446, and probably following Piero's design on the reverse⁴³.

More important, however, is to observe the contraction in the spelling of the castle's name, from *Sigismondus* to *Sismondus*, both of which survive in modern Italian either as names or surnames. They derive from the very ancient Gothic name Sigismund (Sigmund in modern German), a name composed of two words, each of which has meaning. *Sigis*, means victory, triumph, conquest (modern German, *Sieg*), and *Munt*, meaning protection or hand (modern German, *die Munt*). The name thus literally means "Victorious Protector". At least three inscriptions in the Tempio call Sigismondo by this name: the two Greek dedicatory inscriptions on the exterior name him *Nikephoros*, or Bringer of Victory; and in the Latin distich circling his fine profile portrait on the back of the Ancestors Sarcophagus's lid, he is called *Victoris*⁴⁴. Accepting the idea that Sigismondo meant his name to carry the weight of its verbal value, and thus recognizing his insistence on an alternate form for his castle's name, he must have been indicating a related but alternate meaning. And indeed, the three syllables of Sismundum also have significance, this time in Latin. *Sis* is a common contraction of *si vis* or *si vis sultis*, a parenthetical interjection meaning "as it were" or "if you will"⁴⁵. *Mundus*, of course, means world, universe, cosmos; the form *mundum* used in the inscription is neuter nominative and is adjectival, modifying *Castellum*. Literally, *Sismundum* means "as it were, the cosmos." The image thus metaphorically declares the castle, and the state of Rimini, as a microcosm containing all the elements of the universal prototype.

The praiseworthy spelling further associates the image with yet another long-standing tradition, this time literary: that of City Lauds – the tradition can be followed from Aristotle to Leonardo Bruni – and describes the ideal civic unit as circular⁴⁶. Thus, the circular castle image, appearing in a church, in a scene of devotion, as an attribute of the devotee, has the dual meaning of both religious offering and sovereign power⁴⁷.

The last element Piero presents is the pair of two handsome greyhounds, lying *addorsed* and *couchant*⁴⁸. No such creatures form part of Malatesta armorial bearings, yet their extreme formalism alerts us to their having more than anecdotal meaning. Pliny said that dogs are to be recognized as particular for their guardianship, vigilance, and sagacity, and most important, their fidelity to their owner. From Charlemagne to Dante, the greyhound (specifically the *volpe*) represented the virtuous leader, *par excellence*. The symbolism of dogs for their owner/leaders resulted in their presence in courtly images and judgment scenes⁴⁹. But on another level, the canine character had religious meaning, deeply associated with their unfailing attachment to their owner. The ubiquitous name *Fido* springs from the Latin word *Fides*, the cardinal virtue of Faith. As such, dogs were often represented on religious monuments, as in Nicola Pisano's *Allegory of Faith*, who holds a little dog, or in the Lorenzo Maitani's *Adoration of the Magi* (fig. 16) on the facade of Orvieto's Duomo. Pairs of dogs appear on innumerable tombs, under the feet of the deceased – alluding generally not only to the deceased's pious and eternal fidelity, but also to Faith as the foundation of the Church. The motif is seen in innumerable military tombs (fig. 17) as well tombs of individuals like that of Ilaria del Carretto in Lucca⁵⁰.

What is the answer to the question: why two dogs? I say the doubling of Sigismondo's dogs should be seen in the light of opening passage of the biblical Letter to the Hebrews 11:1 «Now, faith is the substance of things to be hoped for, the evidence of things that appear not [est autem fides sperandorum substantia rerum argumentum non parentum]». This dictum led to centuries of commentaries by the Church Fathers who frequently speak of all virtues as dwelling in pairs⁵¹. The contrast of black and white from time immemorial has connoted opposing forces of the cosmos, light and darkness, day and night, even good and evil. In this painting the paired contrast seems to have a new meaning. The white dog – white is always the color of Faith – looking alertly into the devotional scene, alludes to *Fides Catholica*. The dark dog looking intently down the long imaginary corridor, as if aware of things outside the audience hall, and visually linked with the cosmic-civic emblem above his head, can be identified as *Fides Publica*, the political faith that flows between the ruler and his subjects. The overlapping

animals form a composite signifying two aspects of a single thought, pledging the donor's two-fold Faith, as he himself stated in his Greek inscriptions, to the Immortal God and to the State.

Two things remain to be said: the configuration of the tiny, private sanctuary where the fresco was meant to be, might be thought of in relation to the medieval tradition of small royal chapels, or *sacelli*, within a public church, where the monarch could participate in the Divine Service, yet remain aloof in solitary splendor, where his image was in perpetual devotion during his absence. It is the same here: both the real Sigismondo, seated on a tall *sedia*, and the painted Sigismondo could see through the barred window (fig. 18), revealed by sculpted angels, to participate in Holy Mass at the altar of his patron saint⁵². Such chapels were also martyria, with precious relics providing the necessary protection and sanctification. So was the Cappella delle Reliquie (as this space is alternatively known). Moreover, this chapel is built of stones purchased from nearby Ravenna, taken from living remnants of the theocratic empire where such *sacelli* existed, where the emperor left his effigy to pray or rule in his absence⁵³. Clearly, such an ideological identification was intentional and imperative. The controlled stillness and measured pace of Piero's composition confirm the profoundly iconic nature of the fresco.

Finally, remember that the Malatesta were among the first feudal families to receive the papal vicariate (their first was in 1355). Unlike true aristocrats, however, the office was not hereditary and had to be renewed periodically by petition. I mentioned that in 1448 Sigismondo received such a grant, one of most generous ever to come out of the Vatican. Two years later, in 1450, legitimacy was confirmed for his bastard offspring, and more vicariates were put under his control. The fresco and the conception of its function may well have been created in relation to these promising events. But we also know that Sigismondo was not satisfied. He wanted to join his neighbors and his rivals, the Montefeltro (who were counts and dukes) and the Gonzaga (who were marquises). Sigismondo wanted perpetual inheritance and a title. From the multiple petitions that have come down to us, we know he asked the pope: «ché facia Marchesa de Arímino»⁵⁴. And as we also know, it did not happen. Only in the realm of the imagination did Sigismondo achieve the nobility he sought. He takes his place in the divine auditorium, in the center of the universe, with a chaplet of white Malatesta roses encircling the swag above his head (fig. 19), and he is figuratively crowned through the creative power of Piero della Francesca.

- 1 M.A. Lavin, *Review of Benozzo Gozzoli by Diane Cole Ahl*, in «The Art Bulletin», 79, 4, 1997, pp. 724-725.
- 2 Barbara G. Lane, Professor Emerita, Queens College and The Graduate Center, City University of New York.
- 3 See Simone Martini's, *Giovanni Montefiore Greeted by Saint Martin*, interior facade wall of the Saint Martin Chapel, Lower Church, San Francesco, Assisi, 1317-1320.
- 4 See the tiny *Bishop Teobaldo Pontano Supplicating his giant-size Patron Mary Magdalene* (see fig. 6); attributed to a member of Giotto's workshop, Magdalene Chapel, Lower Church, San Francesco, Assisi, mid-1320s.
- 5 Described by Pope Pius II himself in his *Commentaries*, 3 vols., ed. by M. Meserve, M. Simonetta, *The I Tatti Renaissance Library*, Cambridge, Mass., 2003, vol. 1, bk. 2, pp. 327-329.
- 6 M. Rzepińska, *The Peculiar Greyhounds of Sigismondo Malatesta: An Attempt to Interpret the Fresco of Piero della Francesca in Rimini*, in «L'Arte», n.s. 4, 13, 1971, pp. 45-65.
- 7 M.A. Lavin, *Piero della Francesca's Fresco of Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta before St. Sigismund: ΘΕΩΙ ΑΘΑΝΑΤΩΙ ΚΑΙ ΤΗ ΠΟΛΕΙ*, in «The Art Bulletin», 56, 3, 1974, pp. 345-374.
- 8 *Ead.*, *Letter to the Editor*, in «The Art Bulletin», 57, 2, 1975, pp. 306-307, fig. 1.
- 9 M. Rzepińska, *Letter to the Editor*, in «The Art Bulletin», 57, 4, 1975, pp. 606-607; M.A. Lavin, *Reply*, in «The Art Bulletin», 57, 4, 1975, p. 607.
- 10 A. Campana, *Ciriaco d'Ancona e Lorenzo Valla: sull'iscrizione greca del tempio dei Dioscuri a Napoli*, in «Archeologia classica», 24-26, 1973-1974 (1975), pp. 84-102.
- 11 M.A. Lavin, *The Antique Source for the Tempio Malatestiano's Greek Inscriptions*, in «The Art Bulletin», 58, 3, 1977, pp. 421-422. See below note 16.
- 12 *Ead.*, *L'affresco di Piero della Francesca raffigurante Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta di fronte a San Sigismondo*, in *Piero della Francesca a Rimini. L'affresco nel Tempio Malatestiano*, ed. by M.A. Lavin, Bologna, 1984, pp. 3-74.
- 13 Another example is Ottaviano Ubaldini della Carda (1424-1498), half-brother of Federico da Montefeltro, who, after a lifetime of intellectual activity and administrative genius, is still often accused of witchcraft and condemned as a sorcerer. It is said that because of his astrological calculations for a propitious date to consummate the marriage of Guidobaldo Montefeltro to Elisabetta Gonzaga (which was quite far from the marriage date), the couple remained childless. He is still judged to be a usurper in spite of the fact that the *promessi sposi* were both seven years old at the time, and the duke was later proved to be impotent; see L. Michelini Tocci, *Storia di un mago e di cento castelli*, Pesaro, 1986.
- 14 F. Farina, *Sigismondo Malatesta, 1417-1468: le imprese, il volto e la fama di un principe del Rinascimento*, Rimini, 2017.
- 15 C. Hope, *The Early History of the Tempio Malatestiano*, in «Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes», 55, 1992, pp. 51-152; P.G. Pasini, *Il Tempio Malatestiano: splendore cortese e classicismo unamistico*, Milano, 2000.
- 16 Campana, *Ciriaco*, cit., related the inscription to the lost, but often recorded Greek inscription on the ancient Temple of the Dioscuri in Naples, seen there by Cyriacus of Ancona, epigraphist, antiquary, and scholar, who travelled to Rimini in 1449. Dual dedications for ancient temples was apparently a commonplace; see Lavin, *Piero della Francesca's Fresco*, cit., p. 345, note 4.

- 17 E. Lavagnino, *Cinquanta monumenti italiani danneggiati dalla guerra*, Roma, 1947; *Fifty War-Damaged Monuments of Italy*, trans. S.T. Morey, Italian Association for Italian War-Damaged Monuments, Roma, 1946; *Architecture and Armed Conflict: The Politics of Destruction*, ed. by J.M. Mancini, K. Bresnahan, Abingdon-New York, 2015; O. Nonfarmale, *Il restauro dell'affresco di Piero della Francesca*, in *Piero della Francesca a Rimini*, cit., pp. 151-155. A new analytical appraisal was later provided by P.G. Pasini, *La «sinopia» dell'affresco riminese di Piero della Francesca*, in *Piero della Francesca tra arte e scienze*, ed. by M. Dalai Emiliani, V. Curzi, conf. proc., Arezzo-Sansepolcro 1992, Venezia, 1996, pp. 131-142.
- 18 There are two untrustworthy engravings, one from 1794 and the other from 1820, by which time the last number of the inscription was damaged or lost. They both reproduce it as «1», that is, 1451. As they are both incorrect in recording other inscriptions in the composition, I do not trust their decision here, and find 1450 a much more likely date. See my discussion below concerning Pope Nicholas V's two bulls of 1450, and Lavin, *Piero della Francesca's Fresco*, cit., p. 372, figs. 31-32.
- 19 I make this remark because of the frequently posed accusations that the rebuilding of the church involved a «re-dedication in the humanistically pagan sense», quoted by Rzepińska, *Letter*, cit., from H. Siebenhüner, *Die Bedeutung des Rimini-Freskos und der Geisselung Christi des Piero della Francesca*, in «Kunstchronik», 7, 1954, p. 124. The latter also calls the equality in size of saint and donor as well as the donor's central position blasphemous.
- 20 J.R. Banker, *Piero della Francesca: Artist & Man*, Oxford, 2014, pp. 29-31.
- 21 Apparently, the painted wall surface was originally curved, flattened only when the detached fresco was placed in a wooden frame for shipment. The rebuilt wall is flat. See Pasini, *La «sinopia»*, cit., p. 132, note, who also reports that, according to a Bolognese restorer, Piero worked not in fresco but in «tempera corte di calce e cera, con ampie ridipinture a olio nel fondo»!
- 22 I use the past tense here because the fresco has been moved out of the chapel and is now displayed on the end wall of the north transept, where, unhappily, it can be viewed by more tourists, but is completely out of context.
- 23 A second fresco in this chapel, *Bishop Pontano and Saint Rugino* (ca. 1320) is identical in type and arrangement; see B. Kleinschmidt, *Die Basilika San Francesco in Assisi*, 3 vols., Berlin, 1915-1928, vol. 1, p. 32, fig. 21; vol. 2, pp. 217-218, color plate 21.
- 24 See M. Lazzaroni, A. Muñoz, *Filarete, Scultore e architetto del secolo XV*, Roma, 1908, pp. 15-16, plate 1.
- 25 See the discussion of dogs in Christian religious contexts, with illustrations, in my original Lavin, *Piero della Francesca's Fresco*, cit., pp. 363-368, text and notes.
- 26 C. Ricci, *Il Tempio Malatestiano*, Milano-Roma, 1924, pp. 173-174; Lavin, *Piero della Francesca's Fresco*, cit., pp. 369-371.
- 27 This was a secular position to act in the pope's stead on designated parts of the Papal States, and pay taxes for the privilege of doing so.
- 28 This event resonated historically in recalling Sigismondo's ancestor, Galeotto Malatesta, who, 100 years earlier, had likewise been knighted by the then King of Hungary, in honor of which Galeotto called himself Malatesta l'Ongaro. See *Cronichetta dei Malatesti scritta nel sec. XIV da Anonimo Riminese*, ed. by F. Zambrini, Faenza, 1846, p. 30. See also P. Litta, *Famiglie celebri italiane*, Milano, 1869, vol. 8, supplement 1, p. 516, *Indagine su Malatesta l'Ungaro*.

- 29 The basic secondary source for the life of Sigismondo is F.G. Battaglini, *Della vita e de' fatti di Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta*, in *Basini Parmensis Poetae. Opera Praestantiora*, Rimini, 1794, vol. 2, pp. 273-578.
- 30 The couple was married in 1456.
- 31 Musée du Louvre, Denon wing, Salle des Sept-Mètres, Room 709. 44.5 x 34.5 cm; M. Laclotte, *Le portrait de Sigismondo Malatesta par Piero della Francesca*, in «La Revue du Louvre et des Musées de France», 4, 1978, pp. 225-266.
- 32 See C. Cipolla, *Ricerche storiche intorno alla chiesa di Santa Anastasia in Verona*, in «L'Arte», 17, 1914, pp. 91-106, 181-197, 396-414, esp. pp. 402-404; M.A. Lavin, *Piero della Francesca's Montefeltro Altarpiece: A Pledge of Fidelity*, in «The Art Bulletin», 51, 4, 1969, pp. 367-371.
- 33 The *gonella*, a coat, with straight sleeves, has hems anywhere from mid-thigh to just below the knee; see R. Levi-Pisetzky, *Storia del Costume in Italia*, 2 vols., Milano, 1964-1969.
- 34 For the critical edition with anastatic facsimile, see *Edizione nazionale degli scritti di Piero della Francesca*, ed. by M. Dalai Emiliani, O. Besomi, C. Maccagni, 3 vols., Roma, 2012. The editors emphasize that there are no documents dating any of Piero's writings, but that it seems feasible that the *Trattato d'Abaco* is the earliest.
- 35 Piero had already established this measurement on the *sinopia* (see fig. 4), where the frame is elaborated in detail.
- 36 H. Wolfram, *History of the Goths*, Oakland, Ca., 1988, pp. 311-313.
- 37 B. Degenhart, *Un'opera di Pisanello: il ritratto dell'Imperatore Sigismondo a Vienna*, in «Artfigurative», 2, 1946, p. 184, was the first to relate two drawings of the Emperor with Piero's image as well as the painted portrait of Emperor Sigismund in Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, now attributed to a Bohemian artist.
- 38 By Agostino di Duccio, ca. 1452.
- 39 G.C. Bascapè, *Sigillografia*, Milano, 1969, plate II, no. 14.
- 40 O. Posse, *Die Siegel der Deutschen Kaiser und Könige*, Dresden, 1909-1913, vol. 2, plate 18, fig. 3.
- 41 The exact moment is recorded as: 1437, 20 March, hour 18, minute 48 «in circa». See Lavin, *Piero della Francesca's Fresco*, cit., p. 357, note 52. P.G. Pasini, *Piero e i Malatesti: L'attività di Piero della Francesca per le corti romagnole*, Cinisello Balsamo, 1992, pp. 78-79, who believes the fresco was originally intended as the altarpiece on the opposite side of the chapel, remarks that details in the tondo, painted *al secco*, have lost almost all their color.
- 42 The castle was known as «Castro Sigismondo» until about 1440-1441, when the spelling was changed to «Castellum Sismundum» in the building documents and used with the date 1446 twice in inscriptions on the restored castle itself.
- 43 At the UCLA/Getty conference of 2017, James Fishburne, research associate of the Getty Research Center, presented new material on the Pasti medal, which he is preparing for publication.
- 44 G. Ravaoli, *Una nuova effigie di Sigismondo nel Tempio Malatestiano*, in *Studi riminesi e bibliografici in onore di Carlo Lucchesi*, Faenza, 1952, pp. 182-186.
- 45 It was actually the syllable «*sis*», the meaning of which I recognized from my high school Latin, that stimulated this line of inquiry.
- 46 H. Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Renaissance*, 2 vols., Princeton, 1955, vol. 1, pp. 4, 169-170; vol. 2, pp. 517-518; Bonvesino della Rina, *De Magnalibus Urbis Mediolani*, [Milano], 1288,

- «the city itself is orbicular in the manner of a circle whose admirable roundness is a sign of its perfection», and discussion of Bruni's *Laudatio* of Florence (1403-1404).
- 47 See Lavin, *Piero della Francesca's Fresco*, cit., pp. 362-363, for full documentation.
- 48 A.C. Fox-Davies, *A Complete Guide to Heraldry*, New York, 1909: *addorsed* (or *endorsed*) is a pair facing away from each other; *couchant* is lying down with head raised.
- 49 See the reference in note 50 for the full history of the symbolism of dogs, with illustrations, and further discussion of their meaning in Piero's fresco.
- 50 Lavin, *Piero della Francesca's Fresco*, cit. pp. 363-368.
- 51 While Hebrews is most traditionally associated with Saint Paul, this letter is also attributed to other Early Christian authors. Already by the end of the second century, Clement of Alexandria titled a chapter of his *Stromata* «*The Twofold Faith*», with later major contributions to the analysis by Saint Augustine, Saint Ambrose, and later Saint Thomas Aquinas, who developed the same concept. See the gathering of these sources in Lavin, *Piero della Francesca's Fresco*, cit., p. 367, note 103.
- 52 Originally, Sigismondo's tomb was planned to match the window on the opposite (west) side of the Saint Sigismund Chapel, so that the entire space would have been dedicated in perpetuity to Sigismondo and his devotion to his onomastic saint.
- 53 See O.G. von Simson, *Sacred Fortress: Byzantine Art and Statecraft in Ravenna*, Chicago, 1948, pp. 15-16; E.B. Smith, *Architectural Symbolism of Imperial Rome and the Middle Ages*, Princeton, 1956, esp. pp. 84-85.
- 54 Letter from emissary Francesco de Cusano to Francesco Sforza, Duke of Milan, 2 March 1452; see Lavin, *Piero della Francesca's Fresco*, cit., p. 371, note 128, for quotation of the full passage.



Fig. 1: Piero della Francesca, *Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta before Saint Sigismund*, fresco, 257 x 345 cm, 1450(?). Rimini, San Francesco (Tempio Malatestiano), formerly Chapel of the Relics. Photo by Antonio Guerra, Bologna.

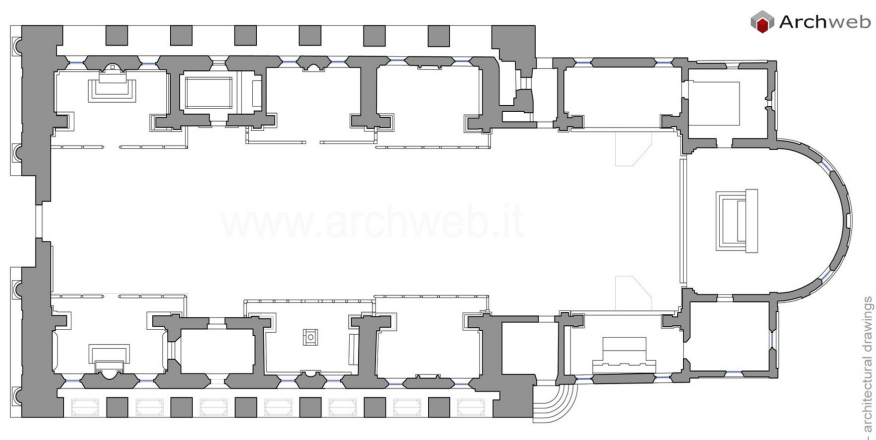
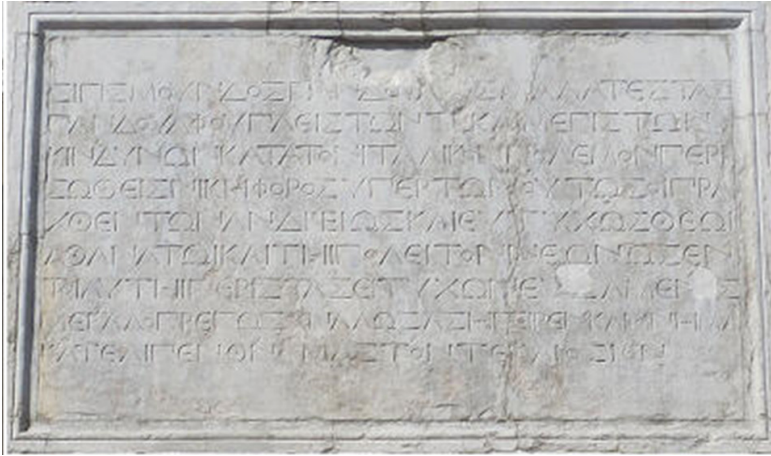


Fig. 2: Ground plan of the fourteenth-century church of San Francesco overlaid with the ground plan of the Tempio Malatestiano. Photo: ArchWeb.



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Fig. 3a: Dedicatory Inscription, Tempio Malatestiano, exterior left wall, stone plaque.
Photo: Gabinetto Fotografico Nazionale, Rome.

Fig. 3b: Stephen Walsh, copy transcription, ink and paper. Photo by Author.

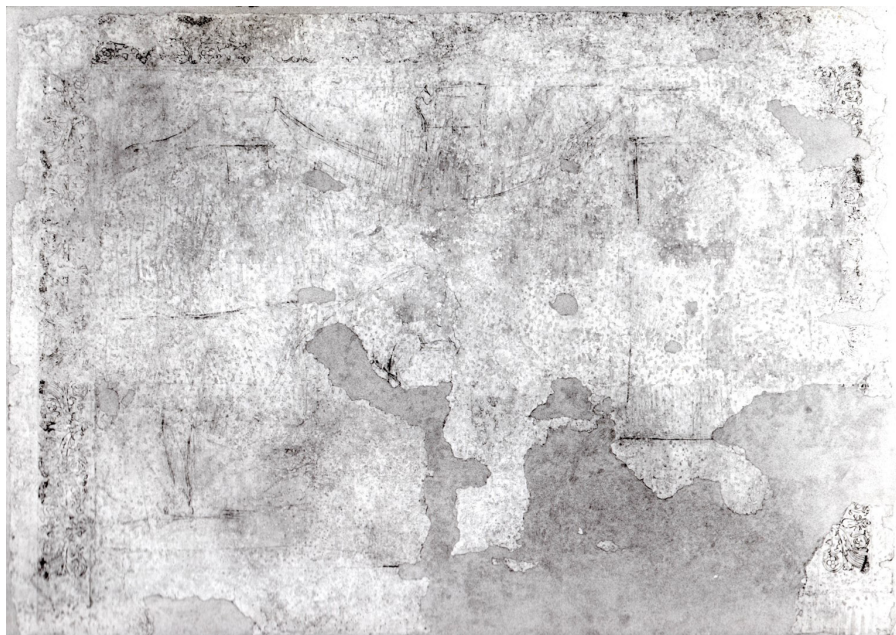


Fig. 4: Piero della Francesca, *sinopia* of *Sigismondo Malatesta before Saint Sigismund*, discovered in 1943. Photo courtesy of Ottorino Nonfarmale.



Fig. 5: Piero della Francesca's fresco *Sigismondo Malatesta before Saint Sigismund* in its current location of the north transept wing wall, Tempio Malatestiano, moved out of Chapel of the Relics for the sake of tourism. Photo by Author.



Fig. 6: Workshop of Giotto, *Bishop Teobaldo Pontano before the Magdalene*, fresco, mid-1320s. Assisi, San Francesco, Lower Church, Chapel of the Magdalene. Photo by Author.



Fig. 7: Filarete, *Pope Eugenius IV before Saint Peter*, bronze relief, ca. 1449.
Vatican City, center doors of Saint Peter's.

Photo: Archivio Fotografico delle Gallerie e Musei Vaticani, Vatican City.



Fig. 8: *Jean de Berry before the Virgin and Child*, manuscript illumination, ca. 1372, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, ms Lat. 18014, fol. 97v. Photo: M. Meiss, *French Painting in the Time of Jean de Berry: The Late Fourteenth Century and the Patronage of the Duke*, London, 1967, vol. 2, fig. 114.



Fig. 9: Piero della Francesca, *Portrait of Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta*, tempera with some oil on wood, 44.5 x 34.5 cm, ca. 1450. Paris, Musée du Louvre, Denon wing, Salle des Sept-Mètres, Room 709. Photo: Musée du Louvre.



Fig. 10: Altichiero da Zevio, *Cavalli Brothers Presented to the Madonna and Child*, 1369-1375, fresco. Verona, Sant'Anastasia. Photo: Alinari.

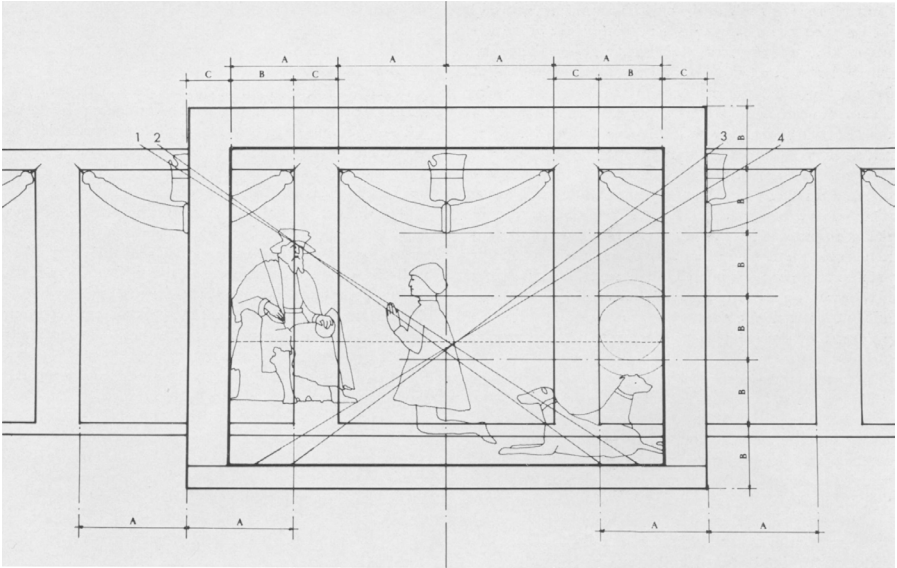


Fig. 11: Peter M. Schmitt and James Guthrie, Geometric analysis of Piero's fresco, 1972, ink on paper. Photo by Author.



Fig. 12: Filarete, *Pope Eugenius IV Crowning of Sigmund of Hungary as Holy Roman Emperor*, ca. 1449, bronze relief. Vatican City, center doors of Saint Peter's.
Photo: Archivio Fotografico delle Gallerie e Musei Vaticani, Vatican City.



Fig. 13: Hungarian artist (?), *Sigmund of Hungary and Bohemia*, ca. 1430, tempera on parchment on wood, 64 x 49 cm. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum. Photo courtesy of Museum.



Fig. 14: Civic Seal of Trier. Photo: G.C. Bascapè, *Sigillografia*, Milano, 1969, plate II, no. 14.

Fig. 15: Gold bull of Emperor Sigismund, 1433, Frankfurt am Main. Photo: O. Posse, *Die Siegel der Deutschen Kaiser und Könige*, Dresden, 1909-1913, vol. 2, plate 18, fig. 3.



Fig. 16: Lorenzo Maitani, *Adoration of the Magi*, relief sculpture, begun 1310. Orvieto, facade of the Duomo, right column. Photo by Author.



Fig. 17: *Tomb of Magaldi Margotti*, fourteenth century. Naples, Santa Chiara.
Photo: Alinari.

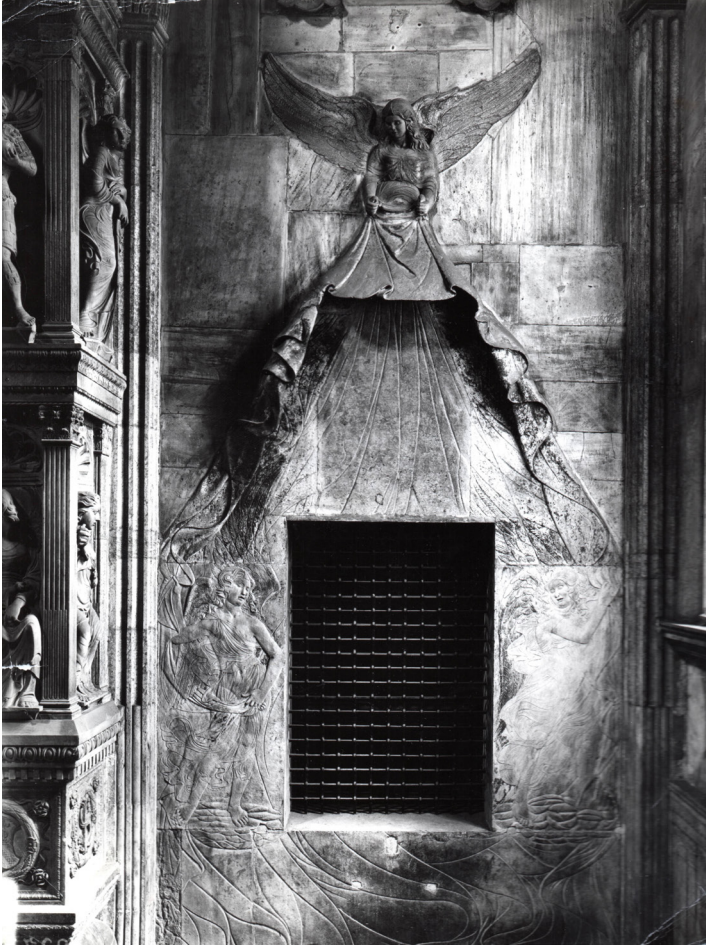


Fig. 18: Agostino di Duccio, *relief sculpture*, 1450-1455, Rimini, Chapel of Saint Sigismund, Tempio Malatestiano, detail of left wall; window into the Relic Chapel.
Photo: Gabinetto Fotografico Nazionale, Rome.



Fig. 19: Piero della Francesca, *Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta before Saint Sigismund*, detail, 1450 (?), fresco, 257 x 345 cm. Rimini, San Francesco (Tempio Malatestiano), formerly Chapel of the Relics. Photo by Antonio Guerra, Bologna.