

## M I S Z E L L E N

Richard C. Trexler: THE UBRIACHI AT SANTA MARIA NOVELLA

In 1978 I published a lengthy biography of messer Baldassare di Simone degli Ubriachi.<sup>1</sup> In 1350 Baldassare was a boy in Avignon befriending a cohort, the Merchant of Prato Francesco Datini. He died in Naples about 1406 after a long life as an important merchant, diplomat and art impresario.

Our man was also a significant patron, and I gave some attention in my article to the so-called Ubriachi chapel in Santa Maria Novella, which is mentioned in Baldassare's 1395 testament. It is the only documented endowment from the family or one of its members. Choosing *his* (and not the family's) "capella de' tre magi" as a place of burial, Baldassare left a substantial dowry for its masses and charged the church's *laudesi* with carrying out the services he ordained.<sup>2</sup>

The whole passage has the clear ring of a testator's foundation. Thus it was my opinion that until better evidence appeared and for reasons developed in my biography, we should assume that this Baldassare built the chapel sometime after 1364, and that by 1378, the sculpted lintel near the chapel was also in place. Facing on the Chiostro Grande, it shows the magus Baldassare presenting a patron to the infant.<sup>3</sup>

Gert Kreytenberg read my article almost immediately, but only after completing his own research on the same edifice, which he calls a "student chapter". Kreytenberg went ahead and published his results in 1979, although reflection would have shown him that a critical element of his research was wrong. Kreytenberg merely added an endnote to his text that cited, only to dismiss, my work as wrong as regards the chapel.<sup>4</sup> It was not. In what follows, I want to set the record straight. For Kreytenberg has created a false history of the Ubriachi chapel.

The author claims he can document a pre-1335 dating of the Magi lintel and the Ubriachi chapel. Quite apart from arguments based on style and building analysis — which I shall not enter into here — the author states that a key figure in Ubriachi genealogy has been neglected. Once this person is properly accounted for, he says, the pre-1335 date can be established.

Kreytenberg's claim is that in 1331 an earlier Baldassare degli Ubriachi was buried in this so-called chapel, one which he had founded. The author labels this alleged person "Baldassare the Elder" to complement the well-known but now renamed Baldassare "the Younger" (still alive in the Quattrocento) who was the grandson, according to Kreytenberg's unexplained assertion, of "Baldassare the Elder".<sup>5</sup> Not the well known messer Baldassare di Simone but his alleged (paternal or maternal?) grandfather "Baldassare the Elder" — elders unknown — built the chapel of the Magi. Kreytenberg concludes that this Baldassare must be the figure whom the magus Baldassare sponsors — since the early 1330s — on the lintel near the chapel.

I was puzzled. How had Kreytenberg, who consulted none of the genealogical literature, found this man? Neither I nor Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, who have shared between us all the apposite genealogical compilations in Florence regarding the Ubriachi, found a Baldassare in the Ubriachi family predating the famous messer Baldassare of the second half of the century?<sup>6</sup> Alas, a reading of Kreytenberg reveals that "Baldassare the Elder" in fact never existed. He stems from Kreytenberg's bad reading of two eighteenth-century Italian texts by the Dominican Vincenzo Fineschi.

Here are the relevant passages in Fineschi, which I reproduce textually. Having arrived at the "Cappella degli Ubriachi" in his tour of the convent, Fineschi refers at first to the area above the chapel and then to the chapel itself:

Non era ancora a mio credere fabbricato il Capitolo di sopra nominato dalla Famiglia de' Guidalotti, che Mess. Baldassarre degli Ubriachi Famiglia illustre Fiorentina, e benaffetta al nostro Convento (1) fino del 1300, fece fabbricare a sue spese questa Cappella...<sup>7</sup>

A bit later, describing the contents of the chapel, Fineschi adds:

In mezzo poi presso l'Altare vedesi un lastrone di marmo con arme, ma senza iscrizione; e quest'è appunto il Sepolcro di Mess. Baldassarre, e qui pure è sepolta nel 1331. Madonna Tuccia vedova di Neri Ubriachi, e nel 1383. Madonna Lapa figlia del predetto Fondatore Baldassarre degli Ubriachi.<sup>8</sup>

Fineschi thus says that the Ubriachi family had supported Santa Maria Novella from early Trecento on, that messer Baldassare degli Ubriachi founded and paid for a chapel at Santa Maria Novella at his cost, and that the unmarked gravestone in that chapel indicates the sepulchre of messer Baldassare. All this is quite right. But Fineschi says further that Tuccia, the widow of Neri Ubriachi, was buried here (in the same chapel) in 1331, as was one mona Lapa degli Ubriachi in 1383. This Lapa, Fineschi concludes, was the daughter of the chapel founder, messer Baldassare. These latter points require comment.

First, Fineschi inferred them. Since he knew that the widow Tuccia left land to the convent in her will of 1303/4, he guessed, reasonably enough, that that was the land on which the Ubriachi chapel was later built. Second, Fineschi reasoned that when Tuccia died in 1321 (his, and Kreytenberg's, "1331")<sup>9</sup>, and when mona Lapa died in 1383 (as one in fact did), they were buried in the same area intended for Baldassare. Fair enough.



In the case of Lapa Ubriachi, however, Fineschi erred. He called her the *daughter* of the founder messer Baldassare, whereas the necrology the Dominican was using, which contains the only documentary mention of Lapa, lists her unambiguously as a mother: *domina Lapa mater Baldassarri de Obriacis pop. S. Petri Scheradii*, a text I of course cited in my monograph. Kreytenberg accepts both: a mona Lapa as mother, and another as daughter.<sup>10</sup>

Before going any further, note that Fineschi does not even hint that there were two Baldassares. No writer ever has ... before Kreytenberg, who reads Fineschi as follows: first, he says that the Dominican describes two Baldassares, the one the grandfather of the other.<sup>11</sup> Fineschi says nothing of the kind. Second, the author misreads Fineschi to the effect that the founder of the chapel — "Baldassare" — was buried there in 1331, whereas Fineschi in fact says that *Tuccia*, not any Baldassare, was buried there in that year!<sup>12</sup> Third, Kreytenberg has both the imaginary daughter Lapa and the real mother Lapa die in 1383. He missed the obvious: that the convent's necrology, which contains the only reference to any Lapa, was the obvious source of Fineschi's mistaken daughter as well as of the true mother Lapa.

I want to mention only one further mistake of Kreytenberg, because it misrepresents me. Kreytenberg references me for his assertion that the very name of messer Baldassare's grandfather (paternal or maternal?) was unknown. I in fact stated I could not confirm (though I can now) what the genealogists universally claimed: that Baldassare's paternal grandfather was one Aliotto.<sup>13</sup> By failing to mention my reference to the genealogists' grandfather Aliotto, Kreytenberg could put forward his Baldassare the Elder as the uncontested (paternal?) grandfather of the famous messer Baldassare.

From a strictly art historical point of view, Kreytenberg's disagreement with me was *poca roba*: along with other authorities, I dated the chapel after 1364 and the lintel before 1378, while Kreytenberg wants them before 1335. There may be architectural reasons for his argument; those have not been my concern here. Creating persons who never existed by using sources badly, at another scholar's expense, has been. Once ghosts like Baldassare the Elder make their way into the literature — and that process has already begun<sup>14</sup> — they are notoriously hard to exorcise.

In fact, there was only Baldassare: messer Baldassare di Simone di Aliotto degli Ubriachi, who died about 1406. He must be on that lintel, sponsored by the magus Baldassare. Until shown otherwise, he built the chapel of the Ubriachi, sometime after 1365. If I am right, it was the same messer Baldassare who, through his remarkable devotion to the Kings — evident on the lintel at Santa Maria Novella by 1378 — brought about the intense adoration of the Magi in Renaissance Florence.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> R. Trexler, *The Magi Enter Florence. The Ubriachi of Florence and Venice*, in: *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History*, n.s. I, 1978, pp. 127-218.

<sup>2</sup> "Item ch'io lascio l'anima mia allo onnipotente idio, el corpo a luogo de' Frati predicatori, che sia mandato a tempi a Firenze al detto ordine chiamato Santa Maria Novella, nella mia capella titolata de' tre magi, al quale ordine di Fireze lascio ogn'anno a un frate anticho, chui eleggerà i capitani delle laude della detta chiesa, fiorini sette d'oro. Il quale frate ogni mattina che gli sia possibile, che non sia impedito o da infermità o d'altro grosso impedimento, vi debba dire la messa..."; *ibid.*, p. 195. The sections on the chapel in my article are *ibid.*, pp. 137-146.

<sup>3</sup> The arguments for these dates are *ibid.*, pp. 138-139.

<sup>4</sup> "Während der Drucklegung dieses Aufsatzes ... ist ein ausführlicher Aufsatz über die Familie Ubriachi und insbesondere über den um 1406 gestorbenen Baldassare (d. J.) publiziert worden: R. Trexler [Zitat] ... Trexler vertritt (p. 138 ff) die Auffassung, dass Baldassare d. J. der Stifter der "Cappella Ubriachi" gewesen sei, die man bald nach 1365 errichtet habe, und zwar im Zusammenhang mit dem Bau des Noviziats, das sich über dem Refektorium und der "Cappella Ubriachi" befindet und von Alessio Strozzi 1365 gestiftet worden ist ... Durch die Stiftung derden hl. Drei Königen geweihten "Cappella" falle Baldassare d. J. eine Schlüsselrolle bei der Einführung des Dreikönigskults in Florenz zu (p. 131 ff). Die Fakten des Baubestandes sowie die von mir angeführten Dokumente zur Baugeschichte des Refektoriums widerlegen ebenso wie die stilistische Haltung der zugehörigen Skulpturen eine spätere Datierung der "Cappella" als ca. 1335. Der Bau des Noviziats, zu dem Alessio Strozzi 1365 nach Ausweis der Wappen den grösseren und ein Ubriachi (vielleicht Baldassare d. J. oder aber dessen 1383 bzw. 1386 verstorbene Eltern) den kleineren Teil beigetragen haben, konnte unabhängig von der Errichtung der Gebäudeteile des Erdgeschosses erfolgen und gibt deshalb für diese nur einen terminus ante quem. Es gibt keinen stichhaltigen Grund dafür, dass Baldassare d. J. die "Cappella" gestiftet hat; der Umstand, dass er das Patronatsrecht besass, besagt nichts über die Stifterfrage. Über Vater und Grossvater dieses Baldassare ist nichts überliefert (s. Trexler, p. 134 ff), nach Trexler nicht einmal der Name des Grossvaters, den aber der von Trexler nicht beachtete Fineschi (1787) mit Baldassare angibt. Die "Cappella" ist bei der von mir vorgeschlagenen Datierung das früheste Zeugnis für den Dreikönigskult in Florenz. Ihm folgte als zweites das von der Familie Baldesi (eine Ableitung von Baldassare) gestiftete Nonnenkloster S. Baldassare in Coverciano (heute im Florentiner Stadtgebiet in Richtung Settignano) in den 1340er Jahren... Die Existenz dieses Klosters schliesst die Hypothese aus, es sei das Verdienst des um 1406 gestorbenen Baldassare Ubriachi, den Dreikönigskult in Florenz eingeführt zu haben"; G. Kreytenberg, *Das "Capitulum studentium"* im Konvent von Santa Maria Novella, in: *Flor. Mitt.*, 23, 1979, pp. 237 f.



<sup>5</sup> See the quote above, at note 4.

<sup>6</sup> Klapisch-Zuber's collaboration appears in the reissue of the Ubriachi article, in: *R. Trexler, Church and Community 1200-1600. Studies in the History of Florence and New Spain*, Rome 1987, pp. 81-82, note 21, and the genealogical table.

<sup>7</sup> *V. Fineschi, Memorie sopra il cimitero antico della chiesa di S. Maria Novella di Firenze*, Florence 1787, pp. 127-128.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.

<sup>9</sup> I checked the document to ascertain Tuccia's actual death year; *Trexler* (n. 1), p. 134, no. 20.

<sup>10</sup> "Wenn Fineschi schreibt, dass Baldassare, der eine Tochter mit Namen Lapa hatte, 1331, in dem von ihm gestifteten Saal beigesetzt wurde, und wenn Orlandi schreibt, dass Lapa die 1383 verstorbene Mutter des 1403 noch lebenden Stifter Baldassare sei, dann sprechen sie offenbar von zwei verschiedenen Personen, von Grossvater und Enkel; nur einer von beiden kann der Stifter gewesen sein"; *Kreytenberg*, pp. 226-227. Note that in both instances, Kreytenberg uses secondary literature, and not the primary materials themselves. See further *Trexler* (n. 1), p. 134, no. 21, p. 139. Baldassare did not have a daughter named Lapa; see the genealogical table at the end of my monograph.

<sup>11</sup> See the texts in the above notes 4, 10.

<sup>12</sup> "Fineschis Überlieferung ... nach der der ältere Baldassare Ubriachi 1331 in dem von ihm gestifteten Saal bestattet wurde."; *Kreytenberg* (n. 4), p. 231.

<sup>13</sup> *Trexler* (n. 1), p. 135. With Klapisch-Zuber's help, I could later confirm that Aliotto was the paternal grandfather; see my *Church and Community* (n. 6), pp. 81-82, no. 21, and the table. See Kreytenberg's assertion above, at note 4.

<sup>14</sup> Thus: "Kreytenberg ... kann ... anhand der Quellen zwei Baldassare Ubriachi, Grossvater und Enkel, ausfindig machen und die Stiftung dem älteren zuweisen, der Trexlers Quellenstudium entgegen ist"; *I. Klotten, Wandmalerei im Grossen Kirchensisma. Die Cappella Bolognini in San Petronio zu Bologna*, Heidelberg 1986, p. 219, no. 47. Prof. Klotten kindly furnished me a copy of her work, which first brought Kreytenberg's article to my attention. *E. Merlini (Il trittico eburneo della Certosa di Pavia: iconografia e committenza, in: Arte Cristiana, 74, 1986, pp. 153 f)* noted but did not pass judgment on Kreytenberg's contention.

#### *Kathleen Giles Arthur: A NEW DOCUMENT ON ANDREA ORCAGNA IN 1345*

Andrea Orcagna's early artistic career, like most other Trecento artists, is poorly documented. The first securely dated reference to Andrea is the statement of January 19, 1343 (new style) in the records of the Confraternity of Gesu Pellegrino of Santa Maria Novella which chastizes Andrea for many faults and disobedience, "per molti defetti e falli che fece e di non volere ubidire".<sup>1</sup> This concerns his personal character and dismissal from the confraternity rather than any artistic commission being executed at that time.<sup>2</sup> "Andrea Cionis vocatus Orchagna" first appears in the *Arte dei Medici e Speciali* membership list between 1343-1346.<sup>3</sup> Few paintings have been attributed to Andrea prior to 1346 when he may have painted the Lindau-Finaly *Annunciation*, (signed and dated but in such ruinous condition that it is rejected by many scholars) and the nave frescoes from Santa Croce which have been dated circa 1345 by Boskovits and in the 1360's by other scholars.<sup>4</sup> Yet the famous Pistoiese letter of 1347 already cites Orcagna as one of the best painters in Florence.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, although Orcagna is often described as the leader of mid-trecento Florentine painting, neither the documents nor securely attributed paintings illuminate his career much before 1350.

A previously unnoticed payment to Orcagna dating from June 26, 1345 has been discovered in the records of the Confraternity of Gesu Pellegrino. Andrea was paid a modest sum for painting *candelabra* or torches: "demo a di xxvi di giugno ad Andrea di Cione dipintore per la dipintura de' torchi" lire i, soldi xii, denari vii...".<sup>6</sup> Though "torchio" could be translated as a festival candle, other evidence confirms that here the meaning is a processional candleholder.<sup>7</sup> Such decorative arts objects are rarely preserved from the trecento, but a representative example may be found in the Museo di San Matteo, Pisa (fig. 1).<sup>8</sup> This brief documentary note adds a small piece to the puzzle of Andrea's early career, and is significant as the first dated reference to Orcagna's artistic activity.

More information about the Company of Gesu Pellegrino's torches can be gleaned from inventories of 1341 and 1350<sup>9</sup>, and the *Entrate* and *Uscite* from November 1343 through 1351.<sup>10</sup> In 1343 the company owned several pairs of ordinary wooden and iron "candellieri", and a pair of candlesticks for the altar of their chapel in Santa Maria Novella. By 1350 they had acquired "due torchi grandi forniti di giunte di ferri da portare a' morti della compagnia".<sup>11</sup> Since these are the only new torches among their possessions, they can be identified as the new pair painted by Orcagna in 1345. Shortly after the payment for the "dipintura de' torchi" in June 1345, the confraternity ordered "giunte de ferro", and six months later on December 13, 1345 they purchased two enormous wax candles, "dopp(i)e(ri) da torchi da morti, pesarono soldi v ciera nuova".<sup>12</sup>

The designated purpose of the candleholders, "to carry to the company dead", gives a clue to their ritualistic importance. For the Company of Gesu Pellegrino the burial of its deceased members was