

Gianluigi Ludovico Vitelli

The condottiero who chose Cetona

Appointed as the marquis, used the bequest of a noblewoman to create the main square of the town

The Vitelli were an ancient family of wealthy merchants, rising in authority to become the main family in the City of Castello. The branch from which the Marquises of Cetona originated was characterized by the pseudonym "Chiappino" (bear), earned by the condottiero Paolo Vitelli in 1498 when he was the

captain general of the Florentine troops. It passed on to his nephew Gianluigi Ludovico Vitelli, the son of the condottiero in Venice and under the papacy of Niccolò II. Known in the family as "Gianliso," he was more widely recognized as Chiappino. Born in 1520, he became a celebrated and valiant condottiero. After studying Greek, Latin, and mathematics, he served with his uncle Alessandro in the service of Duke Cosimo I de' Medici in Florence. In 1543, he joined the imperial army engaged in the War of Gelderland in the Netherlands, and in 1544, upon returning to Tuscany, he was tasked by Cosimo to repel the corsair Khayr al-Din Barbarossa from Orbetello. A condottiero and diplomat, equipped with solid technical preparation (particularly in military architecture) and simultaneously detached from the politics of Florence, Vitelli became one of the main trusted men of Cosimo I.

After participating in the decisive victory at Scannagallo (August 2, 1554) in the War of Siena, he was appointed by Cosimo as lieutenant general. Working on behalf of the Medici, he served as an ambassador in Spain and Ferrara, and for Spain, he held the same position in England. In 1560, as a reward for his long and decisive loyalty and military services, he was invested with the marquisate of Cetona. Cosimo I had at least a couple of territories in mind that he could have granted to Vitelli, but he chose to let the latter make the choice. The decision of the new Marquis was likely influenced by the letters in favor of Cetona from Luca Contile to Giuseppe Betussi, his friend and secretary of Vitelli, who eventually took possession of his new marquisate on January 1, 1560. Accompanying him were individuals from the City of Castello, including his lieutenant Francesco di Austino Vagnoli. The first edict of the new Marquis of Cetona is dated January 12, 1560: a survey plan on the state of the town and a proposal for a reconstruction and expansion policy. It was probably on this occasion that the bequest of the noblewoman Antea Cioli for the construction of a monastery dedicated to the Immaculate Conception came to light. This included "a house in Capparoni, a small house with lands in Poggio Martellone, a cultivated land with vineyards, orchards, and olive trees in Campo Contile," along with various revenues. The administration of these properties and their yields until the monastery was erected would be entrusted to the Company of the Good Jesus.

Despite the construction of a monastery being authorized by the General Council of the Land of Cetona as early as September 22, 1522, and funds being available for the building since 1555, not even the first stone had been laid five years later. Chiappino decided to personally erect it, choosing one of the lands included in the bequest: Campo Contile, in front of the "Portonaccio," the new

fortified access built by the Sienese in 1458 with a ravelin. The location, sadly known because it was where gallows were erected for the condemned, was near the church of Sant'Angelo al Trivio and in a flat position. The first walls were already rising when the bishop of Chiusi opposed the construction of a monastery outside the castle walls. This only partially interrupted the desire for a new urban layout for a town that had suffered many damages in the recent war. In confirmation of this hypothesis, in the second part of Chiappino's first edict, it reads: "He has also ordered for greater convenience that all those who build new houses will repair the ruined ones and fix the uninhabited houses or renovate the old ones they inhabit, and the expense will be 25 scudi (...) they are not obliged to provide any help to public walls and are exempt from it for ten years."

The incentive bore the expected fruits, culminating in the construction of the square and the building of new quarters, despite the almost total absence of the Marquis. Chiappino, since March 1562, was called to Pisa to be the first knight of the new Order of Saint Stephen. In 1567 Filippo II appointed him as the master of the general field of the Spanish armies in the Flanders, where he once again distinguished himself for his military skills. In 1574, at the age of 56, he was leading the Spanish armies against Holland when he found his death in Antwerp. His body was embalmed, while his heart is still preserved in the Flemish city of Hamme.

Chiappino had married Eleonora Cybo in 1549, but they had no children. For the succession, recourse had to be made to his natural son, born from a youthful relationship with Giovanna di Iacopo Gavari in Città di Castello: Gian Vincenzo, also called Gian Francesco to avoid confusion with his uncle of the same name. Born between 1545 and 1547, he was legitimized to become the successor of the Marquis of Cetona by Philip II, King of Spain, and Grand Duke of Tuscany Cosimo I. In 1569, Gian Vincenzo "Chiappino" married Virginia Savelli, the lady of Antrodoco. Donna Virginia was the only one of the Vitelli family to reside regularly in Cetona, even because, needless to say, not even her husband could stay there for extended periods. So much so that in 1571, coinciding with the birth of his son Niccolò in Cetona, Gian Vincenzo was sent to Spain to pay homage to Philip II, who had become the father of Ferdinand. Immediately after being elected grand constable of the Order of Saint Stephen, Gian Vincenzo had to go to the Flanders in 1575 to honor and bring back the body of his father Chiappino. In 1581, we see Gian Vincenzo, with the rank of general of the troops of Pope Gregory XIII, again in the Flanders and then, still on behalf of the Pope, in Avignon.

Meanwhile, Virginia Savelli continued to be involved in the government affairs of the land of Cetona. It was probably she who ended the dispute with the bishop of Chiusi by agreeing to move the construction of the monastery uphill, between the old walls of the fortress and the new walls of Capperone, while the newly started building would be transformed into the residence of the Vitelli family. Returning to Cetona in April 1590, Gian Vincenzo ordered to keep a strip of land free from bushes and gardens along the walls. He died in Città di Castello in 1596, a year after the loss of his only son during a siege in Hungary. Virginia Savelli, appointed guardian of her nephews Giovan Luigi "Chiappino" and Gentilina, returned the income from Antea Cioli's estate to the monastery, valued at about a thousand scudi, the equivalent of "an olive field and a vineyard." "Chiappino's" dream was finally realized. Near the family palace, the loggias of the covered market arose, as did the oratory of the powerful Confraternity of the Immaculate Conception, and around it, the small palaces of the main and wealthy families of Cetona: the Minutelli Cioli, the Tosoni Raffaelli, the Beltrami. Thus, a square with imposing dimensions was created, which still impresses today.

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