



HISTORY

The earliest documentary evidence of an *opera* (cathedral works committee) of Santa Maria dates to the last decade of the twelfth century; it testifies to a building site active in the work of construction and maintenance of the ancient cathedral. By the middle of the following century, the Opera appears well-defined as an institution, with an autonomous bureaucracy, substantial real property, and established administrative offices. Also by this time, the Opera was fully inserted into the orbit of the Commune of Siena, which regulated its institutional structure, disciplined its financing, and fixed its objectives by drawing up statutes for it during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. An *operaio* was placed at the head of the administration. He was named directly by the political faction in the government at the time and flanked by a group of councilors and a scribe whose job it was to keep the account records; this latter was replaced by an actual treasurer (chamberlain) starting in 1362. The structure and functions assigned to the Opera in the course of the fourteenth century remained substantially unchanged until 1545, when the city drew up a new statute. At the head of the Opera was the rector, elected by the city's highest political assemblies, and a council of nine "sages," one of whom was chosen from among the canons of the cathedral. The chamberlain continued to manage the money, and his work was reviewed annually by the commune's auditors. The sixteenth-century norms continued to be applied essentially throughout the modern age, although the prerogative of appointing the rector was assumed by the Grand Duke of Tuscany. In the closing decades of the eighteenth century, the reforms of the rulers of the House of Lorraine modified the institutional structure of the Opera several times, until in 1790 the office of the "sages" was suppressed, and the rector was given complete responsibility for administration, in collaboration with an accountant (*bilancere*) for all aspects of bookkeeping, a chancellor for handling bureaucratic matters, and a steward for ordinary administration. During the time that Tuscany was part of the French empire (1808-1814), the administration of the Opera was left relatively untouched, despite the general administrative reforms that characterize this period. Not even the restoration of the Grand Ducal government resulted in substantial change to the direction and management of the cathedral; if anything, the forms of control and auditing of accounts were reinforced. After Italian Unification, the Opera della Metropolitana di Siena was subjected, like all

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the other cathedral governing boards in Italy, to the legislation of the new unified state, which inherited the already-established prerogatives of the Grand Duke in this area.

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