

## Chapel of Theodelinda

From the historic and artistic point of view, the focal point in the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist is the Chapel of Theodelinda, built on the right of the central apse towards the end of the fourteenth century. As well as the altar in which the Iron Crown is kept and behind which is the sarcophagus where the queen's remains lie, the Chapel of Theodelinda is famous for the cycle of paintings that adorns its walls: an absolute masterpiece in International Gothic style.



### Theme of the cycle of paintings

In its structure, divided into five tiers, the cycle (which covers a surface area of about 500 square metres) consists of 45 rich paintings inspired by the life of Theodelinda. Its main artists - between 1441 and 1446 - were Franceschino, Gregorio and Giovanni Zavattari, members of a well-known family of painters who were active in Lombardy for the whole of the 14th century.

In carrying out their work (ordered perhaps by the Cathedral Chapter or perhaps by Filippo Maria Visconti and completed in two stages between 1441 and 1445), to represent scenes from the life of Theodelinda the Zavattari sought inspiration both in the texts of Paul the Deacon (*Historia Langobardorum*, 8th century) and in those of Bonincontro Morigia (*Chronicon Modoetiense*, 14th century)

The visual effect of the work is exceptional, richly decorated with parts in gold and crowded with people depicted in luxurious court garments. In this way, along with the Longobard history of the first queen of Italy,

they offer a meticulous panoramic view of fashion and life at the palace in the golden period of the Visconti, the Lords of Milan, who saw the legitimation of their dynasty in Longobard royal history.

### **1441, a decisive year**

1441 was not just the year when the Zavattari began their work in the Cathedral. In the same year, after a long "political" betrothal, Bianca Maria Visconti - natural daughter of Filippo Maria, the last duke of the Visconti lineage - was married to Francesco Sforza. This marriage in fact marked the end of the Visconti rule in Milan and the beginning of that of the Sforza.

It is strongly suggested that the Zavattari were inspired by this historic Milanese marriage to represent, with particular insistence, the scenes of the marriage between Theodelinda and her two husbands: first Authari and then Agilulf. There are 28 scenes representing diplomatic missions, preparations, ceremonies and banquets: more than half of all the paintings in the cycle



### **Technological workshop**

The extraordinary artistic quality of the work of the Zavattari is combined today with the exceptional level of quality of the restoration work carried out on the paintings (begun in 2008 and completed in 2015), which was carried out by specialised teams using the most advanced technologies as well as non-invasive photographic diagnostic procedures. Innovative lighting techniques have also been adopted in the Chapel, with the intervention of specialists in lighting design, with the aim of increasing the emotional value of the work of art.

