



EUROPEAN WOMEN PATRONS OF ART AND ARCHITECTURE, C. 1500-1650

SOME PATTERNS

By Sheila ffolliott

To assess women's patronage roles in the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries requires the acknowledgement that women's support of the arts transpired within a deeply embedded patron-client arrangement pervasive in European social relations and religious practice. It also requires examination of the period's laws and gender norms. This paper surveys and attempts to categorise how and why a range of European women—from Isabella d'Este in Italy, Catherine de' Medici in France, and various Habsburg queens, in Spain, France, and the Netherlands, to less well known patrons—acquired and made use of the visual arts and architecture in the early modern period. Women and men actively supported art and architecture in all its forms and maintained relationships with canonical artists. They operated, however, in a society that prescribed differentiated male and female roles.

In the Renaissance, unlike today, art did not occupy a separate sphere in which artists made largely non-utilitarian creations. Motivated by the desire for salvation, patrons initiated the process, hiring artists and architects to build and decorate churches and provide the liturgical apparatus central to religious practice. At the same time patronage of such works, together with civic and domestic architecture and decoration, enhanced personal and family stature. These connections are clear in an inscription accompanying a painting that Catherine King quoted in her recent book on Italian women patrons of the Renaissance:

Ad lectorem.
Nobile testata est pingi pia Brisida quondam
Hoc opus. O! nimium munera grata Deo.
Si petis auctoris nomen. Nicolaus alumnus
Fulginae: patriae pulcra corona suae
Octo quincties centum de millibus anni,
Cum manus imposita est ultima, vanuerant.
Sed quis plus meruit, quaeso, te iudice, lector
Cum causam dederit Brisida et ille manum?

To the reader

The pious Brisida, now dead, willed that this noble work be painted.
Oh! a gift extremely pleasing to God. If you seek to know the artist's name, it is Niccolò L'Alunno of Foligno, beautiful crown of his native land. Eight years from one thousand and five hundred had passed when he put the finishing touches. But who is the more worthy of merit according to you, I ask you, my reader, since Brisida gave the commission, and he the exacting hand?¹

Let us examine the inscription's language. It names the patron and asserts that her commission pleases God. Then it provides the artist's name. Finally, and provocatively, given today's assumptions about art, it asks whether the artist or the patron is more worthy of merit. Significantly, this patron, Brisida, was female. Nevertheless, Francis Haskell's magisterial *Patrons and Painters*, first published in 1963, the first comprehensive examination of visual arts patronage in early modern Italy, includes very few women. The patrons Haskell examined had great wealth and power—popes, cardinals, and princes—and collected antiquities and cultivated the artists most prized today. Although many women commissioned artworks, few conform to his model. Those who did were exceptional: rulers like Christina of Sweden or Christine de Bourbon, Duchess of Savoy, with the resources and position to engage in that arena. When Haskell names some women who were active art patrons, like Anna Colonna Barberini in Rome, he provides, however, only the information that she married a male patron.² Women actively supported art and architecture in all its forms and some maintained relationships with canonical artists, but that is only part of the story. Why did Haskell ignore the patronage activity of Anna and many women like her?

Assessing women's patronage requires a different model, one that takes gender into account. Law denied most women access to money, but there were regional differences and widowhood offered some scope.³ Gender norms advocated by treatises like Alberti's *On the Family* (1433-4) to Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier* (1528) to Juan Luis Vives' treatise *A very frutefull and pleasant booke called the instruction of a christen woman* (1529?), provided gender-based models for ideal behaviours. Patronage models for women emerging from such sources include the sometimes overlapping categories: pious wife and widow, guardian, court lady, nun, and ruler. Working within and occasionally resisting the implications of these terms, women, by which I largely intend those of aristocratic and royal

¹ Todini 2004, 600; King, 1998, 1. English translation: Minna Skaftte Jensen.

² Haskell 1980, 32.

³ Kuehn, 2001; Conelli 2004; Edelstein 2000.

status, used art patronage to promote personal and family identity, relating to both their birth and marital lineage. They commissioned paintings, sculptures, and the decorative arts, collected and displayed portraits, and built religious and secular buildings and gardens. Their activity transpired within family palaces and country houses, in churches, focusing on funerary monuments, and—in those countries remaining Roman Catholic—in convents, some of which became, in fact, multigenerational palaces for royal and patrician laywomen. Elite marriage practice, which exchanged women between courts, fostered commerce in artists and ideas. Over the past decade, a number of scholars have unearthed data on numerous individuals and have attempted better to theorize women's patronage.⁴ This paper surveys and attempts to categorize how and why a range of early modern European women—from the well-known Isabella d'Este in Italy, Catherine de' Medici in France, and various Habsburg queens and regents, in Spain, France, and the Netherlands, to less well known patrons—obtained and used art and architecture.

The Pious Wife or Widow

Piety provided the most socially acceptable outlet for women's patronage. Women owned the majority of illuminated manuscripts in Renaissance France, but beyond such personal objects, women like Brigida used patronage to assert themselves and their interests more publicly. Although few could marshal the same resources as men, religious patronage gave women access. Many commissions resulted from vows.⁵ A would-be courtier in the circle of Catherine de' Medici addressed an entire book on patronage appropriate to a queen of France. His lengthy title, *History of the Devotion, Piety, and Charity of the Illustrious Queens of France ... with the Churches, Monasteries, Hospitals, and Colleges that they have founded ... which actions have resulted in fruitful issue*, showed how married women might attain an elusive goal, the birth of a male heir.⁶ Such votive works range from paintings and statues to entire buildings. To commemorate the birth of a son, Giovanna da Montefeltro, sister-in-law of Pope Julius II, commissioned an *Annunciation* for a local church.⁷ Anna Colonna Barberini vowed to found a convent in Rome during a difficult labour resulting in the birth of her son Carlo; completing it was a lifelong process.⁸ Similarly, the childless

⁴ Anderson, 1996; Lawrence, 1997; Tinagli, 1997; Johnson & Grieco, 1997; King, 1998; Matthews-Grieco & Zarri, 2000; Reiss & Wilkins, 2001; Hills, 2003.

⁵ King 1998, 20-42.

⁶ Houel 1586 and ffolliott 1997.

⁷ Clough 1996, 40.

⁸ Dunn 1994.

Anne of Austria, seventeenth-century queen of France, vowed to build a new monastery for the Benedictine sisters associated with the Val-de-Grâce abbey, in the new Parisian location she helped them obtain. After the birth of the future Louis XIV, in 1638 (when she was 37), she made good on her pledge.

The typical Italian non royal female patron was a widow who ordered an altarpiece for a family chapel. She was frequently quite precise as to the paintings' iconography—choosing subjects including the Virgin, flanked by specific saints associated with the donor or the deceased. Often the contracts require the use of good quality colours, but not all specified an artist.⁹ At other times women patrons sought specific artists, sometimes securing the services of those now in the canon of greats, although men of greater stature may have trumped them in their search. In the sixteenth century, Raphael, when the Popes were not claiming his services, and Parmigianino, both made multiple altarpieces for female patrons; in fact, Raphael had many women patrons at the start of his career e.g. for the *Colonna Altarpiece* (New York: Metropolitan Museum); the *Entombment* (Rome: Galleria Borghese), and the *St. Cecilia* (Bologna: Pinacoteca).¹⁰ Two of Parmigianino's best known altarpieces result from women's commissions. Elena Baiardi, patron of his *Madonna of the Long Neck* (Florence: Uffizi), furnished an inscription to appear alongside, giving her name and acknowledging her motivation for dedicating the chapel to the Virgin. Notably the inscription begins with the words: TABULAM PRAESTANTISSIMAE ARTIS: "this panel painting of outstanding artistry."¹¹

Building required great sums, but in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Catholic countries many women supported church construction. Dynastic chapels were appearing throughout Europe in this period, and royal widows were active patrons: Margaret of Austria's church at Brou in eastern France and Catherine de' Medici's Valois Chapel attached to S. Denis outside Paris are prime examples (the ancient widow Artemisia, builder of a funerary monument for her husband Mausolus, served as an important model).¹² But in Rome alone, quite amazingly, Carolyn Valone has identified over fifty aristocratic female patrons of significant architectural projects at this time.¹³ Wealthy women, principally widows who retained some control over family resources, actively funded religious institutions. Some built convents, where they often furnished cells for themselves, whether or not

⁹ Franklin 1987, 652 and Lowe 2003, 354.

¹⁰ Simon 2006; Stefaniak 1991, 345-71; Cooper 2001, 554-561.

¹¹ Vaccaro 2001, 180.

¹² ffolliott 1986, 227-41, Carpino 1997, 37-52.

¹³ Valone 1992, 50.

they actually took vows. Others supported male religious orders, especially those closely associated with Reformation ideals, like the Jesuits, Oratorians, and Capuchins.¹⁴ Largely disenfranchised by the institutional structure of the Roman Church, which excluded them from the priesthood, some women supported attempts at reform with its emphasis on charity, with which women could take an active role.¹⁵ In the sixteenth century, Ignatius of Loyola cultivated patrons among aristocratic women in his Spanish circle to help start the Jesuit order.¹⁶ His followers sought out and found wealthy, often childless, widows throughout Europe as likely prospects for financial support.¹⁷ Once the Jesuits achieved legitimacy, male patrons, with their greater resources and political clout, took over. Scholars have argued, in fact, that the Jesuits sought to diminish the significance of women to their early growth.¹⁸

These aristocratic women saw themselves continuing a long established patronage pattern, the Roman matrons in the circle of St. Jerome.¹⁹ Family members did not always appreciate women's charitable patronage and sometimes women had to fight to get what was theirs. Johanna Heideman has uncovered the remarkable story of Flaminia Margani Mattei in sixteenth-century Rome.²⁰ Much against custom, which kept property within the male line, she was her husband's sole beneficiary. As a childless widow, however, she became embroiled in lawsuits with her in-laws, since his will excluded his brothers and their heirs. Under attack by his family, to add lustre to her character and to influence the court, she donated large sums to the Franciscans to decorate the apse of Santa Maria in Aracoeli, with which her family had long association. Documents reveal how actively the monks participated, even helping to draft the necessary documents inside the church! Sufficient wealth enabled Flaminia to do something public for her own honour, but it did not save her life, as the Mattei hired an assassin, who stabbed her enroute to church.

The Guardian

Turning to the domestic sphere, the treatises advocated a custodial responsibility for elite women regarding family property. Italian men assigned themselves the active patron role of choosing and accumulating goods and

¹⁴ Barzman 1992, 173.

¹⁵ O'Malley 1993, 113 and 195-99.

¹⁶ O'Malley 1993, 75.

¹⁷ Valone 1994, 157-84.

¹⁸ Hufton 2001, 329.

¹⁹ Tomas 2003, 86.

²⁰ Heideman 2001, 500.

consigned women to life within the family palace protecting the patrimony—important, but less creative.²¹ The patrician residence and its contents embodied family identity.²² In Florence, major expenditures coincided with life-cycle events centred on women—marriage and birth—but significantly, women did not select the majority of objects in their care and with which they spent most of their time. Encouraging men to spend and women to conserve limited the latter’s ability to commission artworks in the domestic environment. Economizing required reuse and repair: but occasionally it presented opportunity. After her 1491 marriage to Alfonso d’Este, Duke of Ferrara, for example, Anna Sforza had some of her wedding silver melted down to make new objects of her choice.²³ Occasionally women used guardianship assertively to preserve family honour through attention to material remains. Felice della Rovere Orsini saw to repairs at Orsini properties at Bracciano, north of Rome, neglected by her husband.²⁴ Rather than totally redecorate, she hired local artisans to “replenish the decorative paintwork ... and brighten up 40-year old frescoes by Antoniazio Romano.”²⁵ When patronage studies privilege “taste”, i.e. selection, the narrative privileges an individual’s foresight in procuring artists whose reputations would endure.²⁶ By such standards, Felice’s and other women’s similar activities seem minor. For a patron to “choose,” however, required a powerful position and ample resources, not a position most women occupied. So while her father, Pope Julius II, unhesitatingly put his personal stamp on Vatican spaces through patronage, in some cases covering up pre-existing artworks, can we not see Felice’s and other women’s endeavours as showing respect for the value of thrift, regard for tradition, and investment in a collective family identity, marital and birth? This is borne out by the way that other women extended the guardian role beyond the palace, providing for the conservation of works earlier family members donated to churches.²⁷ If, in the eighteenth century, the Electress Palatine, Anna Maria Luisa de’ Medici, last of her line, had not been an active guardian, insisting that her birth family patrimony remain in her native Florence, we would all go to Vienna instead of Florence to see major works of Renaissance art.²⁸

²¹ Alberti 1969, 207; Rusconi, 182.

²² Alberti 1969, 202.

²³ Welch 2000, Neher & Shepherd 2000, 108.

²⁴ Murphy 2005, 165.

²⁵ Murphy 2005, 164, 257-60.

²⁶ San Juan 1991, 68.

²⁷ Lowe 2003, 344.

²⁸ Ciletti 1984, 23-27.

The Court Lady

Women's custodial role did not grant them spaces they could call their own. Some wealthy men had small personal retreats, *studioli* or cabinets, where they kept their most prized possessions, often ancient cameos and coins, antiquities being the most sought after and expensive items in this period. Cabinets were the smallest and probably least accessible rooms in palaces, which inversely signalled their importance. Alberti even recommended that husbands ban their wives from these exclusive spaces.²⁹

A tiny number of very high status women had *studioli*, and examining what they did with them is revealing about women's patronage. Isabella d'Este in Mantua, probably the best-known Renaissance woman patron, competed with her male peers on their terms in accumulating a substantial collection of antiquities in a variety of media.³⁰ For her personal spaces, moreover, Isabella commissioned erudite allegories to represent herself, employing mythological and classical references that would have been familiar to those having received a humanist education not usually available to women. Her voluminous correspondence demonstrates her unrelenting pursuit (not always successful) of objects and popular painters including Perugino, Giovanni Bellini, Correggio, and Leonardo da Vinci.³¹ If we take the model of court lady to be that derived from Castiglione's *Courtier*, the lady at the court's centre who inspires rather than acts, Isabella used art patronage to resist and redefine that role.

Because the palace expressed *par excellence* the patrilineal family and was very expensive, few women built them. The exceptions are women of substantial wealth with dynastic ambitions and rulers (another patronage category), in some cases, dowager queens.³² There are well-known examples in most European countries. Probably the woman patron most able to carry out large projects on the Italian peninsula in the early modern era is Cristina of Savoy. The daughter of Henry IV (King of France) and Maria de' Medici (patron of Rubens, among other artists) and sister of Henrietta Maria, Queen of England, and Elizabeth, Queen of Spain, she married the Duke of Savoy in 1619 and, when widowed, ruled as regent for 10 years.³³ That ruler position gave her great authority and access to capital. She remodelled, built, and decorated villas for herself and supported innovative, politically charged court masques. She changed the face of Savoy's capital,

²⁹ Alberti 1969, 209.

³⁰ Fletcher 1982, 53.

³¹ San Juan 1991, 67-78; Campbell 2006.

³² Eichelberger 2003, 25-46, McIver 2006; Michahelles 2002, 1-5, Reiss 2001, 125-158, Tomas 2003, 92.

³³ Pollak 1991 and Oresko.

Turin, arranging for a large new square and building one of the churches flanking it. She also lavished attention on the church of San Francesco di Paola, with decorations celebrating herself and connections between France and Savoy. Indicative of her status—and the lack of any proto-Feminist solidarity—in trying to attract the Florentine painter Cirro Ferri, she claimed that he could easily free himself to come work for her as his current contract was “only with nuns.”³⁴

Married women moved to their husband’s house, sometimes as early as their mid to late teens, and some royal women never saw birth family members again. Portraits reminded them of those left behind. Fifteenth-century Ippolita Sforza, the bride of Alfonso II of Naples, wrote her mother in Milan about what she wanted for her *studiolo*:

I pray your Illustrious Highness . . . to have made for me portraits from life of His Excellency my father and of Yourself, and of all my Illustrious brothers and sisters, for beyond the adornment of my studio, looking on them would give me continual consolation and pleasure.³⁵

Similarly, Margaret of Austria, sixteenth-century regent of the Netherlands, charged the Dutch painter Jan Cornelisz Vermeyen, enroute to Augsburg, to make portraits of the Emperor (her father) and the King and Queen of Hungary (her niece) in the following terms: “take and portray their physiognomies as close to life as is possible.”³⁶ To keep her apprised of the health of her children, maintained in their separate household, Catherine de’ Medici, queen of France, insisted her artists make new portraits of them, not copy old ones, which was a common portrait practice.

Elite women throughout Europe commissioned portraits of kin and connections and displayed them in those spaces over which they had control.³⁷ Women exploited their identity within two lineages, which generated an extensive kinship network. To cement such ties, Isabella d’Este, Margaret of Austria, and Catherine de’ Medici, among others, commissioned portraits to exchange with relatives and clients. Such women also understood how displaying portraits of powerful relatives and connections enhanced their stature.

Discussion of portraits recurs in women’s art-related correspondence, highlighting particular concerns and anxieties. Renaissance culture presupposed that beauty represented virtue; thus how women appeared, whether in

³⁴ Haskell 1980, 65.

³⁵ Thornton 1997, 90.

³⁶ Horn 1989, 60.

³⁷ Eichelberger & Beaven 1995, 227.

person or in paint, mattered greatly.³⁸ In 1621 Caterina de' Medici, Duchess of Mantua, received a letter from her mother, Christina, Grand Duchess of Tuscany, stating that the Flemish painter Justus Suttermans had arrived in Florence, bringing with him portraits he had made of the addressee and of her sister-in-law, Empress Eleonora Gonzaga von Habsburg. Christina wrote: "I thank you infinitely for the small one you sent of yourself and I am pleased with it to an extent that you might imagine, but I really like the large one, because it is very well made and satisfies everyone ... as for the Empress, those who have seen her say that it isn't that well made, as she is much more beautiful than the portrait. Nevertheless, the portrait demonstrates that she is a beautiful Empress."³⁹ One sees here how the arrival and examination of portraits is an important courtly event. Her comment indicates precisely what portraits were meant to signal, with beauty the appropriate focus.

Christina, granddaughter and namesake of Christina of Denmark, Duchess of Lorraine, had married the Tuscan Grand Duke Ferdinando I in 1589. Two months after her wedding, she displayed unfinished portraits of her young nieces, Maria and Eleonora de' Medici, to her aunt, Dorothy, the Duchess of Brunswick (namesake of the elder Christina's sister, the Princess Palatine), and to the Duke and Duchess of Ferrara, Alfonso II and Margherita Gonzaga d'Este. All comment saying, as one would expect them to, that "they must be the most beautiful princesses in Italy."⁴⁰ She arranged to send these portraits with the Duchess of Brunswick, who was shortly to return to Milan and her mother, in the final year of her life.

As these examples indicate, royal marriage distributed women across Europe. Female kin typically exchanged artworks, ideas about art, and even artists themselves, greatly enhancing the international nature of court culture. In 1617 Grand Duchess Christina wrote to Caterina to inform her that she wanted portraits of all her children "made by a good hand" and was, therefore, sending Tiberio Titi, her official painter, to Mantua.⁴¹ The Grand Duchess recommended that her daughter avail herself of his presence there to commission works she might want. Female relatives distributed among courts throughout Europe had a profound effect on patronage. Artists, architects, musicians, and writers freely moved among courts and made court

³⁸ Brown 2001, 12.

³⁹ Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Mediceo del Principato 6110 folio 138 (Entry 6950 in the Medici Archive Project Documentary Sources database.)

⁴⁰ Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Mediceo del Principato 5927 folio 460 (Entry 3692 in the Medici Archive Project Documentary Sources database.)

⁴¹ Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Mediceo del Principato 6110 folio 5 (Entry 6870 in the Medici Archive Project Documentary Sources database.)

culture increasingly international. If any single family represents the maximum potential for facilitating exchange, it is surely the Habsburgs, who, at one time or another in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, had male or female members on practically every European throne. Moreover, widowed Habsburg women often took care of the next generation, in the absence of one or both parents. Numerous letters between sisters, aunts, and nieces, provide a rich picture of gift and artist exchange.⁴²

Convent Culture

Convents were an important socioeconomic force and patronage site in Catholic Europe. The convent was a religious institution, but it also provided an alternative domestic arrangement. Renaissance honour culture had no place for single women. The burdens of the dowry system caused families, even elite ones, to send some daughters to convents, irrespective of religious vocation.⁴³ Estimates place as many as one-half to three-quarters of Milanese noble girls in the seventeenth century in convents.⁴⁴ Although convent walls separated women from the outside—with the Counter Reformation insisting on strict enclosure—relations persisted between town and gown.⁴⁵ Families gravitated towards the same convents and patronage flowed where there was family. Successive generations of male and female Medici provided for several Florentine convents in the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries, motivated to augment support for the family, both in current politics and in the afterlife.⁴⁶ Similarly at convents like Fontevault and the Val-de-Grâce in France and the Descalzas Reales in Spain patronage carried similar expectations of reciprocity.

Families lobbied to maintain kinfolk in leadership positions and convent life typically duplicated and buttressed the power structure found outside.⁴⁷ The members of some convents, like Fontevault in France paralleled the bloodline of the royal house. San Zaccaria in Venice enjoyed the privileges it attained by continued association with civic authorities.⁴⁸ The abbess was generally related to the current Doge and the nuns expected his annual appearance for Easter vespers.⁴⁹ Being a nun did not always mean isolation: Philip III, King of Spain and other monarchs frequently visited nuns. Many convents with an elite membership hosted social events: in 1626 Duke Fran-

⁴² Jordan 2000, 265-293; Wilson-Chevalier 2002, 474-524.

⁴³ Hills 1994, 22.

⁴⁴ Goldthwaite 1993, 89.

⁴⁵ Dunn 2003, Hill 2003, 152.

⁴⁶ Tomas 2003, 86-88.

⁴⁷ Hills 2004.

⁴⁸ Primhak 2000, Panizza 2000, 93.

⁴⁹ Radke 2001, 400.

cresco Gonzaga of Mantua asked his wife to join him and other courtiers at a cold collation at the Convent of San Vincenzo, at the invitation of his cousin, Anna Eleonora, the prioress.⁵⁰

Elite women who entered the convent as part of a family economic scheme expected a measure of personal autonomy as a trade off for their cooperation.⁵¹ Nunneries reproduced the prevailing class system: aristocratic women managed the convent while their less privileged sisters did the menial work.⁵² The former generally had better accommodations and some possessed quite splendid accoutrements. The seventeenth-century sisters at Regina Coeli in Naples had silk, majolica plates, and ebony desks in addition to the standard devotional objects in their cells.⁵³ Adroitly exploiting their outside connections, nuns regularly commissioned artworks to decorate spaces within their convents, both in the churches open to the public and in the spaces reserved to the members of the order. Gary Radke has demonstrated how involved nuns could be in getting the results they desired: at San Zaccaria in Venice, they tried out a sample choir stall and made adjustments before giving the woodworkers the go-ahead for the project.⁵⁴

One perhaps unintended consequence of convent patronage by royal and aristocratic women is that the convent became a quasi palace for women, often multigenerational members of the same families. As I suggested earlier, such women did not generally have their own spaces within their father's or husband's house. Patronage of a convent gave such women both a space and access to a network of often well connected women outside their husbands' domain. Joanna of Austria married John of Portugal, produced an heir, and when widowed returned to her native Madrid to serve as Regent (while her brother Philip II went to England). In 1557 she transformed a palace into a convent for the Franciscan Poor Clares, the Descalzas Reales, and busied herself commissioning art for it. She kept her extensive collection of family portraits there, some of which remain *in situ*.⁵⁵ She chose to be buried there in an impressive funerary monument by the Italians Pompeo Leoni and Jacopo da Trezzo. Joanna's sister Maria, Habsburg Empress, returned from Austria to live at the Descalzas. Their niece, Isabella Clara Eugenia, Regent of the Netherlands, who had lived at the convent in her youth, commissioned tapestries for it from Rubens' designs on the *Triumph*

⁵⁰ Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Mediceo del Principato 6109 folio (Entry 7140 in the Medici Archive Project Documentary Sources database.)

⁵¹ Radke 2001, 432.

⁵² Wood 1996, 86 and Hills 2004.

⁵³ Hills 1999, 37.

⁵⁴ Radke 2001, 449.

⁵⁵ Jordan 2002, 42-65.

of the Eucharist.⁵⁶ She expected to return home to Madrid to take up residence at this convent, where she had spent time in her youth. Margaret of Austria, the Austrian born Queen of Philip III of Spain, was a major patron and founder of another Madrid convent, La Incarnación. She spent time at these convents when her husband was away; creating thereby her own network among nuns and other women, an act that was deeply resented by her husband and his ministers.⁵⁷ Her daughter Anne married Louis XIII of France. From her arrival, the former infanta cultivated relationships with women religious, an activity her husband and Richelieu, his minister similarly disliked. As stated earlier, as an appropriate charitable activity to help her conceive, Anne supported the Benedictine community of the Val-de-Grâce. She sponsored a new church building including an apartment for herself, where she spent, on average, two days a week. Louis XIII discovered that she used this site to carry on correspondence with members of her own family, of whom he disapproved. He forbade her to visit this or any other convent. However, shortly thereafter she produced the dauphin and strengthened her position. When her husband died and she became Queen Regent, the Val-de-Grâce became the site of her autonomy. She sponsored an entire new building complex, with decorations relating to her, and like many other convent patrons, chose internment there.⁵⁸

Working within and occasionally resisting models presented for their behaviour, in addition to proposing their own, women used art patronage to promote personal and family identity, and to maintain kinship networks, relating to both their birth and marital lineages. They commissioned paintings, sculptures, and decorative arts, collected and displayed portraits, and built religious and secular buildings and gardens. Their activity transpired within family palaces and country houses, in churches, especially concerning funerary monuments, and—in those countries remaining in the Roman Catholic sphere—in convents, some of which became residences for royal and patrician laywomen. An especially distinctive feature of women's art patronage resulted from elite marriage practice, which exchanged women between courts, fostering thereby exchanges of ideas and artists.

⁵⁶ Jordan 1999, 118-37.

⁵⁷ Sánchez 1998.

⁵⁸ Germann 2003, Hills 2003, 47-61.

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