Attending to Early Modern Women 2018 Workshop Proposal

TITLE: Early Modern Women Patrons and Collectors

SUMMARY: This workshop will explore the roles of early modern women patrons and collectors in Europe and beyond. Particular emphasis will be placed on how these related activities provide evidence for female agency ca. 1400-1750. While the workshop reading concerns patronage of the visual arts and architecture, it is hoped that the questions posed and the case studies presented will be useful for other disciplines represented at the conference, including history, musicology, and literature.

ORGANIZER INFORMATION:

Sheryl E. Reiss, Independent Scholar, art history, sherylreiss8@yahoo.com
Diana Robin, Newberry Scholar-in-Residence and University of Mexico emerita, history, diana.robin@rcn.com


DESCRIPTION: In 1977 Joan Kelly-Gadol famously posed the question “Did Women Have a Renaissance?,” answering her own question in the negative. The past three decades, however, have seen a Renaissance, or, more properly, a Golden Age, of scholarly interest in female patrons and collectors in the broadly-defined early modern period. The dramatic expansion of interest in patronage of art and architecture, literature, intellectual culture, and music (and in the collection of objects) ca. 1400-1750 is part of the greater project of historians of culture to recover evidence for women’s agency in the past. This workshop, under the rubrics of Collectivity and Choice, will explore the roles of early modern women patrons and collectors in Europe and beyond. Questions we will ask when examining women’s patronage and collecting in this workshop include: who were the female patrons and collectors in this period? What were their relationships with other
women and with men, including their kinsmen and those whose works they commissioned or collected? To what social classes did these women belong and how were they able to finance the undertakings they sponsored? What types of works did they request? What were the personal, familial, and societal motivations for their patronage? What were the social, political, and religious groups and networks to which these women patrons and collectors belonged? Did the character of patronage and collecting by women differ from that of men and what were the mechanisms of their patronage in male-dominated cultures? It is important to stress that the patronage system was based on social stratification and inequalities in power and economic standing. Thus, in general, patronage in this period by both women and men was the province of elites, who had the means to extend commissions. This workshop will consider classes of female patrons and collectors -- both secular and religious -- ranging from upper-class widows to queens; the types of commissions they extended and objects they owned; and networks of women patrons and collectors, and the relationships of these women to other women and to men. A reading on women’s art patronage, slide presentations, and contributions by participants will help facilitate discussion in the workshop. While the workshop reading concerns patronage of the visual arts and architecture, it is hoped that the questions posed and the case studies presented will be useful for other disciplines represented at the conference, including history, musicology, and literature. Participants will be asked to provide an example of women’s agency through patronage or collecting from their own fields of study.

Beyond Isabella and Beyond: Secular Women Patrons of Art in Early Modern Europe¹

Sheryl E. Reiss

In 1977 Joan Kelly-Gadol famously posed the question ‘Did Women Have a Renaissance?’ answering her own question in the negative.² This chapter, an overview of the literature on art patronage by secular women in early modern Europe, argues that the past two-and-one-half decades have seen a Renaissance, or, more properly, a Golden Age, of scholarly interest in female patrons in that broadly defined period. The dramatic expansion of interest in female patrons circa 1300–1800 is part of the greater project of historians and art historians to recover evidence for women’s agency in the past.³

Questions to bear in mind when examining women’s art patronage include: who were the female secular patrons in Europe from the fourteenth through eighteenth centuries? What were their relationships with other women and with men, including their kinsmen and the artists and architects whose works they commissioned? To what social classes did these women belong and how were they able to finance the undertakings they sponsored? What types of works did they request? What were the personal, familial, and societal motivations for their patronage? What were the social, political, and religious groups and networks to which these patrons belonged? Did the character of patronage by women differ from that of men and what were the mechanisms of their patronage in a

¹ Some of the material in this chapter was first presented in a lecture at Texas Christian University. I am grateful to Babette Bohn for inviting me to speak there and to the editors of this volume for inviting me to contribute to it. This chapter is dedicated to David Wilkins and to Carolyn Valone, whose work has inspired so much of the research considered in it.


³ For recent overviews of women’s art patronage, see ffolliott 2007 and 2008. Significantly, the patronage of women is not considered in Baxandall’s classic Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy, first published in 1972.
male-dominated culture? In essence, these are questions that were posed in the ‘Prologue’ to the collection of essays I co-edited with David Wilkins entitled *Beyond Isabella: Secular Women Patrons of Art in Renaissance Italy* that was published in 2001 after a long genesis.\(^4\) This chapter will first consider the literature on art patronage by women prior to the publication of *Beyond Isabella*, will then discuss the major themes and conclusions of that book, and finally, will survey more recent work, concentrating primarily on Italy, France, England, the Netherlands and Spain. In so doing, I will consider classes of secular women patrons, the types of commissions they extended, and the relationships of these women to men. It is important to stress that the patronage system was based on social stratification and inequalities in power and economic standing. Thus, in general, art patronage in this period by both women and men was the province of elites, who had the means to extend commissions; some noteworthy exceptions will, however, be discussed below. For the most part this chapter will focus on English language publications.

In a review article of 1995 entitled ‘The Progress of Patronage in Renaissance Italy’, the historian Kate Lowe encouraged a re-examination of the assumption that Isabella d’Este, Marchioness of Mantua, (1474–1539) (Figure 22.1) was a nearly unique example of female art patron in the Renaissance:

> Perhaps, as a coda, it may be worthwhile to consider new directions in studies on patronage which have not been represented by the books under review. Not one of them addresses directly the issue of female patronage. … Generally, authors mouth platitudes on Isabella d’Este in lieu of giving serious attention to this utterly neglected field. A huge body of material is available for a consideration of the physiognomy of female patronage, and new studies of it would certainly add greatly to our understanding of gender relations and the place of women in society, as well as to our comprehension of the process.\(^5\)

In part because of her widespread and often aggressive acquisition and patronage of art (both ancient and modern) and in part because her activities are exceptionally well documented in letters, account books and inventories, Isabella d’Este has been, and remains, the quintessential exemplar of female art patron in Renaissance Italy. She once even described herself as having ‘an insatiable desire for antiquities’.\(^6\) Isabella d’Este was unusually well educated for a woman of the period and she was an extraordinary demanding patron who sometimes drove her chosen artists

\(^{4}\) Reiss and Wilkins, 2001. It is worth mentioning here that in 1997 the manuscript for *Beyond Isabella* was rejected by a major university press based on the assessment of an anonymous reader who said, that the subject of women’s art patronage was ‘inherently weak and not worthy of a book-length study’. As this chapter demonstrates, the historiography of the ensuing decade and a half would prove this reviewer greatly mistaken.

\(^{5}\) Lowe, 1995, p. 149.

\(^{6}\) Brown, 1976.
to distraction. Until relatively recently, Isabella has also been singled out as the great exception, a nearly unique example of Renaissance woman as patron of art.

Nonetheless, 20 years before Lowe’s above-quoted remarks David Wilkins had already remarked upon the absence of studies on the roles women may have played as patrons in a brief article entitled ‘Woman as Artist and Patron in the Middle Ages and Renaissance’. At that time, one of the few scholars to have exhibited interest in a woman patron other than Isabella d’Este was Erwin Panofsky, who investigated the Benedictine abbess Giovanna da Picenza in his study of Correggio’s Camera di San Paolo in Parma. In 1981, Douglas Lewis drew attention to the patronage of the Venetian patrician Agnesina Badoer Giustinian, whose commissions included,
with her husband, the Villa Giustinian at Roncade. The apparent lack of scholarly interest in the art patronage of early modern women (especially secular women) changed slowly in the 1980s and early 1990s with pioneering publications by authors including Alison Luchs on Raphael’s Perugian patrons; Elena Ciletti on Anna Maria Luisa de’ Medici; Gabrieilla Zarri on Raphael’s patron in Bologna, the Beata Elena Duglioli Dall’Olio; Catherine Turrill on Girolamo da Carpi’s Mazzarelli Altarpiece, which prominently features its widowed patron (Figure 22.2); Mary Vaccaro on Parmigianino’s female patrons; Marilyn Dunn on noblewomen in seventeenth-century Rome; Catherine King on a number of lesser-known laywomen as patrons; and, especially, Carolyn Valone, whose groundbreaking work on the architectural patronage of Roman noblewomen in the Counter-Reformation era has inspired a number of other scholars. Most dealt with women’s patronage of religious art such as altarpieces and chapels, and of religious institutions, with some work on women’s patronage of portraits and domestic objects beginning to appear. Janet Cox-Rearick’s 1993 study of Bronzino’s Chapel of Eleonora di Toledo emphasized the patronage role of her husband, Duke Cosimo I de’ Medici, rather than that of the duchess, an interpretation that was subsequently questioned. An exception to the relative dearth of publications on female Renaissance art patrons in Italy was (and is) the veritable ‘cottage industry’ devoted to Isabella d’Este, with significant contributions prior to 1995 by Egon Verheyen, Clifford M. Brown, Rose Marie San Juan and Sylvia Ferino Pagden – not to mention the classic biography by Julia Cartwright, first published in 1903. What might be called an ‘Isabelline industry’ continues unabated today, with Isabella still being a favoured object of study by art historians including Brown, Molly Bourne and Stephen Campbell, with scholars in other fields including history, literary studies, and musicology, also focusing upon her. A considerable portion of the work on Isabella has considered her secular commissions, particularly the decorations of her apartments in Mantua’s Ducal Palace and Castello di S. Giorgio. Beyond Italy, fundamental early work on women patrons in France includes that of Carla Lord and Madeline Cavendish on fourteenth-century royal patronage and of Deborah Marrow and Geraldine Johnson on the patronage of Marie de’

11 See, for example, Luchs, 1983; Zarri, 1983a and 1983b; Ciletti, 1984 and 1988; King, 1992 and 1995; Turrill, 1990; Vaccaro, 1993; Dunn, 1994; and Valone, 1992, 1994a and 1994b. For bibliography on the patronage of female religious, see Catherine King’s contribution to this volume.
12 For these topics see the contributions of Andrea Pearson and Katherine McIver to this volume.
15 Brown in Lawrence, 1997; Brown, 2005; Campbell, 2006. Bourne’s exceptionally interesting work has frequently compared Isabella’s patronage to that of her husband, Francesco II Gonzaga. See Bourne in Reiss and Wilkins, 2001 and Bourne, 2008. The historian Sarah Cockram is working on Isabella’s political strategies and the literary scholar Deanna Shemek is editing and translating a selection of the Marchioness’s letters.
In a series of articles beginning in 1986 on Catherine de’ Medici, Sheila ffolliot has explored the Italian-born queen’s patronage of secular commissions and in 1993 Kathleen Wilson-Chevalier first studied women and the arts at the court of Fontainebleau. In 1990, Donald Posner published a controversial article arguing against the significance of Madame de Pompadour as a patron.

Scholars were also working on women of the Burgundian court and in 1995 Dagmar Eichberger and Lisa Beaven published an article on the Mechelen portrait gallery of Margaret of Austria, Habsburg regent of the Netherlands. For early modern England, the patronage and self-fashioning of Queen Elizabeth I (like that of Isabella d’Este) had been widely studied for decades, but Alice Freidman’s work on aristocratic women as patrons of country house architecture and

Figure 22.2 Girolamo da Carpi, *The Apparition of the Virgin* (Muzzarelli Altarpiece), 1530/40. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

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16 Lord, 1985; Caviness, 1993; Marrow, 1982; Johnson, 1993.
19 Eichberger and Beaven, 1995.
decoration drew attention to women architectural patrons of the aristocracy and upper classes.\textsuperscript{20}

What Kate Lowe’s remarks do not suggest is that by 1995, when her review essay appeared, there was already very considerable interest in patronage of art by women in early modern Europe, but much of the research was yet to be published. As Caroline Murphy noted in her 2003 review of \textit{Beyond Isabella}:

The 1990s were an exciting period for those concerned with gender issues in Italian Renaissance art. Seemingly overnight, a group of scholars emerged determined to track down how, when, where, and why women created, commissioned, and utilized works of art. Such scholarship provided access to a world in which Renaissance women were seen to have a greater measure of the autonomy history has traditionally denied them\textellipsis Moreover, the large number of symposia and conference sessions convened to examine this subject across Europe and the United States provided a particularly fruitful exchange of ideas and engendered a sense of community among scholars in the field.\textsuperscript{21}

In April of 1990 a one-day symposium organized by Cynthia Lawrence entitled ‘Matronage: Women as Patrons and Collectors of Art, 1300–1800’ was held at Temple University in Philadelphia and in March of 1993 the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, DC sponsored a two-day symposium on the topic of ‘Women, Power and Art’. Two months later, Wilkins and I chaired a session entitled ‘Beyond Isabella: Secular Women Patrons in Italy 400–1600’ that we had jointly organized for the Italian Art Society at the 28th International Congress on Medieval Studies in Kalamazoo, Michigan. All the proposals we received were on topics ranging from the fourteenth through sixteenth centuries; as a result, our session was devoted to the later Middle Ages and the Renaissance era.

By the time the session that Wilkins and I had organized took place in May 1993, it was evident that many scholars had been gathering material on Renaissance women art patrons and the next few years would see a flood tide of publications. These include articles and essays in collections by authors including King on Italian laywomen as patrons, Caroline Bruzelius and Adrian Hoch on Neapolitan queens, Murphy on female patrons in Bologna, Katherine McIver on women in North Italy, along with the completion of doctoral dissertations by Marjorie Och on Vittoria Colonna in 1993, Cordelia Warr on female patronage and spirituality in late medieval Italy in 1994, and Bruce Edelstein on Eleonora di Toledo in 1995.\textsuperscript{22}

In 1996, \textit{Renaissance Studies} published a special issue edited by Jaynie Anderson entitled ‘Women Patrons of Renaissance Art 1300–1600’ based on panels held in
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Birmingham (UK) at the 1994 meeting of the Association of Art Historians. The collection brings together contributions by a number of scholars including Warr on Fina Buzzacarini in late trecento Padua; Eichberger on Margaret of Austria’s portrait collection; Murphy on Lavinia Fontana’s Bolognese patrons; and King on Margarita Pellegrini’s chapel at S. Bernardino in Verona. It also includes two essays by male scholars: Rupert Shepherd on the literary evidence for female patronage of a now-lost battle scene in fourteenth-century Bologna and Thomas Tolley on French female regents as patrons of art. Much of the work on female patrons has been undertaken by women scholars, thus the contributions of male authors was (and remains) particularly welcome. Anderson’s introductory essay provides an overview of the topic, drawing attention to early writers on women patrons in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Anderson stresses that hundreds of women patrons can be named and identified, many of them commissioning works of great quality like Correggio’s frescoes for the Camera di S. Paolo in Parma.

In an essay on Renaissance art patronage also published in 1996, Tracy Cooper wrote about the talks presented in the 1990 Temple University ‘Matronage’ conference:

My last example purports to be a wholly new field of study, ‘matronage.’… These women were, for the most part, members of the ruling elite, yet subordinate in a patriarchal gender system such as that of Renaissance Italy. In fact, the very conceit ‘matronage’ focuses our awareness on this paradox, playing as it does on the inescapable patrilineal basis for the system of patronage …

In 1997, a collection of essays based on the Philadelphia conference edited by Lawrence was published under the title Women and Art in Early Modern Europe: Patrons, Collectors, and Connoisseurs. This volume contained 12 essays on European female patrons and collectors from the fourteenth through eighteenth centuries. Some were queens such as Jeanne d’Evereux discussed by Carla Lord, Catherine de Medici considered by ffolliott, and Marie de’ Medici, subject of Geraldine Johnson’s contribution. Some were noblewomen such as Eleonora di Toledo (Carolyn Smyth), Margaret of Austria (Alexandra Carpino), Anna Maria Luisa de’ Medici (Elena Ciletti) and Sarah Churchill, Duchess of Marlborough (Kathleen Szilpa). Yet others were wealthy aristocrats such as Bess of Hardwick and Lady Anne Clifford, discussed in Alice Friedman’s contribution on women’s roles at English country

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23 Anderson, 1996.
24 See Warr, Eichberger, Murphy and King in Anderson, 1996.
26 See Anderson in Anderson, 1996.
27 Cooper, 1996. The English term ‘patron’ derives from the Latin patronus (protector of clients or dependents) which, in turn, derives from pater (father) and is thus gendered male.
28 Lawrence, 1997.
29 See Lord, ffolliott and Johnson in Lawrence, 1997.
houses. In the book’s introduction, Lawrence emphasized themes in the book, including the status of women in early modern Europe, the types of commissions they extended and the socioeconomic conditions necessary for patronage by women. Particularly suggestive are her remarks on the impact of female patrons on both style and iconography.

It is worth noting that much of the research on women patrons in the 1990s and since has appeared in collections of essays bringing together the research of multiple contributors often using a case study approach. As a rule, these books have not been lavishly illustrated, reflecting, perhaps, a bias on the part of some publishers against what was seen as research of ‘marginal’ interest.

In 1998, Catherine King’s book *Renaissance Women Patrons: Wives and Widows in Italy c. 1300–1500* was published. The single-authored volume, a rarity at the time, greatly expands upon her 1992 article ‘Medieval and Renaissance Matrons, Italian-Style’, which described the patronage of lesser-known laywomen (some of them from classes beneath the aristocracy), primarily of religious art. In the article (and later in the book), King vividly brought to life wealthy widows such as Maria de’ Bovoloni, patron of a monumental trecento crucifix by the Paduan painter Guariento di Arpo, and Oradea Becchetti of Fabriano, who commissioned an altarpiece by Carlo Crivelli. In King’s translation, the inscription on the Guariento crucifix reads: ‘Bona Maria de’ Bovoloni imitator of Helen, the inventor of the Cross and Nails, dedicated this herself to the piety of the people of Bassano that they might pray for her to Christ our Lord’. Oradea’s inscription reads ‘Oradea of Giovanni dedicated this in compassion for her forbears and descendents with not a little of her own money, to bountiful Mary, source of all consolation’. Both women stress their piety and agency in extending the commissions. King’s article of 1992 downplayed women’s patronage of architecture, both ecclesiastic and secular, noting ‘laywomen, however rich, never commissioned palaces (presumably because they could not be represented as sexually powerful generators of a dynasty)’.

A considerable body of more recent work has, however, demonstrated that women were active architectural patrons in early modern Italy and elsewhere in Europe.

31 Friedman in Lawrence 1997.
33 Annabel Thomas commented in Thomas, 1999, p. 153: ‘Some of the more obscure areas of enquiry presented in the other studies may be deemed of sufficient importance to merit black and white illustrations, but not yet to be sufficiently “main stream” to rate reproduction in colour. Yet, there is a further factor that merits some consideration. Publishing of “peripheral” material is frequently considered incompatible with existing agendas and prevailing market driven policies.’
34 King, 1998.
35 King, 1992.
36 Ibid., p. 373; 1998, pp. 140–43.
39 See the essays by Reiss and Jenkens in Reiss and Wilkins, 2001; McIver, 2006; and esp. Hills, 2003. See also my comments below.
In the introduction to her book, King singled out the extraordinary inscription on the predella of an altarpiece of 1492 by Niccolò L’Alunno of Foligno (Figure 22.3) that poses the question of authorship:

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 … . 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?40

The topic of patronal authorship by men is one that has engaged scholars working on male patrons such as Cosimo de’ Medici, but the topic is one that could be profitably explored by those studying women patrons.41

Figure 22.3 Niccolo di Liberatore, called L’Alunno, Angels with Inscription, detail of predella of Nativity with Saints, 1492. Musée du Louvre, Paris

41 See the introduction to Kent, 2000. I consider this topic in my forthcoming Giulio de’ Medici (Pope Clement VII) as Patron of Art: A Portrait of a Medici Maecenas.
In March of 1999 a large conference entitled ‘Women Art Patrons and Collectors: Past and Present’ was held in New York. Devoted to female art patrons and collectors from the ancient world to the twentieth century, the conference was organized by Lilian H. Zirpolo and Joanna Gardner-Huggett. One panel was devoted to the patronage of women in Asia, a topic deserving greater attention. Selections from the 18 sessions were published in 2003 as a number of the journal *Aurora*, which was edited by the conference organizers. Like the conference, the essays ranged from antiquity to the present. Several were devoted to early modern Europe, including Margaret Skoglund on Queen Isabel the Catholic’s religious and secular works, Joseph Manca on Isabella d’Este’s mother and role model Eleonora d’Aragona, and Todd Larkin on the negative reception of Vigee Le Brun’s 1783 portrait of Marie Antoinette in a muslin dress.

As Caroline Murphy noted, the 1990s were indeed an exciting time for the study of art patronage by women, particularly in early modern Europe. In the first few years of the new millennium it became clear that female art patrons had become a major focus of research by art historians and others, particularly scholars of Renaissance Italy. The year 2000 saw important publications on patronage by women in Venice, Rome and at Italian courts of the Quattrocento. The same year, when *Beyond Isabella* was in press, a special number of the Italian journal *Quaderni storici* was devoted to women’s art patronage. Edited by Sara Matthews-Grieco and Gabriella Zarri, *Committenza artistica femminile* was based on two conferences held in Florence in 1998 and 1999. The thematic issue contains four essays in Italian, three of them by Anglo-American authors, among them the literary scholar Victoria Kirkham writing on Laura Battiferra degli Amminati’s patronage of the Jesuits in Cinquecento Florence. None of the contributions to *Beyond Isabella* explore women’s art patronage in Naples, Bologna and Venice, so the essays in this publication on those major centres serve as a welcome complement. Bruce Edelstein’s contribution looks at how the social environment in Naples formed the character of two major patrons, Eleonora of Aragon and Eleonora di Toledo. Murphy’s essay continues her exploration of patronage by Bolognese women in the Cinquecento, in this case – widows – while Sabina Brevaglieri’s explores Tintoretto and female patrons at a Venetian consoority.

I would like now to turn to *Beyond Isabella* and to some of its themes that have broader relevance for the study of women’s art patronage in early modern Europe. The book was published in 2001, eight years after the conference session

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42 See now Lee, 2010.
44 Humfrey, 2000; Manca, 2000; and Welch, 2000.
48 Murphy and Brevaglieri in ibid.
49 Reiss and Wilkins, 2001.
upon which it was based took place. The volume brings together 14 essays and a methodological preface. Six of the essays are based on papers presented at Kalamazoo, with David Wilkins’s contribution and my own originating as poster papers at the conference. The remaining authors were invited to contribute to the volume. The essays are arranged chronologically, beginning in the mid-fourteenth and ending in the late-sixteenth century. In addition to several studies dealing with Florence and Rome, the volume contains essays concerning Siena, Mantua, Padua and the Emilian region. In the period covered in *Beyond Isabella* there was great diversity among the various Italian courts and city-states, and the experiences and autonomy of women differed from place to place. Most of the women discussed were cultural elites with the financial means that permitted them to extend commissions; some of the authors did, however, present evidence for patronage by women of other social classes. While most of the papers in the collection are case studies of individual women, others looked at networks or groups of women.

The first theme I would like to highlight is the motivations that led women to extend commissions, which varied greatly. For many women, piety, filial and wifely duty, and the preservation of memory were prime motivating factors. Marjorie Och, for example, interpreted the sensuality and apparent eroticism of Titian’s representation of Mary Magdalene in terms of Vittoria Colonna’s devout piety. The patronage of funerary chapels and altarpieces for deceased husbands was an especially significant focus of women’s art patronage in early modern Italy. But sometimes such patronage by women came with a twist, when widows ignored the testamentary wishes of their husbands. The patronage of widows, who almost always enjoyed greater autonomy and access to financial means than did married women, is one of the most important themes in *Beyond Isabella*.55

Another powerful motivation for women’s patronage of art and architecture emphasized in *Beyond Isabella* is the visual expression of familial and dynastic concerns. While some of our authors demonstrated how women used patronage to manipulate or subvert the male-dominated structures and institutions in which they operated, others, myself included, emphasized how other women extended commissions in order to sustain and further the aims and ambitions of their male relatives. In the past some art historians have argued strenuously against an approach that considers’ women’s agency within the broader sphere of gender relations. But as Sara Matthews-Grieco noted in a 2002 review of Catherine King’s *Renaissance Women Patrons*:55

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50 Roger Crum, Rosi Prieto Gilday, Mary Vaccarro, Marjorie Och, Katherine McIver and Carolyn Valone presented papers at Kalamazoo in 1993.
51 See especially Gilday in Reiss and Wilkins, 2001, a statistical study of Neri di Bici’s female patrons in mid-fifteenth-century Florence.
52 Och in Reiss and Wilkins, 2001.
53 See Kohl and Vaccaro in ibid.
54 See the contributions of Elizabeth Pilliod and Carolyn Valone in ibid.
55 Essays in ibid. that consider the patronage of widows include those by Kohl, Gilday, Jenkens, McIver, Vaccaro, Och, Reiss, Pilliod, and Valone.
seeking a ‘non-conformist’ proto-feminism in women’s self-expression via art patronage seems in this case somewhat anachronistic, as what is at stake here seems, upon close analysis, more a case of the use of art by both men and women in the politics of everyday life, which included at that time family negotiations, spiritual investment, and civic charity.56

However one chooses to interpret such behaviour, *Beyond Isabella* presented evidence for both ‘oppositional’ and ‘relational’ activities by women. Evidence that both models were at work suggests that greater flexibility is needed in our considerations of how women operated within the socially constructed gender boundaries of the period.

What, then, were some of the cooperative patronage activities of women that encouraged or supported the agendas of their husbands, brothers, sons and male in-laws? The Neapolitan-born Alfonsina Orsini, subject of my contribution, worked ceaselessly to advance the political fortunes of her son Lorenzo, whom she wished to be a titled lord.57 In both Rome and Florence she was a visible patron of large-scale secular architecture, an area in which it was thought that women never ventured. As a foreign-born woman who openly involved herself in political machinations, Alfonsina was constantly reviled by contemporaries. In her patronage of art and, especially, of architecture, Alfonsina manifested her dynastic ambitions for herself and her son. I suggested in my essay that her usurpation of traditionally male patterns of secular patronage contributed to the widespread loathing and contempt she engendered.58

Other women discussed in *Beyond Isabella* similarly used art and architecture to further the aims of their male relatives. For example, in 1467, India Salviati commissioned with her brother Bernardo an altarpiece from Neri di Bicci, requesting the family coat of arms on the frame, thus jointly proclaiming their family’s status.59 In his essay Lawrence Jenkens described the patronage of a new private palace in Siena by Caterina Piccolomini, the sister of Pope Pius II.60 She purchased the property and employed the architect and builders, but the monies came from papal coffers. Several other women discussed in the book extended commissions that served to enhance the status of their husbands. Katherine Mclver emphasized the role of Silvia Sanvitale of Scandiano, who, in the 1540s, worked with her husband on the commission for Niccolo dell’ Abbate’s decorations of a room in their castle; documents indicate that Silvia selected both the subject and the painter, and that she settled some of the accounts with her own money.61

This brings me to one of the most interesting themes to emerge from our collection: the dynamics of conjugal patronage. Sometimes husbands and wives had

57 Reiss in Reiss and Wilkins, 2001. See also Tomas, 2000 and 2003, Ch. 6.
58 Reiss in Reiss and Wilkins, 2001, p. 140.
61 Mclver in ibid.
clearly independent commissions, other times it is nearly impossible to untangle the role of an individual spouse. On occasion, as Molly Bourne reminds us in her ‘Renaissance Husbands and Wives as Patrons of Art: The Camerini of Isabella d’Este and Francesco II Gonzaga’, married couples even competed with one another in their art patronage. This was certainly the case with Francesco, husband of the woman whose name, as we have seen, has been practically synonymous with ‘female patron of art’. In 1506, Isabella teasingly compared Francesco’s apartments to her own private rooms in the Gonzaga castle: ‘I tell you that they are beautiful, and even more because Your Excellency has learned from the example of my room, although I must confess that you have improved upon it.’ Bourne demonstrated how, as patron, Isabella was both an inspiration to her husband and a rival. In his contribution to Beyond Isabella, Edelstein stresses Eleonora di Toledo’s participation in commissions for dynastic portraits of herself and her children with Duke Cosimo I de’ Medici that were often intended to serve as diplomatic gifts. Edelstein also argued for Eleonora’s patronage of the Chapel in the Palazzo Vecchio that bears her name. But, as he notes, court accounts often made no distinction between the patronage activities of the Duke and Duchess.

The difficulty of unraveling conjugal patronage – indeed the advisability of attempting to do so – was the subject of Roger Crum’s contribution, certainly the most provocative in the book. Crum argues for a broader definition of patronage that encompasses those who wished for a work or used it, in addition to those who paid for it outright. He used the analogy of a future archaeologist discovering his father’s cheque book, filled with payments for embellishing the Crum house with paintings, furniture, drapery and other precious items. While the archaeologist might assume that the senior Crum was a great patron, Crum wrote:

The truth is that my mother chose the house and everything in it, and her will was supreme – if not exclusive – when renovations were made, a chair recovered, or a painting selected for purchase or removal. My father is far from being a twenty-first-century patron; he just pays the bills.

Finally, I would like to single out two further themes that emerged from Beyond Isabella. These are the significance of role-models for female patrons and the importance of networks of women who extended commissions: the two themes, in fact, often overlap. Many of the women studied in this book looked to other women – sometimes from ancient history, such as the Hellenistic queen Artemisia or the

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62 For conjugal patronage, see the essays by Benjamin Kohl, Molly Bourne, Katherine McIver and Bruce Edelstein in ibid.
63 Letter of 5 October 2006 quoted by Bourne in ibid., p. 93.
64 Edelstein in ibid.
65 Edelstein in ibid., p. 225.
66 Crum in ibid.
67 Crum in ibid.
68 Ibid., p. 38.
pious women encouraged by Saint Jerome to build churches. Others modelled themselves after relatives or friends, and many of these women worked together with other women on commissions or were in contact with each other. Gabrielle Langdon suggested that the subject of her essay, Dianora de’ Medici looked to her aunt Eleonora di Toledo for inspiration. Isabella d’Este was inspired by the example of her mother, Eleonora of Aragon, and Isabella herself inspired much emulation. Veronica Gambara and Silvia Sanvitale, considered by Katherine McIver, looked to Isabella as a shining example of courtly woman as patron, and in her contribution to Beyond Isabella and elsewhere, McIver has delineated the role of Sanvitale’s mother Laura Pallavacina, who often worked in tandem with her daughter. Gambara corresponded with Vittoria Colonna, also a poet, and Isabella d’Este wrote to several of the women considered in the book. Similarly, many of Carolyn Valone’s pious Roman matrons were related and they certainly emulated one another.

In the ‘Prologue’ to Beyond Isabella David Wilkins and I wrote: ‘It is our hope that this volume will encourage scholars to move yet further “beyond Isabella” in their assessment of women’s patronage of art and architecture in Renaissance Italy and, in so doing, significantly broaden our understanding of late medieval and early modern patronage patterns in general.’ It has been particularly gratifying to see that many of the questions we posed and themes we identified have been explored by others working not only on Italian topics and in art history, but also in other periods and disciplines such as musicology. In the final segment of this chapter, I would like to single out some recent work on secular women patrons in early modern Europe published in the past decade or so, emphasizing new questions and approaches that have emerged. I would also like to single out areas I believe to be particularly fruitful for future research.

Since the publication of so many illuminating studies in the later 1990s and early 2000s, the study of art patronage and collecting by secular women in early modern Europe has become an exceptionally vibrant field, with an ever growing body of literature. Many American doctoral dissertations have been completed or are in progress and many scholars outside North America and Great Britain are now working on female secular patrons. The days when the study of female patrons was disparaged have clearly come to an end. Particularly welcome is how recent research acknowledges the necessity of taking gender relations into account.
The brevity of this chapter prevents me from giving a full account of the recent work on this topic, but I would like to point out some of the highlights. In 2002 the exhibition ‘Women Who Ruled: Queens, Goddesses, Amazons in Renaissance and Baroque Art’ was seen at the University of Michigan and Wellesley College. The catalogue, edited by Annette Dixon, contains essays on powerful women such as Elizabeth I and Catherine de’ Medici as subjects, patrons and users of the visual arts; Dixon’s overview of women rulers 1500–1650 is particularly useful.79 In September of 2003, the J. Paul Getty Museum hosted a two-day conference organized by Maite Alvarez entitled ‘Mencia de Mendoza: Renaissance Collector and Patron’. Mendoza, the third wife of Count Henry III of Nassau, was a significant patron and collector of Netherlandish art and a collector of naturalia and exotic objects.79 Several contributions to Widowhood and Visual Culture in Early Modern Europe, edited by Allison Levy and published in 2003, concern the art patronage of widows throughout Europe, particularly as a vehicle for self-fashioning.80 Also published in 2003 was the seminal collection of essays Architecture and the Politics of Gender in Early Modern Europe, edited by Helen Hills, which brought together several essays on women’s patronage of architecture both secular and sacred.81

Renaissance Italy continues to be a major focus of work on secular women patrons. Caroline Murphy’s monograph of 2003 on Lavinia Fontana devoted several chapters to women’s patronage of the celebrated Bolognese painter; Murphy points out that these women prized Fontana for her ability to render their jewels, lavish dresses and even their lap dogs (see Figure 22.4).82 Published in 2004, The Cultural World of Eleonora di Toledo, edited by Konrad Eisenbichler, brought together essays by a number of scholars addressing many facets of the duchess’s patronage, religiosity and self-fashioning through art.83 In 2008 Stephanie Solum published a thought-provoking article in the Art Bulletin entitled ‘Attributing Influence: the Problem of Female Patronage in Fifteenth-century Florence’, which problematized the study of female art patrons.84 Like Crum in Beyond Isabella, Solum questioned the very methods used to understand women’s art patronage, particularly the reliance on documentary evidence – the sine qua non of research on male agency. For both scholars, issues of reception and viewership suggest new and particularly promising paths for understanding the

79 I am grateful to Dr. Alvarez, who has discussed the forthcoming publication based on the Mendoza conference with me.
80 See especially the introduction by Levy and the essays by Joyce de Vries, Holly Hurlburt, and Laura Gelfand in Levy, 2003.
81 See the contributions of Eichberger, Germann, and Howe, as well as the introduction to Hills, 2003.
82 See Murphy, 2003a, especially Chs 3–6. The recently discovered painting illustrated here is currently undergoing scientific analysis and conservation; Caroline Murphy is preparing a future study.
84 Solum, 2008.
role played by gender in cultural production and consumption. Similar concerns are fundamental to recent studies of Renaissance women and material culture, including Murphy’s *The Pope’s Daughter* on Felice della Rovere, illegitimate daughter of Pope Julius II and Joyce De Vries’ study of Caterina Sforza published in 2010.85 Recent work by Kimberly Dennis on Camilla Peretti, widowed sister of Pope Sixtus V, demonstrates how she was involved in several of her brother’s projects in late sixteenth-century Rome.86 Like many women in Counter-Reformation Rome, Camilla combined familial and pious motivations in her patronage. Another very recent contribution to the literature on Italy is the new volume edited by Katherine McIver, which features several essays concerning secular women patrons.87

Important recent work on Northern European women patrons in the late medieval and early modern periods includes Dagmar Eichberger’s monograph on Margaret of Austria, published in 2002; Kathryn Smith’s study of three English women and their books of hours published in 2003; and Andrea Pearson’s

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85 Murphy, 2005; De Vries, 2010.
87 McIver, 2012. See, for example, the contributions of Jennifer D. Webb, Dennis, McIver, and Allyson Burgess Williams.
Envisioning Gender in Burgundian Devotional art, 1350–1530 of 2005. Patronnes et mécènes en France à la Renaissance, edited by Kathleen Wilson-Chevalier and published in 2007 is the most comprehensive study of the patronage of women in early modern France. There and elsewhere, Sheila ffolliott has continued to publish on Catherine de’ Medici’s patronage and for some years Nicola Courtright has been working on art and architecture for early modern French queens. Very recently, Meredith Martin has studied rustic architecture for early modern French rulers in the wittily titled Dairy Queens.

By way of conclusion, I would like to mention some paths I see for future research. First among these is my hope that more work will be done on non-elite women as patrons. We know that male members of guilds and confraternities often acted together as corporate patrons and I suspect that comprehensive examinations of groups of non-patrician laywomen would prove most rewarding. Following the lead of Helen Hills and, recently, Sally Hickson and Katherine McIver, more work is needed on women as patrons of architecture, both sacred and secular. An especially interesting topic, I think, is women as patrons of villas and gardens. We know of Isabella d’Este’s insatiable desire for antiquities, and there is evidence that Alfonsina Orsini collected ancient works, but what of other women in Italy and elsewhere in Europe? How were they involved in the assembling and display of antiquities? As suggested by the work of Caroline Murphy, the intersection of female artists and patrons is a fascinating topic. More work throughout Europe in this vein would be most welcome. For Italy, the seventeenth century is replete with women patrons of all classes, ranging from humble prostitutes to exalted monarchs, but it is striking that relatively little work has been done in comparison to the previous few centuries.

In response to the calls of Roger Crum, Stephanie Solum, and others for a more expansive understanding of the patronage process itself, I would encourage scholars working on women patrons to think more about audience, reception, and the use of objects: for whom were the works intended, and what reaction did the patrons – female or male – desire? Finally, and I say this in all seriousness, it is my hope that

90 ffolliott in ibid. and ffolliott in Strunck, 2012b; Courtright 2005 and 2009. Courtright is currently preparing a book-length study entitled Art and the Invention of Queenly Authority in France.
91 Martin, 2011. For eighteenth-century Europe, see also Hyde and Milam, 2003 and Yonan, 2011.
92 Hills, 2003; Hickson, 2012; McIver in McIver 2012.
93 For Ginevra de’ Alessandri’s involvement in the building of the Medici Villa at Fiesole, see Lillie, 1993. Bruce Edelstein is currently working on Eleonora di Toledo and the Boboli Gardens in Florence. For France, see ffolliott, 2001.
94 See, for example, Bohn, 2012, which looks at Elisabetta Sirani’s male and female patrons.
95 Kimberly L. Dennis is currently preparing a book on Donna Olimpia Maidalchini Pamphilj.
many more men will undertake research on women patrons. While I am proud to say that, in addition to having a male co-editor, *Beyond Isabella* featured four other male contributors, I have noticed that many conference sessions on women and gender tend to attract a primarily female audience. The role that women played in the genesis of works of art and architecture should be of interest to all art historians, and I hope that in the future many more scholars – both women and men – will undertake research that will take us ‘beyond Isabella’ in our understanding of art patronage in early modern Europe.

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