



RENAISSANCE WOMEN AS PATRONS OF ART AND CULTURE

On 21 September 2006, Forum for Renaissance Studies hosted a seminar about female patronage, and the first three contributions to the present volume originated as talks that day.

Many new initiatives in Renaissance art and science had their origin in male aristocratic sponsorship. When patrons decided to support science, they often had military or economic interests in mind; the construction and decoration of grand palaces and the refined and magnificent court culture, with its encouragement of music, art, learning and collecting, were mainly political in kind. The economic relations between artist and patron were often much more explicit than in modern Western civilization, and patrons were tempted to set themselves up as parallels to such ancient Roman models as the emperor Augustus' wealthy friend Maecenas and poets like Horace and Virgil.

To female patrons, similar ancient models were not immediately at hand. Not that ancient history and fiction did not contain powerful women, but they tended to belong to foreign, more or less barbaric contexts, such as Dido of Carthage, Artemisia of Halicarnassus or Cleopatra of Alexandria, and accordingly were hardly attractive as mental templates for women patrons or their clients. Queen Christina of Sweden, however, lent herself to identification with virgin goddesses such as Minerva and Diana, but that worked only because she chose to remain unmarried. Instead, images were mostly chosen from the family sphere, and princely consorts who engaged in patronage were approached as motherly housewives in their lands.

Some rich women were very generous in their patronage of art and architecture, but – as shown in the present contributions – they mostly had to confine themselves to conspicuously pious and virtuous projects such as decoration of churches or building of monasteries. At court, however, noble ladies might arrange various kinds of entertainment as long as they were not open to the public. Also, it seems that active female patrons ran the risk of being

criticized for attempting at gynecocracy, and their ways of supporting subjects and establishing power systems often had to remain relatively secret.

Of the three articles presented here, one offers a general overview while the other two concentrate on matrons belonging to the Danish royal family, Electresses Anna and Hedevig of Saxony, daughters of King Christian III, and King Frederik II respectively.

The seminar also counted three other speakers, Marianne Alenius, Copenhagen, Clare McManus, Roehampton and Susanna Åkerman, Stockholm. For various reasons their talks are not published here. In order to nevertheless convey an overall impression of the day, we reprint the summaries given in the programme:

Dr. Marianne ALENIOUS, Copenhagen: Danish Learned Women – Works, Libraries, Gifts: *The European Renaissance phenomenon "Learned Women" also had its Nordic representatives. The lecture presents them as a group (c. 1500 to 1800), and their libraries and work as patronesses are studied on a micro level.*

Dr. Clare MCMANUS, Roehampton: Touring Europe: Royal Women and Theatrical Patronage: *This paper will discuss Anna of Denmark's English masquing, investigating the physical and symbolic importance of the royal female performer and reading the masque as a European, transnational form. – Cf. Modern Philology, February 2008.*

Dr. Susanna ÅKERMAN, Stockholm: Queen Christina's Neoplatonic Academies: *The Stockholm court was in a few years after 1650 lighted up by theatre, ballets, music, ceremonies and humanist and scientific discussions. Queen Christina's readings among the neoplatonists would later shape her Roman Accademia Reale. - Cf. Dr. Åkerman's contribution to Judith P. Zinsser (ed.), Men, Women and the Birthing of Modern Science, De Kalb 2005.*

The seminar was part of the festival *Golden Days in Copenhagen*, September 2006, and the expenses were met by Copenhagen University.

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