

A Taxonomy of Art Patronage in Renaissance Italy

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On November 25, 1523, Michelangelo wrote from Florence to his stonecutter Topolino in Carrara with important news: “You will have heard that Medici has been made pope, because of which, it seems to me, everyone is rejoicing and I think that here, as for art, there will be much to be done.”¹ Michelangelo spoke of Cardinal Giulio de’ Medici, who had been elected Pope Clement VII two days before. This passage reveals the necessarily symbiotic relationships of patrons and artists in early modern Italy. Each depended upon the other to secure their reputations by bringing works of art and architecture into existence. Although the strategies employed by artists and patrons were often mutually reinforcing, sometimes relations between them were adversarial.

Patrons in Renaissance Italy promoted personal, familial, and group renown by requesting works from – and fostering the careers of – famous or promising artists. Just as artists in this period often competed for the attention of patrons, patrons frequently competed for the services of successful artists. While artists of the caliber of Michelangelo, Raphael, or Titian often manipulated the patronage game to great advantage, most painters, sculptors, and architects in the period functioned within a deeply entrenched sociocultural system of mutual dependency. Even in the case of Michelangelo (who had, to paraphrase William Wallace, “reversed the rules of patronage”), in a painting for the Casa Buonarroti, his Seicento descendants had him depicted in the mode of a traditional presentation image, in which artist was subservient to patron (fig. 1.1).²

Taking as its starting point the patronage system that flourished in late medieval and Renaissance Italy, this essay provides an overview of various classes of patrons. Questions to be taken into consideration when examining art patronage include: Who were the men, women, and groups who commissioned works of art and architecture? What were their motivations for doing



FIGURE 1.1 Jacopo Chimenti da Empoli, *Michelangelo Presenting Pope Leo X the Project of the Façade of San Lorenzo*, Casa Buonarroti, Florence, 1619. Photo: Scala / Art Resource, NY.

so? What were the social, political, and religious networks to which these patrons belonged? Why did they select certain artists and architects, and what were the mechanisms that led to commissions? What were the patrons' economic circumstances, and how did class differences affect their commissions? 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 was the province of elites, who had the means to extend commissions. Recent work has, however, demonstrated the existence of open markets for uncommissioned objects.³ In this essay, I will focus primarily on central and northern Italy in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, with occasional discussion of earlier and later examples, and of cases elsewhere on the peninsula.

Patronage studies, which bring together issues of personal and group identity, political power, and cultural production, have come to occupy a significant place in the history of Renaissance art.⁴ We now understand much more about the processes of art patronage in this period and have come to ask new questions, in particular about the relationship between *clientelismo* (political and social patronage) and *mecenatismo* (cultural patronage); I concur with other scholars in seeing complex interactions between these two types of patronage.⁵ The latter term refers to Gaius Clinius Maecenas, advisor to Augustus and patron of Horace and Virgil. Other languages, such as French and German, also refer to patrons of the arts with terms alluding to Maecenas. The English term “patron” derives from the Latin *patronus* (protector of clients or dependents, specifically freedmen) which, in turn, derives from *pater* (father).

Borrowing approaches from several disciplines, including social history, anthropology, economics, and psychology, the study of patronage has come to emphasize kinship bonds, self-fashioning, the communication of social status, patronage networks, and the promotion of individual, family, and collective agendas.⁶ Artists and architects formed but one category in a patronage-based society; also vying for the support of the powerful were poets, musicians, historians, and other talented but dependent persons. Scholars have demonstrated the sometimes critical impact that individual, familial, and corporate (or group) patrons had on the form and content of art and architecture.⁷ In many cases, patrons took an active role in shaping the character of works they commissioned. On occasion, the underlying premises of patronage studies as an art-historical enterprise have been questioned, particularly when the scholarship is primarily biographical in character and fails to shed light on the works themselves.⁸ Such doubts notwithstanding, the principal textbooks used to teach Italian Renaissance art both stress the critical role played by patrons.⁹

A key concept for understanding patronage in early modern Italy is *magnificenza*, the classically inspired notion of magnificence that was increasingly put forth as a justification for patronage, particularly of architecture.¹⁰ In the mid-1450s Timoteo Maffei, prior of the Badia of Fiesole, wrote a defense of Cosimo de' Medici's *magnificenza*, arguing that lavish patronage was an obligation of the wealthy.¹¹ This would later become a trope of humanist discourse about patronage. At the end of the Quattrocento, the Neapolitan Giovanni Pontano wrote:

It is appropriate to join splendour (*splendor*) to magnificence (*magnificentiae*), because they both consist of great expense and have a common matter that is money. But magnificence (*magnificentia*) derives its name from the concept of grandeur and concerns building, spectacle and gifts.”¹²

For papal patrons, to be considered below, the related concept of *maiestas papalis* (papal majesty) was fundamental.

Historian Dale Kent has proposed that patrons, like artists, can and *should* be studied in terms of a complete body of work, an *oeuvre*, for which the patron can be seen, at least in part, as *auctor* (author).¹³ This concept, especially useful for



“I’m bored with triptychs. Paint me a quadriptych.”

FIGURE 1.2 Cartoon, *New Yorker Magazine*, May 18, 1987. © James Stevenson / The New Yorker Collection / www.cartoonbank.com.

patrons of multiple, large-scale commissions, implies self-consciousness on the part of men and women who wished to express *their* priorities and ambitions through visual means. Recently, Jonathan Nelson and Richard Zeckhauser have applied economic theories – particularly the economics of information and status signaling – to the study of art patronage.¹⁴

A *New Yorker* cartoon (fig. 1.2) of 1987 with the pithy caption “I’m bored with triptychs. Paint me a quadriptych” suggests near omnipotence for patrons (while perhaps unwittingly elucidating the role of patrons in the evolution of altarpieces). As I have pointed out elsewhere, however, the patronage process during this period was in reality a complex, dynamic, and flexible one in which realized commissions were the result of creative (and sometimes confrontational) interchange between patrons and artists.¹⁵ At the same time, as the longstanding biographical model for studying patrons has been problematized, the monolithic characterization of individual “hero-patrons” has been modified, as we understand more about collaboration among patrons.¹⁶

Rather than being a “two-way” street, the process of art patronage was, in fact, a complicated “multi-lane highway,” often involving intermediaries. Historian Melissa Bullard has illuminated the role of what she calls “shared agency” in Lorenzo the Magnificent de’ Medici’s political and cultural patronage, demonstrating how the importance of his secretaries and other agents – who took on considerable responsibility in carrying out his policies – has been lost in the

celebration of the “great man.”¹⁷ Bullard’s approach suggests an important model for the study of art patronage.

The commissioning, display, and gifting of art remind us too of the critical importance of considering audience and response when examining patronage strategies. In her study of fifteenth-century Florentine patronage, Jill Burke emphasizes the importance of reception, situating family patronage within the context of collective societal bonds such as neighborhood and parish.¹⁸

The topic of patronage and gender has, in recent years, received overdue attention. In his Quattrocento architectural treatise, Filarete famously remarked that the patron was analogous to the father of a building, responsible for its conception, and that the architect was like the mother.¹⁹ Repeating an aphorism in his memoir, the Florentine banker Giovanni Rucellai (1403–81) similarly stated that men do two important things in life: procreation and building.²⁰ These gendered understandings of patronage – and the male origins of the English term in the Latin *pater* noted above – correspond to patriarchal attitudes to gender and power in the Renaissance.

In the past twenty years, the patronage activities of women (sometimes called “matronage”) have become increasingly better known.²¹ Noteworthy women patrons include nuns like Giovanna da Piacenza, Correggio’s patron in Parma, and aristocratic women like Isabella d’Este in Mantua and Eleonora di Toledo in Florence, who employed, respectively, Andrea Mantegna and Agnolo Bronzino. Moreover, we now know that lesser-known, middle-class women also commissioned objects for the home and for ecclesiastic settings. Topics such as the patronage of gendered spaces, the roles of women in the purchase and display of objects, and conjugal competition are of particular interest. The significance of widows as patrons of art and architecture, particularly of funerary chapels and their altarpieces, has become clear in recent years. Another important theme is women’s patronage of female artists such as Lavinia Fontana.²²

Traditionally, patronage studies have relied upon written documentation including inscriptions, contracts, inventories, wills, letters, poems, and biographies and memoirs of artists and patrons. In addition, non-verbal evidence such as *stemmi* (coats of arms), donor portraits such as the one seen in fig. 1.3, and *imprese* (personal devices) also provide information about the genesis of art and architecture. But the absence of documents is not always a dead end for understanding patronage.²³

The following pages consider various classes of patrons active from the late thirteenth through late sixteenth centuries. I am particularly interested in how systems of patronage worked and in the mechanics of the process. These patrons will be considered in terms of their social, political, and economic status and in terms of their relations to the artists and architects in their employ. Among the categories of patrons to be considered are: corporate bodies; wealthy individuals and families; and courtly, papal, and curial patrons. The taxonomic classification of patrons in what follows is somewhat arbitrary; in reality, there was considerable overlap in areas that we might consider public and private, secular and sacred, and individual and group.



FIGURE 1.3 Master G. Z., *Madonna and Child with the Donor, Pietro de'Lardi, Presented by Saint Nicholas*, first third of fifteenth century. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 65.181.5. Image © Metropolitan Museum of Art / Art Resource, NY.

Corporate Patronage, Sacred and Secular

Corporate patronage played a fundamental role in shaping the visual culture of Italian Renaissance cities. Collective groups – whether ecclesiastic, governmental, or professional, like guilds – commissioned churches and convents; buildings with civic functions such as meeting halls, libraries, and hospitals; and public monuments like fountains and tombs. Such bodies were also often responsible for the maintenance, renovation, and ornamentation of buildings and monuments, and in this capacity provided objects such as altarpieces, church furniture, and liturgical books. The patronage of religious groups and secular organizations was deeply intertwined, with ecclesiastic foundations the most common beneficiaries of patronage by secular patrons. In addition, individuals sometimes intervened in corporate commissions, blurring the lines separating these categories.

Many religious orders, among them the Benedictines, were active patrons of art and architecture. In Parma, for example, the monks of San Giovanni Evangelista

commissioned Correggio to fresco the dome of their church in the 1520s (<http://www.wga.hu>). Benedictine female convents such as San Zaccaria in Venice, San Paolo in Parma, Le Murate in Florence, and San Maurizio in Milan also extended commissions. Despite the oversight of monks and the constraints of *clausura* (which theoretically kept them cloistered), many nuns were deeply involved in the construction and embellishment of their convents.²⁴

As they became established in the later Middle Ages, the Dominicans and Franciscans were energetic builders of monastic complexes that would become major sites for patronage. Often the new mendicant orders competed with each other to build and ornament their urban seats. A good example is the cross-town monastic rivalry in Florence of the Dominican Santa Maria Novella and the Franciscan Santa Croce (begun 1279 and 1294, respectively; <http://www.wga.hu>). In Bologna, the friars of San Domenico sought to outshine their Franciscan counterparts with their patronage of the Arca di San Domenico, St. Dominic's tomb (begun 1264; <http://www.wga.hu>). The friars of both orders were savvy promoters of their "brands," selling patronage rights (*ius patronatus*) to wealthy individuals and families.²⁵ Thus, even though the friars may not have patronized artists directly, they still maintained control over the visual character of their churches. In the mid-Quattrocento, the reformed Dominicans at San Marco in Florence favored an austere style that mirrored their spirituality; this is seen both in Michelozzo's architecture and in Fra Angelico's frescoes there (<http://www.wga.hu>). The Dominicans' patronage at San Marco was deeply entwined with that of the Medici, who were urged to rebuild and embellish the church and monastery by its prior (later archbishop and saint), Antoninus. Female orders such as the Poor Clares were also significant corporate patrons.²⁶

Religious reforms in the wake of the Protestant Reformation led to the establishment of new orders such as the Jesuits and religious organizations such as the Oratorians. These groups became major patrons in late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Italy, particularly in Rome, where many new churches were built. The Jesuit style of architecture spread throughout Europe and, via missionary activities, beyond. The Jesuits were highly skilled at using visual means to convey their messages. Pious women, especially widows, supported the new orders and contributed to their visual culture.²⁷ Many of the peninsula's great cathedrals, such as those of Florence, Siena, Pisa, and Orvieto, were begun during the Middle Ages, but their completion and ornamentation continued for centuries. Some, like the venerable Lateran in Rome, were essentially rebuilt in the late Cinquecento and Seicento. Normally, patronage at the *duomo* (cathedral) of an Italian city was overseen by a governing board called an Opera del Duomo (Cathedral Works), its members called *operai*. Other churches, such as San Petronio in Bologna and St. Peter's in Rome, were overseen by a body called a Fabbrica, and the Basilica of San Marco in Venice was overseen by its Procurators.

In the case of Florence Cathedral, the Opera del Duomo, established in 1296, was, from 1331, under the purview of the Arte della Lana (wool guild), establishing strong secular oversight of its upkeep and adornment; taxation of the Florentine populace provided much of the funding.²⁸ Over the centuries, the

many commissions extended by the *operai* include the large-scale sculptural programs on the exterior of the building and the *campanile* (bell tower). Inside the Duomo, the Opera's commissions include the *cantorie* (singing galleries; <http://www.wga.hu>) by Luca della Robbia (1430–8) and Donatello (1433–40). The *operai* also commissioned many splendidly illuminated liturgical books, as well as the frescoed equestrian portraits of the *condottieri* (mercenary military leaders) John Hawkwood and Niccolò da Tolentino by Paolo Ucello and Andrea del Castagno (1436 and 1455–56, respectively), the latter commissions demonstrating again the porous boundaries between sacred and secular in the period.

Some of the best-known examples of corporate patronage in Florence are found at the Baptistery, responsibility for which had belonged to the influential Arte di Calimala (the guild of cloth finishers and merchants of foreign cloth) since the twelfth century.²⁹ These include three sets of bronze doors, the first provided by Andrea Pisano in the mid-fourteenth century, the other two by Lorenzo Ghiberti in the first half of the Quattrocento. Calimala also commissioned the Cinquecento sculpture groups over the portals by Andrea Sansovino, Giovanfrancesco Rustici, and Vincenzo Danti. In 1515, a bitter imbroglio erupted between Rustici and the consuls of the Calimala guild.³⁰ At issue was the artist's payment for his *Preaching of the Baptist* (1506–11; <http://www.wga.hu>) above the north door. The dispute brought in Michelangelo, as well as members of the Medici family and their agents, who "lobbied" on behalf of the unpaid sculptor; the matter was only settled in January 1523. The protracted conflict offers a fascinating glimpse into the complex mechanics of patronage in sixteenth-century Florence.

Throughout the peninsula, the clergy and governing bodies of innumerable other churches extended commissions to enhance their grandeur. The unfinished sculptural program on the façade of San Petronio in Bologna, where Jacopo della Quercia worked in the Quattrocento and other sculptors provided reliefs in the next century, is a noteworthy example. Also commissioned by the Fabbrica during the 1520s was Properzia de' Rossi, the only documented female sculptor in Renaissance Italy (see chapter 10).

Many important buildings resulted from the patronage of civic governments like those of Florence and Siena, which commissioned large town halls nearly simultaneously at the end of the thirteenth century; both the Palazzo della Signoria in Florence and the Palazzo Pubblico in Siena were decorated over centuries. In Venice, the Doge's Palace, commissioned by the Venetian government in the fourteenth century, was, likewise, a site of generations of subsequent embellishment. Governments also commissioned projects for the convenience of the populace like the Rialto Bridge in Venice (1588–91). Fountains such as the Fontana Maggiore in Perugia by Nicola Pisano and his son Giovanni (1277–8), and Jacopo della Quercia's Fonte Gaia in Siena, commissioned by the city's Priors in 1408, provided focal points for public spaces and proclaimed the communes' beneficence toward their citizens.

To commemorate worthies, civic authorities sometimes collaborated with family members and others to erect tombs and cenotaphs. Monuments commemorating

military heroes, such as the equestrian statues the Venetian Senate commissioned to honor the *condottieri* Erasmo da Narni (“Gattamelata”) and Bartolomeo Colleoni, proclaimed the state’s appreciation for service to it. In the case of both Donatello’s *Gattamelata* (ca. 1445–53; <http://commons.wikimedia.org>) and Verrocchio’s Colleoni monument (ca. 1481–96; <http://commons.wikimedia.org>), families of the deceased provided monies and the commissions were authorized by the Senate. In mid-Quattrocento Florence, the Signoria was partially responsible for Bernardo Rossellino’s tomb of the humanist Chancellor Leonardo Bruni in Santa Croce (ca. 1445; <http://www.wga.hu>), a commission apparently involving his native city, Arezzo. The Signoria was probably also involved in commissioning Desiderio da Settignano’s nearby tomb of Bruni’s successor as chancellor, Carlo Marsuppini (after 1453; <http://www.wga.hu>), for which the Medici and Martelli families provided partial funding, demonstrating again the fluidity among categories of patronage such as public and private.

In addition to corporate patronage by civic authorities, guilds were significant patrons, particularly in Florence, where they held great power. The roles played by the Florentine guilds Lana and Calimala have been discussed above. Other guild commissions in the city include Filippo Brunelleschi’s loggia for the Ospedale degli Innocenti (foundling hospital, begun 1419), patronized by the Arte della Seta (silk guild).

The best-known guild patronage in Florence occurred at Orsanmichele (<http://commons.wikimedia.org>), which served a multiplicity of functions, secular and religious. In 1339, legislation sponsored by the guilds declared that the exterior of the building should be ornamented with statues of the patron saints of the city’s seven major guilds and several of the minor ones. But progress was slow, and in 1406 the Signoria declared that the guilds had to provide images of their patron saints within ten years or lose their spaces. This decree spurred a flurry of commissions, resulting in some of Florence’s greatest works of public sculpture, including Nanni di Banco’s *Quattro Santi Coronati* (*Four Crowned Saints*; ca. 1414–16, for the sculptors’ guild; fig. 10.2); Donatello’s *Saint Mark* (1411–13, for the linenweavers’ guild) and *Saint George* (ca. 1410–15?) for the armorers’ guild; and Ghiberti’s bronze *Saint Matthew* (1419–23, for Cambio, the bankers’ guild; <http://www.wga.hu>). For the latter, the young Cosimo de’ Medici served on the four-man guild committee of *operai* that oversaw the commission. The contract of August 26, 1419 stipulated that it be “at least the size” of Calimala’s John the Baptist “or larger,” and that it was to be “as beautiful as possible.”³¹ Orsanmichele reveals fierce competition not only between artists, but also among corporate patrons.

Confraternities (lay brotherhoods devoted to charitable works), one of the most significant sources of corporate patronage, commissioned buildings in which to meet and worship, and paintings and sculptures to decorate them.³² These include fresco cycles such as those by Andrea del Sarto and Franciabigio in the Chiostrò dello Scalzo in Florence in the 1510s and 1520s. In addition, artists provided many altarpieces for confraternal patrons such as Rosso Fiorentino’s *Descent from*

the Cross in Volterra (1521) and Leonardo da Vinci's *Virgin of the Rocks*, commissioned in 1493 by a Milanese confraternity. In Bologna, Niccolò dell'Arca's terracotta *Lamentation* group (1462–63) was made for the Confraternity of Santa Maria della Vita. Confraternities typically commissioned painted banners to use in their processions and illuminated manuscripts with their rules of governance. And lay brotherhoods like Santa Maria della Croce al Tempio in Florence comforted the condemned using small religious images called *tavolette*.³³ In Venice, the six *scuole grandi*, and the many smaller *scuole piccole*, played an exceptionally important role in the life of the city. The Serenissima's finest architects worked on buildings such as the Scuola Grande di San Marco and the Scuola Grande di San Rocco (<http://commons.wikimedia.org>), and painters such as Carpaccio and Titian worked for confraternal patrons, producing some of the city's best-known works. Tintoretto was a member of the Arciconfraternità di San Rocco, devoted to the plague saint, Roch, and many other artists such as Andrea del Sarto belonged to confraternities, sometimes providing their services as acts of devotion.

Patronage by Individuals and Families

Individuals and families comprise another major category of Renaissance patrons. They too were subject to the porous boundaries already noted. Categories of private patrons include wealthy bankers and merchants; celebrated families in republics like Florence and Siena; the noble houses and *cittadino* patrons of Venice; and the secular rulers of various Italian courts. The Angevin and Aragonese kings of Naples comprise an unusual case of royal patronage in Italy, and, in the later Middle Ages, Neapolitan queens were also influential patrons. Finally, in Rome, many Renaissance popes were patrons of the highest order, as were members of the Curia, particularly cardinals. Discussion of a select group of patrons below must stand in for many more such examples.

In Canto XVII of the *Inferno*, Dante condemned the notorious Paduan usurer Reginaldo Scrovegni to fiery punishment, his sin signified by the money purse around his neck. In the early Trecento, his son Enrico, who himself practiced usury, built the chapel of the family palace (now called the Arena Chapel; <http://commons.wikimedia.org>) and had it decorated by Giotto to expiate the patron's guilt for usurious lending.³⁴ More than 150 years later, Vespasiano da Bisticci wrote that Cosimo de' Medici il Vecchio's extraordinary patronage of architecture was motivated by a conscience troubled by wealth "not righteously gained."³⁵ Clearly, concern for questionable lending practices sometimes motivated private patronage. However, by the time the fabulously wealthy Sienese banker Agostino Chigi patronized Raphael and others in the first decades of the Cinquecento, compunction over usurious lending seems to have diminished as a motivation for patronage.

Many other factors were at work as well. Giovanni Rucellai wrote in his memoir of his own patronage: "All the above-mentioned things have given and give me the greatest satisfaction and pleasure, because in part they serve the honor of God, as



FIGURE 1.4 Leon Battista Alberti, façade of Santa Maria Novella, detail, Florence, 1456–70. Photo by Niall Atkinson.

well as the honor of the city and the commemoration of myself.”³⁶ Commemoration of self and lineage were primary motivations for patronage by individuals and families, whose coats-of-arms, inscriptions, and *impresie* proclaim their responsibility. A good example is Rucellai’s own inscription on the façade of Santa Maria Novella in Florence (fig. 1.4): “I, GIOVANNI RUCELLAI, SON OF PAOLO, MADE THIS IN THE YEAR 1470.” As noted above, another important motivation was what A. D. Fraser Jenkins called “The Theory of Magnificence.”³⁷

For centuries, the name Medici has been practically synonymous with patronage of art. Between the early fifteenth and later sixteenth centuries, the family rose from the ranks of Florence’s merchant bankers to become virtual rulers of the city, cardinals and popes in Rome, and hereditary grand dukes of Tuscany. Much of the family’s power and fame derived from the social and political patronage that first established their faction, enabling them to maintain control, and from the artistic and cultural patronage that was central both to the fashioning of the family’s image and to the realization of its princely ambitions. Many members of the family, including Cosimo the Elder, Piero “the Gouty,” Lorenzo the Magnificent, Popes Leo X and Clement VII, Grand Duke Cosimo I, and his sons Francesco I and Ferdinando I, achieved great fame as patrons. Medici women, particularly their wives – among them Lucrezia Tornabuoni, Alfonsina Orsini, Eleonora di Toledo, and Bianca Cappello – were also noteworthy patrons.

But the fame of the Medici has tended to obscure the patronage contributions of other Florentine families such as the Doni and Taddei, who patronized both

Raphael and Michelangelo. Among the most widespread patronage activities of wealthy families in Florence (and elsewhere) was of private chapels such as the Sassetti Chapel in Santa Trinita (1483–86; <http://www.wga.hu>), in which the patron, Francesco Sassetti, and his wife are buried. Domenico Ghirlandaio painted frescoes there with scenes from the life of St. Francis, alluding to the patron.

Outside of Florence, prominent families and individuals in republics such as Venice and Siena similarly shaped the visual cultures of their respective cities. In Venice, members of the great noble families that supplied the city's doges (among them the Foscari, Gritti, and Grimani) were significant patrons of churches, tombs, and palaces. And wealthy non-patrician Venetian *cittadini* commissioned painted house façades and patronized artists like Giorgione and Lorenzo Lotto.³⁸ In Siena, ancient families like the Piccolomini and Salimbeni were among the city's most prominent patrons of architecture, their late medieval and Renaissance palaces giving the city its unique character.³⁹ Smaller Italian towns like Volterra and Città di Castello all had their own prominent families who were influential patrons.

Another category of patronage is that of the peninsula's many courts. Often men like Mantegna and Leonardo served as court artists, receiving regular salaries. They were expected to provide an array of services that included creating paintings and sculptures, but their duties might also involve designing artillery and court entertainments. In Milan, for example, Leonardo worked for Ludovico Sforza, known as "Il Moro," who used art to fashion his image as a legitimate ruler; he is best known as the patron of Leonardo's *Last Supper* in Santa Maria delle Grazie (ca. 1494–97/98).⁴⁰

Federico da Montefeltro, the bastard *condottiere* who ruled Urbino, built the ducal palace with its exquisite *studiolo* and extended numerous commissions to Piero della Francesca for works such as the *Brera Altarpiece* (ca. 1472–74) and the double portrait of himself and his deceased wife Battista Sforza (ca. 1472; fig. 21.1). Federico's son Guidobaldo presided over the refined court described by Baldassare Castiglione in *The Courtier* (1528), and he and others in his court were key early patrons of Raphael. Guidobaldo's heir, the violent Francesco Maria I della Rovere, was one of Titian's major patrons. In the 1530s, Francesco Maria commissioned the decorations of the Villa Imperiale at Pesaro with his wife Eleonora Gonzaga.⁴¹ Their son Guidobaldo II owned Titian's so-called *Venus of Urbino* (ca. 1538; fig. 6.2), though it is uncertain if he was the patron or simply purchased the painting.

At Mantua, Marquess Ludovico Gonzaga brought humanist culture to the Lombard city-state, patronizing Leon Battista Alberti and Mantegna among others. The latter's frescoed chamber, called the *camera picta* (1465–74; <http://www.wga.hu>), shows the assembled court presided over by Ludovico and his wife, Barbara of Brandenburg. Mantegna also worked for Ludovico's grandson Francesco II Gonzaga, painting the *Madonna della Vittoria* (1493–96; <http://www.wga.hu>), which served propagandistically to rewrite the patron's failed military history.⁴² Francesco's consort was Isabella d'Este, daughter of Ercole d'Este, Duke of Ferrara. Her widespread and often aggressive acquisition and patronage of art (both ancient and modern), which is exceptionally well documented, has

made Isabella the quintessential exemplar of female art patron and collector in Renaissance Italy; she even described herself as having “an insatiable desire for antiquities.”⁴³ Isabella was unusually well educated for a woman of the period, and she was an extraordinarily demanding patron, sometimes driving artists to distraction. Isabella and Francesco’s patronage strategies were sometimes cooperative and sometimes competitive.⁴⁴ Their son Federico, Mantua’s first duke, was the patron of the Palazzo Te (begun ca. 1525), as well as of paintings and designs for metalwork by Giulio Romano. Correggio painted a series of erotic works for the duke, who addressed Titian, another favored artist, as “Dear Friend.”

Papal and Curial Patronage

The case of the papal court in Rome is singular: the Roman curia was an ancient, exclusively male (and ostensibly celibate) culture in which women held no official positions. The Renaissance papacy witnessed tumultuous changes over three centuries, from the removal of the papacy to Avignon in 1309 to the Counter-Reformation; in 1417 the Council of Constance ended the Church’s divisions with the election of Martin V Colonna (1417–31). The return of the papacy to Rome, which had suffered a century of neglect without papal patronage, coincided with the beginning of the Renaissance. Martin V’s pontificate initiated centuries of restoration of existing churches; the expansion and decoration of the Vatican Palace (<http://commons.wikimedia.org>); the repair, ornamentation and extension of Old St. Peter’s and its eventual replacement with the new basilica; and the construction and embellishment of the Sistine Chapel (<http://commons.wikimedia.org>). Popes, cardinals, and other members of the curia also patronized new churches like Santa Maria del Popolo in the Quattrocento and the Jesuits’ mother church, the Gesù, in the next century.

In Rome early modern popes undertook numerous urban interventions, such as the opening of new streets to enhance movement and to accommodate pilgrims who flocked there during Holy Years. Papal patronage also provided public fountains such as Sixtus V’s Fontana dell’Acqua Felice (1585–88), which marked the terminus of a restored aqueduct. Papal and curial patrons were responsible for the construction and decoration of many of the Eternal City’s grand palaces, such as the Cancelleria (1480s) and the Palazzo Farnese (begun 1517, continued 1546). They also constructed suburban villas like the unfinished Villa Madama on Monte Mario designed by Raphael for Cardinal Giulio de’ Medici (begun 1518; fig. 22.2). Beyond the city itself, popes and cardinals built lavish country estates such as Cardinal Ippolito d’Este’s villa at Tivoli, famed for its gardens and waterworks created in the 1560s and 1570s.

From the time of the papacy’s return to Rome, successive pontiffs sought to restore the city to its ancient imperial glory and to enhance *maiestas papalis*. It was expected that papal Rome would once again draw talent to work there. For example, in the 1440s Eugenius IV (1431–47) provided Old St. Peter’s with a set of splendid *all’antica* bronze doors by the Florentine Filarete. Nicholas V (1447–55),

who called the Vatican “this most perfect paradise,” was responsible both for Rossellino’s choir added to the venerable Constantinian basilica and for bringing Fra Angelico to paint his private Vatican chapel (begun 1448; <http://www.wga.hu>). One of the most ambitious papal patrons of the Quattrocento was Sixtus IV (1471–84), who built the Sistine Chapel, bringing a team of central Italian painters – among them Perugino and Botticelli – to decorate it (1481–82).

The early Cinquecento pontiffs Julius II (1503–13) and Leo X (1513–21), son of Lorenzo the Magnificent, were extraordinary patrons, commissioning works from Bramante, Michelangelo, Raphael, and others. The undertakings of these popes include the building of New St. Peter’s (begun 1506; <http://commons.wikimedia.org>); the Sistine Chapel ceiling frescoes (1508–12; <http://www.wga.hu>); Raphael’s tapestries for the chapel (commissioned ca. 1515; <http://www.wga.hu>); and frescoes in the Vatican Stanze (<http://www.wga.hu>) painted by Raphael and his workshop. Julius’s ill-fated commission for his own tomb (<http://commons.wikimedia.org> for drawings and reconstructions) resulted in what Michelangelo’s biographer Ascanio Condivi later dubbed “the tragedy of the tomb.” Leo also patronized projects in Florence, commissioning Michelangelo’s never-realized façade of the Medici parish church San Lorenzo in 1516, and, with his cousin Giulio de’ Medici, the New Sacristy (begun 1519; <http://www.wga.hu>), intended to serve as a family mausoleum.

In the letter of November 1523 quoted above, Michelangelo expressed his great expectations for patronage under Pope Clement VII. But the expectations of the many artists who had congregated in Rome hoping for a new golden age of papal patronage were dashed because of the papacy’s political and financial instability. In May 1527, the Eternal City was sacked by imperial troops, and artists including Rosso Fiorentino and Parmigianino fled, taking their modern, Roman style with them. Following the Sack, Clement’s greatest commission was Michelangelo’s *Last Judgment* for the Sistine Chapel, a project only realized under his successor, Paul III Farnese (1534–49). Generally regarded as the first Counter-Reformation pontiff, the Roman-born Paul sought to proclaim papal triumphalism in an era of Protestant ascendancy and to revivify the Eternal City so gravely damaged under his predecessor.⁴⁵

In the second half of the sixteenth century, the Council of Trent’s decrees concerning sacred art and the rise of new religious orders shifted the focus of papal patronage (see chapter 23).⁴⁶ The greatest papal patron of the late Cinquecento Counter-Reformation era was Sixtus V, whose brief reign witnessed radical interventions in the city of Rome that were intended to proclaim its splendor on the world stage and to accommodate pilgrims and other visitors. These include the construction of wide new streets like the Strada Felice to link the city’s basilicas (1585–86); the moving and erection of several Egyptian obelisks; the building and decoration of the Cappella Sistina in Santa Maria Maggiore (begun 1585); and the completion of the dome of New St. Peter’s in 1590.⁴⁷ The scale and ambition of Sixtus V’s patronage set the stage for the patronage of seventeenth-century papal patrons whose interventions would shape the face of Rome for centuries to come.

As princes of the Church, cardinals played critical roles in the patronage of art and architecture in Rome and its environs. Each member of the Sacred College was assigned a titular church for which he was responsible; countless inscriptions and *stemmi* proclaim their patronage at these churches and others. Cardinals were also responsible for many of the city's lavish palaces, among them Raffaele Riario's above-mentioned Cancelleria, confiscated by Pope Leo X in 1517 in the wake of a conspiracy implicating the powerful cardinal. In his *De cardinalatu* of 1510, Paolo Cortesi wrote that a cardinal must live in a magnificent palace, the opulence of which would act as a deterrent to plundering by ignorant mobs.⁴⁸

Cardinals like Riario or Francesco Maria del Monte served as protectors for artists like the young Michelangelo and Caravaggio, respectively. And foreign-born cardinals were also notable patrons, employing artists both from their homelands and from Italy. While most cardinals functioned as worldly princes, some, particularly during the Counter-Reformation, were deeply committed to reform and their patronage reflected these concerns, fostering new and austere styles that evoked Early Christian art. And Cardinal Ferdinando de' Medici, who, after significant activity as a patron in Rome, renounced the purple to become Grand Duke of Tuscany, thereafter engaging in a very different style of patronage.⁴⁹

Among the most powerful of cardinals, *nipoti* (close relatives, often, but not always, nephews) played particularly decisive roles as patrons, often acting, as in the case of Paul III's grandson Cardinal Alessandro Farnese, as agents on behalf of their papal relations.⁵⁰ Known as "*Il gran cardinale*," Alessandro was initially a patron of secular projects such as his splendid villa at Caprarola (begun 1559; <http://commons.wikimedia.org>). At the Cancelleria, he commissioned Vasari's frescoes in the Sala dei Cento Giorni (1544) that celebrate his grandfather's deeds, including the ongoing construction of St. Peter's (<http://www.wga.hu>). In the wake of the Council of Trent, Alessandro's patronage became more focused on sacred art and architecture, his most important commission being the construction of the Jesuit church of the Gesù (begun 1568; <http://commons.wikimedia.org>), the façade of which (ca. 1575–84) bears his name. He was also the patron of Titian's erotically charged Naples *Danaë* (mid-1540s; <http://www.wga.hu>), the mythological subject of which bears the features of a courtesan.

Cardinal Scipione Borghese, nephew of Pope Paul V (1605–21), is probably best known as a patron of the young Bernini, who carved his *David*, *Apollo and Daphne*, and *Pluto and Proserpina* for the cardinal's villa on the Pincian Hill in the 1620s. In addition to being a collector of works by Raphael, Titian, and Caravaggio, Scipione Borghese was noted for his restoration of various Roman churches, in particular his *titulus*, San Crisogono in Trastevere. Thus his patronage, like that of Cardinal Alessandro Farnese, encompassed both sacred and profane, underscoring the duality of cardinals' identities and the varied roles played by the visual arts in the fashioning of those identities.

Finally, mention should also be made of female papal relatives who were active as patrons, their commissions often furthering the aims of their male relations.

The female relatives of Pope Leo X, particularly his sister-in-law Alfonsina Orsini (1472–1520), exerted exceptional political power and were noteworthy patrons and collectors.⁵¹ Alfonsina collected ancient statuary and built a palace in Rome (Palazzo Medici-Lante; begun ca. 1516), the architectural decoration of which includes her arms and those of other members of the Medici family.⁵² Alfonsina was vilified for her ambition (as was Olimpia Maidalchini, sister-in-law of Pope Innocent X, in the following century). In the late Cinquecento, Camilla Peretti (1519–1605), widowed sister of Pope Sixtus V, was involved in several of her brother's projects on the Esquiline and Quirinal hills in Rome.⁵³ Like many women in Counter-Reformation Rome, Camilla's patronage combined familial and pious motivations.

Conclusion

Michelangelo's letter cited at the outset of this essay illustrates the interdependent nature of artist–patron relationships in Renaissance Italy. In this essay, we have seen various classes of patrons, including corporate groups such as religious orders, civic governments, confraternities, and guilds. We have also considered individuals and families in republican cities like Florence, Siena, and Venice and at the courts of Milan, Urbino, and Mantua. Finally, we have considered patronage by popes, cardinals, and other members of the Roman curia. Throughout these pages, the patronage roles of women – among them nuns, noblewomen, and papal relatives – have been highlighted along with the better known activities of men. We have seen how patrons used commissions to fashion identities and to convey messages about themselves. We have also seen the porous boundaries that separate categories of patrons and how individual and group, sacred and secular, and public and private were often inextricably linked. Although an essay of this length cannot cover all aspects of Italian art patronage in the period under consideration, it is hoped that providing a broad overview of the types of patrons extending commissions will serve to underscore the varied motivations and aspirations of the men and women who commissioned art and architecture in Renaissance Italy.

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Notes

- 1 *Il carteggio di Michelangelo*, eds. Paola Barocchi and Renzo Ristori, 5 vols. (Florence: S.P.E.S. Editore, 1965–83), 3:1.
- 2 William Wallace, “Reversing the Rules: Michelangelo and the Patronage of Sculpture,” in Christian and Drogin, *Patronage*, 149–67. For presentation images, Werner L. Gundersheimer, “Patronage in the Renaissance: An Exploratory Approach,” in Lytle and Orgel, *Patronage*, 3–23, at 13–15.
- 3 Marcello Fantoni, Louisa Chevalier Matthew, and Sara F. Matthews-Grieco. *The Art Market in Italy: 15th–17th Centuries / Il Mercato dell’arte in Italia: Secc. XV–XVII* (Modena: F. C. Panini, 2003); Evelyn S. Welch, *Shopping in the Renaissance: Consumer Cultures in Italy 1400–1600* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005).
- 4 See, inter alia, Wackernagel, *Artist*, esp. 207ff; Gombrich, “Early Medici”; Chambers, *Patrons*; Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972) (for the “period eye”); Gundersheimer, “Exploratory Approach” (for anthropological “Big Man” theory); Settis, *Artisti e committenti* (for a taxonomical approach); Kent et al., *Patronage*; Hollingsworth, *Renaissance Italy*; Hollingsworth, *Sixteenth-century Italy*; Tracy E. Cooper, “Mecenatismo or Clientelismo? The Character of Renaissance Art Patronage,” in *The Search for a Patron in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. David G. Wilkins and Rebecca L. Wilkins (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1996), 19–32; Kent, *Lorenzo de’ Medici*; Burke, *Changing Patrons*; Nelson and Zeckhauser, *Patron’s Payoff*; Christian and Drogin, *Patronage*.
- 5 Kent et al., *Renaissance Patronage*, 2; Ron Weissman, “Taking Patronage Seriously: Mediterranean Values and Renaissance Society,” in Kent et al., *Patronage*, 25–45; Kent, *Cosimo de’ Medici*, 8 and 392, n. 63; Cooper, “Mecenatismo”; Burke, *Changing Patrons*, 4–5.
- 6 On the social significance of networks, see Paul McLean, *The Art of the Network: Strategic Interaction and Patronage in Renaissance Florence* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).
- 7 Gilbert, “Patron,” questioned the impact of patrons on iconography.
- 8 Gilbert, “Patron”; Derek A. Moore, “Review of Evelyn S. Welch, *Art and Authority in Renaissance Milan*,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 56 (1997): 352–54.
- 9 Hartt and Wilkins, *History*; Paoletti and Radke, *Art*.
- 10 Fraser Jenkins, “Magnificence”; Kent, *Cosimo de’ Medici*, 214; James Lindow, *The Renaissance Palace in Florence: Magnificence and Splendour in Fifteenth-Century Italy* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007), introduction; Christian and Drogin, *Patronage*, 3.
- 11 Fraser Jenkins, “Magnificence”; Gombrich, *Early Medici*, 39, 45.
- 12 Cited in Lindow, *Renaissance Palace*, 1.
- 13 Kent, *Cosimo de’ Medici*.
- 14 Nelson and Zeckhauser, *Patron’s Payoff*.
- 15 Sheryl E. Reiss, “From the Court of Urbino to the Curia and Rome: Raphael and his Patrons 1500–1508,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Raphael*, ed. Marcia B. Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 36–55; idem, “‘Per havere tutte le opere . . . da Monsignor Revrendissimo’: Artists Seeking the Favor of Cardinal Giulio de’ Medici,” in Hollingsworth and Richardson, *Possessions*, 112–31.

- 16 See John Paoletti, "Strategies and Structures of Medici Artistic Patronage in the 15th Century," in *The Early Medici and Their Artists*, ed. Francis Ames-Lewis (London: Birkbeck College, 1995), 19–36, along with other studies by Paoletti.
- 17 Melissa Meriam Bullard, "Heroes and their Workshops," repr. in *Lorenzo Il Magnifico: Image and Anxiety, Politics and Finance* (Florence: Olschki, 1994), 109–30; Christian and Drogin, *Patronage*, 7–8.
- 18 Burke, *Changing Patrons*.
- 19 Antonio Averlino, Filarete, *Treatise on Architecture*, 2 vols., ed. and trans. John R. Spencer (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1965), 1:15–16; Martin Kemp, "From 'Mimesis' to 'Fantasia': The Quattrocento Vocabulary of Creation, Inspiration and Genius in the Visual Arts," *Viator* 8 (1977), 360.
- 20 Noted in F. W. Kent, "The Making of a Renaissance Patron of Art," in Rucellai, *Zibaldone*, 2:13.
- 21 Lawrence, *Women and Art*; King, *Women Patrons*; Matthews-Grieco and Zarri, *Committenza femminile*; Reiss and Wilkins, *Beyond Isabella*; McIver, *Women*; Solum, "Female Patronage." See also my "Beyond Isabella and Beyond: Secular Women Patrons of Art in Early Modern Europe," forthcoming (2013) in the *Ashgate Research Companion to Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Katherine McIver, Allyson Poska, and Jane Couchman.
- 22 Murphy, *Lavinia Fontana*, chapters 3–5.
- 23 Roger Crum, "Controlling Women or Women Controlled? Suggestions for Gender Roles and Visual Culture in the Italian Renaissance Palace," in Reiss and Wilkins, *Beyond Isabella*, 37–50; David G. Wilkins, "Donatello and his Patrons," in Christian and Drogin, *Patronage*, 117–47.
- 24 Mary-Ann Winkelmes, "Taking Part: Benedictine Nuns as Patrons of Art and Architecture," in *Picturing Women in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*, ed. Geraldine A. Johnson and Sara F. Matthews-Grieco (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 91–110; Radke, "Nuns and their Art"; Saundra Weddle, "'Women in Wolves' Mouths': Nuns' Reputations and Architecture at the Convent of Le Murate," in *Architecture and the Politics of Gender in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Helen Hills (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2003), 115–29.
- 25 For *ius patronatus*, Robert Gaston, "Liturgy and Patronage at San Lorenzo, Florence, 1350–1650," in Kent et al., *Patronage*, 111–33; Burke, *Changing Patrons*, chap. 5; Nelson and Zeckhauser, "Private Chapels in Florence: A Paradise for Signalers," in Nelson and Zeckhauser, *Patron's Payoff*, 113–31.
- 26 Jeryldene Wood, *Women, Art, and Spirituality: The Poor Clares of Early Modern Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
- 27 Valone, "Quirinal Hill"; Carolyn Valone, "Matrons and Motives: Why Women Built in Early Modern Rome," in Reiss and Wilkins, *Beyond Isabella*, 317–35 and other studies by Valone.
- 28 Wackernagel, *Artist*, 20–38; Margaret Haines, "Oligarchy and Opera: Institution and Individuals in the Administration of the Florentine Cathedral," in *Florence and Beyond: Culture, Society and Politics in Renaissance Italy: Essays in Honour of John M. Najemy*, eds. David S. Peterson and Daniel E. Bornstein (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2008), 153–77; Marica S. Tacconi, *Cathedral and Civic Ritual in Late Medieval and Renaissance Florence: The Service Books of Santa Maria Del Fiore* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), esp. 25–26.
- 29 Amy R. Bloch, "Lorenzo Ghiberti, the Arte Di Calimala, and Fifteenth-Century Florentine Corporate Patronage," in Peterson and Bornstein, *Florence and Beyond*, 135–52.

- 30 For the dispute, see Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori, ed architettori...* (1568), ed. Gaetano Milanesi, 9 vols. (Florence: Sansoni, 1878–1885), 6:625–27; Wackernagel, *Artist*, 36.
- 31 Richard Krautheimer and Trude Krautheimer-Hess, *Lorenzo Ghiberti* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), 86.
- 32 Barbara Wisch and Diane Cole Ahl, eds., *Confraternities and the Visual Arts in Renaissance Italy: Ritual, Spectacle, Image* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
- 33 Samuel Y. Edgerton, *Pictures and Punishment: Art and Criminal Prosecution during the Florentine Renaissance* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), passim, esp. 165–92. See now Allie Terry, “Criminal Vision in Early Modern Florence: Fra Angelico’s Altarpiece for ‘Il Tempio’ and the Magdalenian Gaze,” in *Renaissance Theories of Vision*, eds. John S. Hendrix and Charles H. Carman (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2010), 45–61.
- 34 Derbes and Sandona, *Usurer’s Heart*.
- 35 Vespasiano da Bisticci, *Lives*, 218.
- 36 Rucellai, *Zibaldone*, 1:121
- 37 Fraser Jenkins, “Magnificence.”
- 38 Schmitter, “Virtuous Riches.”
- 39 Matthias Quast, “Palace Facades in Late Mediaeval and Renaissance Siena: Continuity and Change in the Aspect of the City,” in *Renaissance Siena: Art in Context*, ed. Lawrence A. Jenkins (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2005), 47–79; Fabrizio Nevola, *Siena: Constructing the Renaissance City* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press), 2007.
- 40 Welch, *Art and Authority*.
- 41 Ian Verstegen, “Francesco Maria and the Duchy of Urbino, between Rome and Venice,” in *Patronage and Dynasty: The Rise of the Della Rovere in Renaissance Italy*, ed. Ian Verstegen (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2007), 148.
- 42 Bourne, *Francesco II*, chap. 2.
- 43 See Clifford M. Brown, “‘Lo insaciabile desiderio nostro de cose antiche’: New Documents on Isabella d’Este’s Collection of Antiquities,” in *Cultural Aspects of the Italian Renaissance: Essays in Honor of Paul Oskar Kristeller*, ed. Cecil Clough (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1976), 324–53.
- 44 Bourne, *Francesco II*, chap. 9.
- 45 Clare Robertson, “Phoenix Romanus: Rome 1534–1565,” in *Rome*, ed. Marcia B. Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 184–245; Rebecchini, “Paul III.”
- 46 Steven F. Ostrow, “The Counter-Reformation and the End of the Century,” in Hall, *Rome*, 246–320.
- 47 *Ibid.*, 278–89.
- 48 Kathleen Weil-Garris and John F. D’Amico, “The Renaissance Cardinal’s Ideal Palace: A Chapter from Cortesi’s *De cardinalatu*,” *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 35 (1980), 88.
- 49 Suzanne B. Butters, “Contrasting Priorities: Ferdinando I de’ Medici, Cardinal and Grand Duke,” in Hollingsworth and Richardson, *Possessions*, 185–225.
- 50 Robertson, *Il gran cardinale*.
- 51 Natalie Tomas, *The Medici Women: Gender and Power in Renaissance Florence* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2003); Sheryl E. Reiss, “Widow, Mother, Patron of Art: Alfonsina Orsini de’ Medici,” in Reiss and Wilkins, *Beyond Isabella*, 125–40.

52 Reiss, "Widow, Mother, Patron."

53 Dennis, "Peretti Family Identity."

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