AN INSTANCE OF FEMININE PATRONAGE IN THE MEDICI COURT OF SIXTEENTH-CENTURY FLORENCE

The Chapel of Eleonora da Toledo in the Palazzo Vecchio

While the artistic patronage of Cosimo I de' Medici, duke of Florence, has been examined extensively, especially as it relates to his political program of Medici supremacy, the influence of his wife Eleonora da Toledo (Fig. 1) on Florentine art of the period has not received recognition.¹ Bronzino’s frescoes for her chapel in the Palazzo Vecchio offer an opportunity to investigate the growing importance of Eleonora’s impact on court art and life, and to contrast, once her role in the chapel is identified, the very different attitudes of the duke and the duchess to the uses of art. An examination of the iconography of the fresco cycle as it developed from its inception in about 1540, the year after her marriage to the duke, to its completion around 1564 reveals changes indicative of Eleonora’s increasing control in the court and of her personal concept of the function of religious painting.

¹ For Cosimo’s development of Medicean iconography, see especially K. W. Forster, “Metaphors of Rule: Political Ideology and History in the Portraits of Cosimo de’ Medici,” Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz, xx, 1971, 66–104; J. W. Richelson, Studies in the Personal Imagery of Cosimo I de’ Medici, Duke of Florence, Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1973; New York, 1975; and Janet Cox-Reeves, Dynasty and Destiny in Medici Art: Pontormo, Leo X, and the Two Cosimos, Princeton, 1984. No study has examined the extent of Eleonora’s participation in the arts, though her involvement with the development of the Palazzo Pitti, her encouragement of Baccio Bandinelli, and her relationship with poets such as Laura Battiferri, as well, of course, as her role in the chapel, indicate activity from the 1550s to her death. The present essay is intended as an introduction to this unexplored aspect of the sixteenth-century Medici court.

Fig. 1 Bronzino, Portrait of Eleonora da Toledo and son Garcia. Uffizi, Florence (photo: Studio Fotografico Quattrone, Florence)
most attractive assets. She was the seventeen-year-old daughter of Pedro

dao Toledo, the wealthy viceroy of Naples and supporter of Charles V. By

establishing an association with the Toledo family, Cosimo placed himself
directly in the imperial circle, which was an important factor in maintaining
the prestige of the Tuscan state.² When Eleonora entered Florence in June
1539, one of the first sights to welcome the new bride was a triumphal
arch topped by an allegorical representation of "Fecundity," a female figure
accompanied by five infants, an allusion to one of the duties expected of
the new duchess.³ This she was to fulfill very well, bearing the duke eleven
children, two of whom became granddukes of Florence. The emblem of her
medal, an imminently fecund peahen, survives to illustrate the association.

Three years her husband's junior, she was also an ideal age, in accordance
with contemporary treatises on marriage, to have her yet unformed notions
molded by her older husband, though as she settled into the ducal court.
Eleonora's strict and pious Spanish background may have subtly resisted,
or at least provided an alternative to, Medici tradition.

In 1540, soon after the marriage, the couple moved to the Palazzo
Vecchio, symbolically claiming as their ducal residence the administrative
and political center of Florence. The duchess took apartments on the
second floor, and Cosimo, those on the first. The chapel, a small, squarish
room, was located between Eleonora's private bedroom and the terrace
that overlooked the Sala dei Cinquecento.⁵ Despite the personal function
of the chapel, however, it seems to have been the duke who instigated its
decoration. Vasari's words make clear that, while the chapel was Eleonora's,

the decision to select Bronzino was Cosimo's.⁶ Frequent payments to

Bronzino in 1542 and 1543 concerning work in the palace for the duke
substantiate that the major part of the project was carried out in the first
half of the decade (immediately following the wedding), that is, sometime
soon after the move of 1540 to the completion of the altarpiece in 1545.⁷

The narrative frescoes of the earliest part of the program depict the
miracles of Moses that saved the Israelites during their exodus from Egypt
to the Holy Land, and are among the first instances of Cosimo's personal
and political investment in biblical imagery.⁸ Bronzino's Brazen Serpent
(Fig. 2), for example, presents a traditional theological parallel between
Moses' bronze serpent and the cross of the crucifixion,⁹ while it proclaims
how the duke, like Moses, is elected by God to save his people. The

6. Probably, as Vasari implies, it was Bronzino's work with Pontormo at the Medici
villas of Careggi and Castello, as well as his contributions for the wedding decorations,
that earned him the duke's attention and the commission for the chapel: "... il duca,
occorrendo la virtù di quest' uomo, gli fece metter mano a fare nel suo ducale palazzo una cappella non molto grande per la
detta signora duchessa, donna nel vero, fra quante turono mai, valorosa, e per infiniti meriti degna
d'eterna lode" (Vasari-Milanese, vi, 596).

7. For the chronology of the fresco decoration, see Janet Cox-Rearick, Bronzino's Chapel of
Eleonora in the Palazzo Vecchio, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1993, chap. 2, 54ff. Earlier scholars had
placed Bronzino's frescoes after the 1545 altarpiece, in the years 1550-64 (A. McComb, Agnolo
Bronzino: His Life and Works, Cambridge, Mass., 1928, 33), until Craig Hugh Smyth's reassessment
set back the major part of the chapel to early in Cosimo's rule (Smyth, "Bronzino Studies" [Ph.D.
diss., Princeton, 1955], 216-17, and idem, Bronzino As Draughtman: An Introduction [Loch
Valley, N.Y., 1971], 53-54 n. 23). Both Smyth and Cox-Rearick place the Francioli drawing for the
vault as early as 1540. Vasari's discussion of the chapel immediately following the wedding
preparations substantiates this chronology, as do the payments made to Bronzino for work in the
Palazzo Vecchio dating from April 1542 to July 1543. The inscriptions discovered in the restoration
of 1949 and interpreted by Edward Sanchez in 1957 date the Crossing of the Red Sea and the Brazen
Serpent to 1541-42, while the two Old Testament scenes flanking the door to the terrace are given
by Cox-Rearick (1993, 62) to late 1542-43 and dated by Smyth to 1546. The substitute for the
altarpiece of 1545 was begun in 1553. A letter from Bronzino to Cosimo of April 1564 (first
published by G. Gaye, Carriego minori d'artisti dei secoli XV, XVI, XVII, Florence, 1839, 108, 111),
in which the artist promises to finish the decorations, indicates that there was still some work
to be done in the chapel, which probably consisted of the eucharistic puri of the left wall
and three of the allegorical symbols at the pendientes. That year the Annunciazione panels received
new frames and the chapel was at least mostly complete—four years after Eleonora's removal to
the Palazzo Pitti and two years after her death.

8. Art under Cosimo began increasingly to turn to Old Testament subject matter in the service
of the duke's secular aspirations. For examples, see particularly Richelson, chap. 4, "Religious
Imagery."

9. John 3:14: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man
be lifted up." And John 3:18: "He who believes in Him is not condemned, he who does not believe
is condemned already."
fresco relates typologically to the sacrificial theme of the altarpiece of the Lamentation on the opposite wall (Fig. 3); at the same time, the snake-entwined rod that protects the Israelites represents not only Christ on the Cross, but the caduceus, which, with its associations with the medical profession, serves as a visual pun on the Medici name and Cosimo's healing control. Political salvation will come to those Florentines who are faithful to Medici authority, and so to God's will. The implicit comparison this fresco draws between the Israelites, Christians, and Florentines occurs in the other Mosaic frescoes in the chapel (The Crossing of the Red Sea, Moses and the Miraculous Spring, and The Fall of Manna [Figs. 4

10. An earlier example of this propagandistic play is found in the official compliments dedicated to Leo X, which entitle him “Medici, healer of the people” (John Shearman, Raphael's Cartoons in the Collections of Her Majesty the Queen, London, 1972, 15). A medal was coined soon after Cosimo's election with the motto “Publicae salutis” (Pietro Bargellini, I Medici, Florence, 1980, 236).
and 5), and announce a pattern of imagery that Cosimo will employ throughout his rule to depict himself as a divinely legitimate and successful authority. Under Eleonora, the emphasis is to shift from Medici propaganda to a more specifically devotional Christian meaning.

The altarpiece of the Lamentation (Fig. 3) and its two flanking panels were completed in 1545 but were only briefly, if at all, the devotional focus of Eleonora's chapel. At its completion, Cosimo dispatched the Lamentation to Nicholas Perrenot de Granvelle, a chief counselor of the emperor, to be placed in his private chapel in Besançon, and so Bronzino's first altarpiece became an instrument of Medici diplomacy. The second version of the painting, a close copy of the first (Fig. 6), was not done until 1553, and thus Cosimo's gift to Granvelle left Eleonora's chapel without an altarpiece for eight years.


12. The completion of the altarpiece can be securely dated to the summer of 1545: a letter from Lorenzo Pagni, the ducal secretary in Florence, dated August 12, 1545, discusses the frame for the painting, and indicates that the altarpiece is at that moment in Eleonora's chapel, for documentation concerning the Besançon Lamentation, see Cox-Resnick, 1993, 74–76 and doc. 9.

13. Ibid., also A. Castan, "Le musée de Besançon et la Déposition de Croix du Bronzino," Gazette des Beaux-Arts xxxvii (1881): 462–63, and O. H. Gigoleti, "La Pietà del Bronzino della Cappella del quarziere di Eleonora da Toledo in Palazzo Vecchio," Revue d'art vi (1909): 263. The correspondence pertaining to the completion of the first altarpiece testifies to Cosimo's eagerness that it be finished, framed, and shipped off to the imperial minister. Granvelle had been helpful when, in 1543, Cosimo had finally granted control of the fortresses at Florence and Livorno, as well as the release of the city from the Spanish troops. The painting is now in the Besançon Museum.

14. Although the letter of 1545 from Bronzino to Riccio indicates that the substitute was already being considered, and a copy would do (see note 16), a payment for two ounces of blue
Janet Cox-Rearick has recently produced documentary evidence that the altarpiece, though executed by Bronzino, may have been designed by Baccio Bandinelli. The correspondence quoted by Cox-Rearick is also of interest for the problem of patronage. In 1542, an eager Bandinelli is informed that the duke authorizes him to proceed with the Pietà design. Cosimo the next day refers to his wife's approval of Bandinelli's drawing, and notifies him that Bronzino has received orders to paint it. The duchess is consulted, but the duke decides. Bronzino indicates in a letter three years later that to the duke the replacement of the now-absent altarpiece is secondary to Bronzino's work on Cosimo's portrait (perhaps that in the Palazzo Pitti), and that he wishes no creative deviations on the painter's part with the second Lamentation.16

The subject of Bronzino’s altarpiece—a “Deposition,” or more accurately, “Lamentation”—is a kind of Pietà with witnesses. These are not actual participants, present at the Savior’s death and burial, but people contemplating the sacrificial body of Christ. From the midst of the grouping, and directly behind the Virgin and Christ, a female figure is curiously emphasized, both by her placement and by her gesture. Cox-Rearick claims, on the basis of a drawing in the Uffizi for the figure’s head, that it is a portrait of Eleonora herself.17 Yet this figure seems no more physiognomically particularized than the other attendants. Instead, she is a generic type—one of the Marys, but especially a feminine devotee who could summon the sympathies of a female viewer. In a sense, she is a mirror image of the elegant worshiper who would look upon the body of Christ from the other side of the picture plane; yet she is not a “portrait” in the conventional meaning of the word.

While Bronzino’s second version of the altarpiece (Fig. 6) seems generally to have followed Cosimo’s request of 1545 that the copy be identical and “not more beautiful,” subtle deviations in this later version of 1553 attest to the change in Bronzino’s work during these years. Most striking is the darker color, notably more subdued than the jewel-like hues of the original, and gloomier, too. than Bronzino’s major altarpieces of the previous year, the Resurrection and Christ in Limbo.18 The drawing in the later piece is harsher and less fluid, the Virgin older, and the figures lament Christ’s death more openly. The formal changes and heightened tragic content ally the piece more closely with Counter-Reformation ideas. Bronzino produced a copy that would demand little new invention or time from his work for the duke, while the duchess, given a faith more in keeping with the sobriety of the Counter-Reformation, perhaps found it “more beautiful.”
Although the essential design of the altarpiece remained unchanged, the new set of side panels substituted even a new subject. The contrasting imagery—from the depiction of John the Baptist (Fig. 7) and Saint Cosmas to that of the Angel and Virgin Annunciata (Figs. 8 and 9)—speaks clearly of dissimilar attitudes toward the purposes of art in the chapel, and here we have specific contemporary testimony from Vasari for Eleonora's influence.

Of the first pair of narrow altarpiece panels (completed, with the Lamentation, in 1545), the John the Baptist is now in the J. P. Getty Museum (Fig. 7)\(^\text{19}\) and the Saint Cosmas is lost. Later in the Palazzo Vecchio,
in Cosimo's private chapel, Vasari painted Saint Cosmas as a portrait of Cosimo il Vecchio and Saint Damian as Cosimo I.20 Could Bronzino's lost panel have likewise been a portrait of the duke himself? If it were

20. These panels, still in the chapel (which is called the Chapel of Leo X, though actually it was the duke's), were part of a decorative project completed by Vasari in 1561, see Vasari-Milanese, VII, 699, E. Allegri and A. Cerchi, 162–65; and Cox-Rearick, 1993, 266–67, and Fig. 16. I am reluctant

the case that Cosimo's own features appeared in the chapel, and this must of course be hypothetical, then his specific presence would have been an indication of power overriding the vaguer reference to Eleonora in the female witness of the altarpiece. Whether or not a portrait, the inclusion of

to see as many portraits in the chapel as Cox-Rearick suggests, but the linkage of Cosimos, duke and saint, would follow naturally from Medici tradition and Renaissance practice.
Saint Cosmas was, like the duke’s identification with Moses in the chapel frescoes, self-referential. The presence of panels of the Baptist, patron saint of the city, and Cosimo’s name-saint constitute another political intrusion into Eleonora’s private sphere. But at some point between the removal of the first altarpiece in 1545 and the 1553 inventory, Eleonora intervened, relegating these first two panels to the duke’s quarters and replacing them with the more pious images of the Virgin Annunciate and the Archangel Gabriel. Vasari specifically ascribes the substitution of the side panels to

21. The 1553 inventory of Cosimo’s guarasaroba includes the first two side panels, indicating that they were removed from the chapel sometime before that date; Conti, 139-40. Earlier writers have usually placed the Annunciation panels chronologically a long way back in the 1540s (e.g. see Coss-Brack, 1993, 366 n. 49, for literature). Most recently, Coss-Brack argues that “Cosimo asked Bronzino to complete the second set of flanking panels” when the church was “refurbished” in 1563 (1993, 86). Although her case is persuasive, Vasari’s statement (see below) should be given careful consideration, especially since his loyalties are not to Eleonora but to her husband. I would at least suggest that an earlier dating is still quite possible, as is the duke’s role in determining the subjects of the new panels.

Coss-Brack bases her chronology on the discovery of two new documents. An order of June 19, 1563, for “adornamenti e una tavola per uno altare nella Cappella in Camera Verde” (67 and doc. 23), clearly indicates that some plan is afoot for Eleonora’s chapel; but the Annunciation side paintings would have required the preparation of two panels, not “una tavola” (singular). The purpose of this panel is impossible to know—a replacement altar? one of the side panels?—but the reference certainly does not offer firm proof that the panel was executed in 1563. The second piece of evidence is a letter from Bronzino to Cosimo of April 15, 1564, in which the artist assures his duke that he will be completing work: “E in tanto non manco di seguire la Tavola de Cavalieri [the Nativity for the church in Pisa], e dar fase a quel tanto che manca della Cappella di Palazzo, le quali cose credo che V.E.I. troverà al suo ritorno favore” (86 and doc. 24). “Le quali cose” refers to both the altarpiece of the Nativity and some unspecified work in the chapel, which could have been even minor touch-ups; no side panels are mentioned.

Since Lenti’s citation of the documents for the commission of the Annunciation frames and their gilding of July 15 and September 16, 1564 (A. Lenti, Palazzofacio, Milan and Rome, 1929, 134; Coss-Brack, 1993, doc. 25), which clearly specify “una Nuntiata” and “una Angelo” for the “Cappella della Camera Verde,” there has been an increasing tendency to place the paintings in a context immediately preceding that date. Yet the commission of the frames only provides a terminus ante quem, not a date for the panels themselves—especially since frames of the proper dimension would already have been available at least four years earlier. An inventory of July 1560, described the Saint John the Baptist and Saint Cosmas, still in the guarasaroba and without frames (“Due quadri con compagni, dettosi in uno Stato Cosimo et nell'altro Giovanni Battista, di man del Bronzino, santo ornamento”; doc. 21). Since both pairs of panels have the same measurement (the Baptism was later cut down), could not the first frames have been moved to serve the Annunciation, and then replaced by the new frames of 1564 as part of a general restoration of the chapel? Bronzino’s payment of February 17, 1565, refers only to the “tavazzate” of the chapel, most likely meaning repairs and minor cleanups, especially in light of the small sum he is given (doc. 27). If Coss-Brack is correct that Scalvati’s altar tapestry of 1545-46 was used to substitute for the panel sent to Granvelle, and her case is extremely convincing, then we see a definite disaste for blank

Eleonora; in his life of Bronzino, he relates how the artist made two new paintings to accompany the new altarpiece:22 “When the first altarpiece was removed, the Baptist and St. Cosmas were put in the Duke’s guarasaroba; since the Duchess, changing her mind, had these other two made.” It is clear that new needs had to be answered, and the shift in emphasis may be explained in part with a look at the spiritual histories of the patron and patroness of the chapel. As for any indications of Cosimo I’s religious attitudes in the years of the program’s initiation, the duke’s participation in the religious life of Florence was chiefly limited to the types of organizations that would be expected to maintain his image as a munificent and acceptably pious ruler, while asserting the continuity of Medici tradition.23 Throughout his rule, his attitude toward new developments in Catholic thought was conditioned always by political necessity. The reorganization of the altars of Sta. Maria Novella and Sta. Croce, for instance, carried out under the duke’s instigation in the 1560s, was, if in part determined by the changing religious climate in Florence, just as evidently a ducal gesture to make the individual families that owned the chapels conform to Medici will.24 As in his wife’s chapel, religious art for Cosimo continued to function as an assertion of Medici authority.
Eleonora, in the years after the completion of the Moses cycle and the first altarpiece, began to develop an interest in the arts. With the dispatch of the first altarpiece to Granvelle, Cosimo's political manipulation of his wife's private chapel reached a climax. In 1545, the duchess was now twenty-three years old—a mature woman by Renaissance standards, and mother already of Medici heirs. She had surely gained in her six years in Florence a clear understanding of the importance held in that city by art in the claim for power and prestige. Eleonora herself begins to play the game of artistic patroness.

In 1549, Eleonora arranged the purchase and remodeling of the Palazzo Pitti, which became the ducal residence in 1560.25 Her involvement in this and in other artistic projects in Florence of the late 1540s and until her death at forty in 1562 provides evidence for her growing influence on decisions concerning commissions throughout Florence. Both Cellini and Vasari tell of the duchess's persistent efforts toward Bandinelli's promotion. Says Vasari: "... in truth, if it had not been for that lady... Baccio would have lost completely the favor of the Duke."26

25. Eleonora purchased the palace for 9,000 florins, making payments in 1549-53; F. Morandi, "Palazzo Pitti, la sua costruzione e i successivi impiegamenti." Commentari xvi (1965): 39.
26. Vasari-Milanesi, vii, 188: "E nel vero, se non fosse stata quella signora che lo teneva in pie, e lo amava per la virtù sua, Baccio sarebbe casato affatto, ed avrebbe perso interamente la grazia del duca. Serravasi ancora la duchessa assai di Baccio nel giardino de Pitti, dove ella aveva fatto fare una grotta... decorarla una fontana... Per queste cose la duchessa di continuo intavava favoriva Baccio appresso al duca; il quale avea dato licenza finalmente a Baccio che cominciase il modello grande del Nettuno." In his Memoriale (ed. P. Barocchi, Scritti d'arte del cinquecento, Milan and Naples, 1973, n. 1408). Bandini praised Eleonora: "...la signora Duchessa che amò e reverenziò con tutto il cuor, ed era veramente ch'ei da lui et dai suoi padre eccellentissimo e tutta la casa Tollerdo non avesse mai trovato [[quello]] sotto". After Cellini's return from France in 1545, Eleonora supported her rival Bandinelli, but Cosimo did not—especially with the Duomo choir project and the Neptune. Late in Bandinelli's career, he made cartoons of four Old Testament subjects to be painted by Andrea del Sedia and given to Eleonora to decorate rooms in the Palazzo Pitti; see J. H. Beck, "Precedings Concerning Bandinelli's picture." Antonio (v. 1973): 7-11. See also Coccari, 1989, 46 and 77, no. 20. According to Vasari (189), Eleonora also acquired for Bandinelli the Pazzi family chapel in St. Annunziata for his own tomb. The artistic rivalry between Cellini and Bandinelli is, as related to the conflicting sponsorship of Cosimo and Eleonora, respectively, merits further study. A summary of the acrimonious feeling between the two sculptors is given by John Pope-Hennessy, Italian High Renaissance and Baroque Sculpture (1963), 195, 44-46. An impolite contemporary testimony is given in Vasari's Life, Cellini's autobiography, and Bandinelli himself in the Memoriale. Cellini's stories of his unsuccessful efforts to win the duchess's support also trace the growing importance of her influence, as her initial interests, limited to the acquisition of jewels and small objects, matured into an increasing involvement in the Neptune commissions.

By Cristoforo Bronzino's account, Eleonora had a passion for philosophy and literature (G. Pietroceri, La stroppe de Medici de Cafaggiolo, Florence, 1925, n. 64-65), and in 1547 several Florentine writers and poets assembled an academy under her encouragement. The nature of this "academy" and the extent and significance of the duchess's participation is not clear. The duchess's friend, the poetess Laura Battifera (painted by Bronzino, and the wife of Ammannati), published her first book of poems in 1560 with a dedication to Eleonora.

27. The anti-Spanish sentiments of Italian chroniclers, past and present, often color views of the duchess's character. For a general discussion of Italian attitudes toward the Spanish, see B. Croce, La Spagna nella vita italiana durante la transumanza, Bari, 1917, 110-12. Pieraccini's ruthless characterization of Eleonora reflects the anti-Spanish feeling of many contemporary letters, diaries, and histories (n. 60). A letter of 1541 from Riccio to Cosimo, away in Pisa, describes the duchess's noisy monastic existence in the palace, where she spent many hours in prayer and was attended by religious worshippers (ibid., 59). Her rare public appearances were splendid. In 1548 she was carried forth in a green satin sedan chair designed to her own specifications, which struck the Florentines as a sort of exotic tabernacle (H. Rahn, St. Ignatius Loyola: Letters to Women, trans. K. Pond and H. Weerman, London, 1958, 16). The intense privacy of her spiritual life and the extravagance of her public display met with disapproval as one observer writes, "It was a marvelous thing to behold such a proud woman. She was never seen to visit churches and other holy places, as her high station demanded—even if it were for the sake of a good example" (ibid., 94). In March 1544, she visited the saintly nun of Prato, Caterina de' Ricci, and was apparently impressed (P. G. de' Agostini, St. Caterina de' Ricci, Florence, 1964, 179).

28. Pope-Hennessy, 354 and 455-56, pl. 52, fig. 64.

29. Rahn, 94. Pedro da Toledo attempted to extend the arm of the Inquisition to Naples, and populated his household with priests and monks who were often informants against heretics as well as spiritual advisers. B. Niccoli, "La biblioteca di Don Pietro da Toledo," in Ideali e passioni nell'Italia religiosa del cinquecento, Bologna, 1962, 131 and 138-39.
Eleonora followed her father's Jesuit sympathies and corresponded with no less than Ignatius Loyola. Her letters to the founder of the Society of Jesus concerned such topics as requests for Jesuit representatives in Florence, spiritual questions, and particularly the founding of a Jesuit college in Florence to be supported by ducal funds. Ignatius, believing Eleonora could be of assistance in the establishment of a Society foothold in Tuscany, sent his illustrious assistant, Diego Lainez, to the Florentine court in July 1547. Lainez was a Spanish priest who had been close to Ignatius from the earliest days of the Jesuits and who was to become the second general of the Society of Jesus.

The Jesuits' primary objective in their relations with Florence always remained the secure establishment of the college. But Eleonora viewed the situation quite differently. In her opinion, the members of the Society in Florence were to answer first to her own private spiritual needs and those of her daughters. In 1555, the duchess defied not only Ignatius but even the pope in an attempt to detain Lainez from his mission to the Imperial Diet at Augsburg.

Cosimo's good opinion was not so easily won. When the duke himself was informed of the Jesuits' projected college, he responded warily. Cosimo remarked: "These novelties always prove dangerous," for they "alienate wives from their husbands." Finally, early in 1552, the Jesuits could announce that the college was to be a reality, though it soon became evident that the institution was to be a modest one. Ignatius wrote boldly to Eleonora that the newly founded college was hardly worthy of such powerful princes—an obvious hint that her generosity was less than adequate. Cosimo simply replied that the Jesuits already had enough money.

The Jesuits' continued presence near Eleonora during the later 1540s and early half of the 1550s—years in which Bronzino was still employed on the

30. Rahner, 106. Eleonora willed the college 200 scudi, a bequest that made her a part-founder. For a fairly detailed account of Ignatius's correspondence with Eleonora, see the last chapter in Rahner, part 1.
31. In 1546, Loyola sent a young secretary, the only recently ordained Juan de Polanco, to test the court's receptivity. Polanco, in his eagerness, apparently failed to respect Eleonora's love for finery, and insisted, in the name of religious piety, on a more modest style of living at the ducal court. The suggestion was not received warmly by the duchess. In the spring of 1547, Ignatius wrote from Rome reprimanding Polanco on his lack of tact: "...now, with your efforts to reform the duke and duchess at once, you see to what a pass matters have come." Polanco was withdrawn from Florence (Rahner, 114). In 1547, Ignatius sent the more discreet Lainez (ibid., 95).
32. Ibid., 100–103.
33. Ibid., 35.
34. Ibid., 96.
by a floral wreath, which still appears at the center of the vault. What might have inspired this change in imagery, emblematic of a shift from Cosimo’s overarching dynastic ambitions to reverence for the mystic unity of God in three persons?235

The Trinity was important as a common object of devotion in Ignatius’s writings, both in his account of personal trinitarian experience and in the

35. The arms still visible beneath the Trinity are more complex than those of the Frankfurt drawing, Cox-Reeck surmises that this intermediary image probably resembled the arms with eagle and crown in the center of the vault of the duchess’s nearby Camera Verde, which was painted by Raffaello Ghirlandaio in 1542 (1971, 13 n. 33). Smyth placed the Trinity in the mid-1540s or early 1550s (1971, 54 n. 23), while Cox-Reeck first dated it to the early 1560s (1971, 12–13). Allegri and Cecchi (28) postulate that the change occurred around February 1564 (Florentine dating) because of the payment “per spece facta el Bronzino pitore nel rassettare la cappella ch’ell nella Camera Verde, in diverse specie.” Cox-Reeck, who publishes this document and corrects the date—1564—has recently dated the execution of the Trinity to that year, when the chapel was being “tidied up” for the marriage of Francesco in December (1993, 88, doc. 27). Her argument is attractive, particularly as the 1565 restoration might have been a moment in which the coat-of-arms of the mother of the groom may have been deemed no longer appropriate. Documents, however, do not help us much with this troublesome but crucial image, since it could be needlessly and inexpensively rendered by an assistant in a negligible amount of time. As with Bronzino’s letter of 1564, the 1565 payment is suggestive but not specific enough to indicate exactly which part of the decoration was involved; because of the near state of completion of the chapel from the mid-1550s, it may still be conjectured that the imagery had been planned, if not executed, before Eleonora’s death. Two factors argue for a return to an earlier dating. First, the painting, so emblematic as to be difficult to judge on a stylistic basis, is not dissimilar in function and symbolic level to the sudarium over Salvati’s tapestry of the Lamentation (1545–46), which may have been the focal point of the devotion from the removal of the original Lamentation panel in 1545 to 1553, as Cox-Reeck has herself convincingly suggested. Although the iconography is different, the reduction of a potent Christian concept to an iconic human countenance that exists on a spatially anomalous plane, and yet dominates the main suggestive composition, has a precedent in the tapestry, where the face of Christ is flanked instead by the combined arms of the Medici/Toledo houses—a possible intermediary stage in Eleonora’s fluctuating program. Second, the condemnation of such eccentric religious imagery took place already at the last session of the Council of Trent in December 1563 (P. Barocci, Trattati d’arte del cinquecento, Bari, 1961, ii. 521 n. 2), and in 1564 Giovanni Andrea Gili, in his Degli errori de’ Pittori circa Pictura, is already specific concerning the heterodoxy of the tricephalic representation of the Trinity in Gili’s dialogue, Vincenzo corrects Toldo, saying, “Pianta pare eretta il dipinse la Trinità con tre teste in un sol busto, come in molti luoghi se vede... perché, se ben l’essenza è sola, le persone sono distinte, e questo, oltre che io lo stimo eretico, io lo anco mostruoso” (ibid., ii. 36). The depiction of the Trinity as three unified faces was already condemned in the fifteenth century by Antoninus, the bishop of Florence (C. Gilbert, “The Archbishop on the Painters of Florence,” Art Bulletin xii [1930]: 76), and might thus be seen as specifically non-Florentine. The inclusion of this iconography in the chapel therefore must belong to a particular moment before the attentive restrictions of the Counter-Reformation, and it helps date the change, also to a period before the mid-1560s. The special emphasis on the Trinity promised by the Jesuits, Eleonora’s spiritual advisers, seems to beg a connection or at least counterexplanation. Even if the image is posthumous, it is also possible that the transformation of the outmoded heraldic image could have incorporated an icon dear to Eleonora’s beliefs, and recognizable as such to her son, embarking on his own dynastic adventure together with his new wife.
while reemphasizing the Christian as opposed to Medicean implications of the *Miraculous Spring* and *Gathering of Manna* on the walls to either side. This last small passage of fresco completes the Incarnation theme and becomes a reminder of the universal importance of Christ's flesh and blood and its place in the Catholic ritual. The Counter-Reformation import of this later fresco is unmistakable, for the cloth is pulled from the globe to expose southern Europe, leaving the Protestant north cloaked in darkness. The global dominance of the eucharistic emblem reflects, too, the zeal for universal faith that was to distinguish the Jesuits in the history of Catholicism. While Smyth and Cox-Rearick had originally included this fresco segment in the changes made in the 1560s, it has more recently been suggested that it is part of a later intervention. However, the iconographical consistency of this image with the other changes under Bronzino, as well as the closeness of one of the putti to a similar figure in Bronzino's work of c. 1555, allows for the possibility that the painting was planned much earlier. As a late addition to the fresco cycle, this painting completes the evolution of the program toward an increasingly Christian message, for here the objects of the Mass surmount the world.

Confined by her Spanish upbringing, the restrictions of Renaissance society, and even by the prominence of her position as Duchess of Florence, Eleonora found in religion one of the few acceptable feminine outlets of personal expression. It was reported to Ignatius Loyola in Rome that she had impulsively exclaimed: "I would give 20,000 ducats to become a Jesuit.

36. In the "autobiography" of Ignatius, written by Father Luis Gonçalves da Câmara in Rome during the last years of the saint's life, "five points" on missions of special calling are listed. The first relates Loyola's constant devotion to the Trinity, which finally culminated in the form of a vision. "As a result the impression of experiencing great devotion while praying to the Most Holy Trinity has remained with him throughout his life"; see J. O'Callaghan, trans., and J. C. Ohm, ed., *The Autobiography of St. Ignatius Loyola*, New York, 1974, 37–38.


38. Ibid., 49.

39. Ibid., 49–50.

40. Smyth, 1971, 54 n. 23, dated the sopraporta to 1564, noting the inconsistency of style. Allegri and Cecchi (24 and 28, with an incorrect date of 1581) first placed the painting to the latter date, attributing it to Allori, and Cox-Rearick (1993, 90, 367 n. 54, and doc. 29) supports this conclusion (correcting the date of the document to 1582). The putto with Chalice and Host are much less sensitively drawn and colored than the rest of the frescos, and were certainly done at a later period, indeed perhaps by Allori. Just how much later this portion was done is problematic. Cox-Rearick, following the evidence of Allegri and Cecchi's document, believes that the sopraporta was executed after a door was cut into the wall to provide access to the newly decorated terrace. The payment refers only to the purchase of new brass doorknobs, which does not in itself necessarily indicate the date or extent of the modification. Cox-Rearick also contends that the flanking scenes of *The Miraculous Spring* and *The Fall of Manna* (completed in May 1543; 62) were "drastically modified" (130–32) in 1582, and that the door replaced approximately ten giornate of fresco (67, 130–32). The two compositions, however, seem to me perfectly adapted to the present surface, door included, and the preparatory drawings (in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan, ibid., fig. 90, and in the Uffizi, fig. 84) also substantiate the probability that the frescoes of the north wall as well today essentially reflect Bronzino's original design.

41. The figure to the right exhibits a pose resembling that of the Eros of Bronzino's *Venus, Cupid, and a Satyr* in the Galleria Colonna, Rome, which is dated to about 1555.
myself, if I were a man!" As a woman, and as duchess, she asserted her limited power by transforming her chapel from Medicean panegyric to an image of Counter-Reformation piety.

The study presented above was formulated before the appearance of Janet Cox-Rearick's authoritative 1993 volume on the chapel. Some points have been updated in light of her discoveries, especially documentary, and some arguments presented in the footnotes that question or at least suggest further consideration of her conclusions, particularly concerning the chronology of changes made in the chapel. In a few cases, her publication of the archival background has made my interpretations, formed without knowledge of the new material, problematic; the eucharistic *sopraporta*, for example, may well fall after Eleonora's direct sponsorship. I still believe, following Vasari, that the duchess ordered and was responsible for the content of the *Annunciation* panels, and that the *Trinity* in the vault should not be dismissed from Eleonora's activity. Cox-Rearick has drawn attention to two additional works of art, which enrich but also complicate the history of the chapel: the tapestry *design* of the *Lamentation*, by Salviati, and a fascinating drawing in a private collection in Amherst, attributed to Bandinelli and presented by Cox-Rearick as an early idea possibly related in some way to the duchess's altarpiece. Her discovery of the connection between these works and the chapel should stimulate new controversy on the duchess's role in the culture of the Medici court, since both constitute evidence for an even earlier participation in the chapel program than my essay has suggested. (It is difficult to believe that an artist could portray the duchess, as in the c. 1540 drawing, with disheveled hair and in a pose of open spiritual ecstasy, so at variance with the extreme composures of her official image in Bronzino's portraits, without her own consent.) In confronting afresh the problem of Eleonora's contribution to the program of her own chapel, I feel that future studies may reveal her influence to have been earlier and more vigorous than previous scholars, myself included, have assumed. Indeed, Bruce Edelstein, in his review of Cox-Rearick's book, has challenged the author for her tendency to override Eleonora's influence with Cosimo's, and argues strenuously for a reinvestigation of the duchess as patron.

Eleonora's chapel cannot be understood without further consideration of her own religious beliefs and contacts; this essay is intended to initiate further discussion of this aspect of Florentine cultural history. The particularly isolated situation of the chapel, deep within Eleonora's private sanctum, and the fact that in 1549 even the ever-serviceable Riccio had to write her at Poggio a Caiano for the chapel keys suggest the chapel was not a court showpiece where Cosimo could broadcast his dynastic and political ambitions but was exclusively Eleonora's personal domain. The documentation of liturgical objects and decorations, including a rather elaborate *pax*, stored in the *guardaroba* for Eleonora's use in the chapel, also speaks for her interest in decorating and outfitting the chapel for private worship. Eleonora also begins to emerge even by Cox-Rearick's account as a political presence surprisingly early in her marriage. In 1541 and 1543, she is entrusted as acting regent in Cosimo's absence. Finally, and most important, the paintings themselves warrant reexamination for evidence of the duchess's own interests. Bronzino's *Moses* cycle has a decidedly "feminine" aspect, for the unusual number of female figures and the earnestness with which these female characters participate in the sacred drama. Not only is the exclamatory figure in the *Lamentation* a mirror for the duchess's piety, but many of the female figures take a prominent part in the Moses narratives. Cox-Rearick's analysis of the *Moses Appointing Joshua* identifies the pregnant woman on the right as a type for Eleonora, within a painting that celebrates the birth of Francesco and the continuation of Medici rule. Surely such an event was as important for the mother as for the father. Many of Bronzino's women in the chapel narratives are mothers, whose spiritual caretaking is illustrated, for instance, in the two women in *The Miraculous Spring*; in concert with a figural diagonal that parallels the angle of Moses' rod, one mother holds a bowl of the miraculous water to an infant who greedily drinks, while the second balances a roaring, still-thirsty baby on her shoulder and leans to diph her bowl from the spring. The men may clumsily thrust their faces to the water with no thought other than 

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42. Rahner, 106. This outcry was Eleonora's statement of admiration for the religious zeal of Cristofalo Trevisano, a court favorite who, under the duchess's encouragement, became an eager member of the Society of Jesus.

43. Bruce Edelstein, "Janet Cox-Rearick, Bronzino's Chapel of Eleonora in the Palazzo Vecchio," *California Studies in the History of Art*, xxxix, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1993, as reviewed in

44. Cox-Rearick, 1993, 80.
45. Ibid., 72 and 81.
46. Ibid., 34–35.
47. Ibid., 310–19.
their own satisfaction and salvation, in contrast with the women's more complex responsibilities.

Whose chapel was it? Cosimo's deliberate self-assertion of Medici power by means of Old Testament imagery surely formed aspects of the program, but the complexity of the iconography and visual elegance of the paintings may in time reveal the growing influence of his wife. Cox-Rearick discusses which academicians of the court may have advised Bronzino—Giambullari and Gelli being the most likely candidates—but the question remains, to whom did they respond? If Bandinelli, as first patronized by Cosimo, grew to depend particularly on Eleonora's sponsorship, the advisers for the chapel program could have likewise been increasingly subject to the will of the duchess. In conclusion, an appraisal of Eleonora as patron still remains to be written.

Sheila ffolliott

THE IDEAL QUEENLY PATRON OF THE RENAISSANCE

Catherine de' Medici Defining Herself or Defined by Others?

Like the late twentieth century, the Renaissance produced a number of "how-to" books, many of which, like Machiavelli's Prince or Castiglione's Courtier, articulated or advocated ideal behaviors. In 1586, Nicolas Houel, the Parisian apothecary who, in 1562, had presented then queen-regent Catherine de' Medici with an illustrated "how-to" manuscript modeled on the ancient queen Artemisia, dedicated another book to the queen mother. This time it was a published work: History of the Devotion, Piety, and Charity of the Illustrious Queens of France, together with the Churches, Monasteries, Hospitals, and Colleges that they have founded and built in diverse parts of the kingdom: By means of which foundations God has given them fruitful and happy issue (that is, children, specifically male). Although art patronage had a place in Houel's earlier idealization of queenly life, his later book represents, significantly, the first attempt to chronicle over time the patronage activity of a group of women as a class—in this case

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