‘ON ACCOUNT OF HIGH MERITS’: THE PORTRAIT MEDALS OF ISABELLA D’ESTE AND THE IMAGE OF THE FEMALE COLLECTOR

BY
SIERRA HALL

THESIS
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Adviser:
Associate Professor Lisa Rosenthal
Isabella d’Este was among the most prominent female collectors in early modern Italy. While her collection of art and antiquities was quite large and diverse, this thesis focuses on a particularly unique object—her opulently embellished personal portrait medal. This gold and diamond encrusted medal was kept in Isabella’s private studiolo; however, there was also a base medal version which was mass produced and widely circulated. This paper examines the ways Isabella d’Este negotiated her anomalous position as a woman patron and collector within the courtly practices of Humanism. In particular, the discussion focuses on the ways in which the portrait medals functioned as a means of identity construction within both the private, elite space of her studiolo and wider realm of public exchange and discourse. The dual functions and meanings of these medals enable us to see how Isabella constructed her identity as a collector, an intellectual, a public figure, and a courtly woman of “high merit.”
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INTRODUCTION: ISABELLA D’ESTE AND HER PORTRAIT MEDALS

In Isabella d’Este’s vast, diverse collection, perhaps the most striking and unique object is her gem-encrusted portrait medal. [Figure 1] The center looks like a traditional medal, containing an idealized portrait of the patron herself. Appearing in profile, her facial features appear gentle and feminine. Her hair is styled neatly in a loose twist at the nape of her neck, accentuating her natural curls. The dress she wears is modest and tasteful and includes embellishment along the neckline. Encircling her is her name and title, designating her as elite both by birth and marriage. On the reverse is an allegorical female figure, likely of victory. She holds a staff and a quill, denoting her dual abilities in leadership and scholasticism. Above her is the astrological figure Sagittarius, who alludes to the all-powerful Jupiter of Roman mythology. The Latin motto surrounding these figures reads “BENEMERENTIUM ERGO,” translating to “on account of high merits.” With this phrase, Isabella’s claim to a privileged position is supported on the basis of her intellect, personal character, and astrological providence.

While the center portion of the object was mass produced in inexpensive metals and widely distributed [Figure 2], it is the frame which makes this medal so remarkable. Cast from gold, the medal is encircled by a swathe of gemstones. Isabella’s name is spelled out in diamonds, as well as a letter ‘M’ for Mantua, the city-state she presided over. Between the letters, small red gems are arranged in a floral pattern and the edge of the medal is trimmed with woven strands of gold. On the reverse of the frame, a decorative foliate pattern is carefully incised. This sort of ornate portrait medal was highly unusual and presents a multitude of questions as to its production, use, and significance. Isabella’s position in her court was

extraordinary, as she was not only a patron and collector, but also a woman with great political power. Using her portrait medals, she was able to construct and disseminate a positive self-image both to the broader public and within the privileged realm of the court.

Over the course of the past century, scholarly attention has largely focused on the paintings in Isabella’s collection. More recent research has explored collecting practices within early modern courts. This broader awareness of material culture has created new interest in objects such as coins and medals, though this particular item has received relatively little attention. Isabella’s medals provide a noteworthy account of the ways in which women used portrait medals for self-fashioning and negotiation of social positioning. This was especially important in Isabella’s case, as she operated within the precarious terrain of female patronage and collecting. Within Mantua and beyond, her identity was shaped by her medal, serving as a tangible demonstration of her great ambition in collecting, Humanism, and leadership.

Isabella was born in 1474 in Ferrara, a northern Italian court city with a culture rich in Humanist scholarship and artistic production. Her father, Ercole I d’Este, carried on the Ferrarese lineage with his wife Eleonora d’Aragona, who came from the prominent and influential court of Naples. In the tradition of her family, Isabella was educated alongside her siblings in Humanist thought, literature, mythology, and antiquarian history. She took great interest in these subjects, later incorporating them into her artistic patronage. While these intellectual pursuits were quite typical of the Renaissance, they were far less prevalent amongst women. Isabella’s precociousness and determination made her a somewhat unusual figure within early modern history, especially considering her prominence as a collector.

In 1490, Isabella married Francesco II Gonzaga and became the Marchioness of Mantua. The Gonzaga family’s court, also located in northern Italy, had a less robust artistic and intellectual culture than Ferrara. Francesco had a successful military career which required him to spend long periods away from home. For Isabella, this was an opportunity to establish herself as a patron, collector, and cultural tastemaker. Indeed, she fostered a lively court environment where music, poetry, and art flourished. She carried on the legacy of art and antiquity collecting established by her Ferrarese family members. Her ability to amass such a grand collection was an impressive feat, not only because she was a woman, but also because she was positioned in a less affluent court. Nonetheless, these obstacles did not deter her, and she constructed a collection that rivaled even the wealthiest and most well-connected families.3

Isabella’s success cannot be appreciated without an understanding of the social and cultural landscape of early modern Italy. The most notable developments in this era came with the reawakening of interest in antiquity and the rise of Humanist thought, which changed the course of art, literature, and scholarship immeasurably. Along with these changes came shifts in social attitudes and understandings of gender and personal identity. These new ideals liberated male Humanists, granting them the ability to construct and express new forms of individuality. For women, however, they were constraining. A return to the mentalities of antiquity placed strict boundaries around female behavior and conduct. In this context, it was more difficult for a woman like Isabella to build a collection or a well-defined personal identity. For this reason, much of her patronage serves to legitimate and justify herself as a leader, an intellectual, and a collector.4

3 For more information about Isabella and her collecting, see C. Brown (2005), Campbell (2006), Rossi (2003), and San Juan (1991).
4 For more information about women’s roles in the early modern period, see Kelly (1984). This text was foundational to scholarship on Renaissance women.
This is particularly true of her portrait medal, which she distributed amongst both the Mantuan public and the wider network of the nobility. The terrain of patronage, collecting, and politics was challenging to navigate, as missteps could lead to personal disparagement. Within the broader public, Isabella used her medal to present herself as a virtuous and intelligent woman. Simultaneously, the medal reinforced her worthiness to hold such a powerful and influential role. However, the jeweled version of the medal that she displayed privately served a different purpose. With this version, Isabella inventively displayed her personal interests in Humanism and antiquity, as well as the splendor and magnificence of her collection.

This thesis will examine the ways in which Isabella d’Este negotiated her anomalous position as a woman patron and collector within the courtly practices of Humanism. In particular, the discussion will focus on her portrait medals as a means of self-fashioning both within the private, elite space of her studiolo and wider realm of public exchange and discourse. The dual functions and meanings of these medals will enable us to see how Isabella constructed her identity as a collector, an intellectual, a public figure, and a courtly woman.
THE STUDIOLO AND THE DOMESTIC SPACES OF HUMANISM

Around the turn of the fifteenth century, the studiolo emerged as new kind of domestic space. The studiolo was a small, secluded study, often directly adjoined to the owner’s bedroom. These rooms were filled with books, paintings, and antiquities and were used for private leisure and contemplation. The studiolo was also intrinsically gendered. These spaces were dedicated to Humanist intellectual pursuits, which were culturally recognized as masculine. For women, constructing a studiolo was not only unusual, but transgressive. Women who participated in scholarship, antiquity collecting, and artistic patronage were stepping outside the boundaries of conventional female behavior and risked public query about their personal character and virtue. It is within this precarious context that Isabella assembled her collection and her studiolo space. While her action came with risks, Isabella’s studiolo was integral to her personal identity within the Mantuan court, as well as her broader self-fashioning as a patron and collector.

During the early modern period, scholars across the Italian peninsula collectively shifted their focus from their medieval surroundings towards their Roman history. In the Middle Ages, study and veneration of ancient Rome’s pagan culture was discouraged. Piety and devotion to the church ranked above worldly concerns and, fittingly, most pre-modern scholars were monks and other monastic figures whose learning was in the service of God. Curiosity about ancient culture slowly resurfaced, however, and many authors, artists, and philosophers began exploring topics outside of the church. Among these interests were Roman mythology, antiquarian society and government, ancient philosophy, and perhaps most importantly, the individual. The introspective study of self-development, identity construction, and personal autonomy gradually evolved into

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Humanism, a movement which emphasized the ethics, values, and responsibilities of the individual as a member of their family and community.⁶

This way of thinking appealed to members the upper classes and nobility. Educated elites had long been patrons of the arts, but during the Renaissance, learning and collecting turned from responsibilities to passions. Leisure time was consumed with reading and discussing literature, carefully examining antiquities, or composing letters to friends and colleagues on the merits of painting or sculpture. Gradually, the acquisition of knowledge became intrinsically tied to personal ownership. To possess and interact with the material artifacts of antiquity was to learn from them, claiming an “intellectual ownership of the concepts [they] transmitted.”⁷ The growth of this Humanist intellectualism amongst the upper classes fueled an enormous rise in collecting, particularly of books, ancient objects, and contemporary art. The desire to collect, as well as competition amongst collectors, precipitated a shift towards a consumption-driven economy. This was likewise a contributing factor in the development of early capitalism. These rich and ever-evolving collections became some of the most important signs of social and intellectual honor, demonstrating that it was no longer enough to simply be wealthy—one needed also to be educated, cultured, and connected to the Humanist world of arts and philosophy.

**The Studiolo: Public and Private**

As Humanism expanded amongst the elite, there arose a need for dedicated spaces to display their collections and enact their intellectual values. Architects designed *palazzi* with these new requirements in mind, designating space for the collector’s *studiolo*. The concept for

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⁶ For more information about Humanism, especially regarding female Humanists, see Clark (2013), Kelly (1984), King (1980, Rossi (2003), Ruvoldt (2006), and San Juan (1991).
these spaces evolved from pre-modern monastic book-lined cells and philosophers’ studies, which were both historically the sites where most scholarship was produced. Though these earlier studies represented different intellectual communities, they provided similar architectural and theoretical models. The studiolo, conceived of as a space dedicated to humanist learning and coded as the domain of elite men, was only rarely part of the personal apartments of aristocratic women.

During the Renaissance, the studiolo had dual, and perhaps even competing, functions. At some times, it was meant for private intellectual activities, such as reading, writing, and contemplating one’s collection. Conversely, the space was also used for holding small gatherings, which included musical performances, lively discussions, and even games. This more social function of the studiolo was an innovation specific to the early modern era, highlighting the increasing convergence of intellectualism and leisure.

For these wealthy patrons, expenditure for art, antiquities, and literature was recognized as virtuous and honorable. Using wealth in the pursuit of knowledge and to support preeminent thinkers and artists was perhaps more prestigious than simple opulence. This is not to suggest, however, that luxury played no role in early modern consumption. Rather, the markers of wealth and prestige expanded to include the patronage of art and architecture, as well as the collection and preservation of ancient artifacts. Historians have long recognized these spending patterns as “conspicuous consumption,” or the purchase of goods with the intention of elevating one’s status

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9 J. Graham Pollard, “The Italian Renaissance Medal: Collecting and Connoisseurship,” *Studies in the History of Art* 21 (1987): 162. One such game was directly related to the practice of numismatic collecting, with players competing to invent the best reverse image for another player’s hypothetical portrait medal.
and prestige.\textsuperscript{10} Forming a comprehensive and magnificent collection was perhaps the most important way to accomplish this, and the construction of a \textit{studiolo} established a dedicated space for this activity.

For many collectors, their \textit{studiolo} was not just a place to keep their collection, but an extension of the collection itself. Their spaces were often ornately decorated and fitted with cabinets or bookshelves used for storage and display of antiquities, art objects, and books. Perhaps the most prominent example of a rich, luxurious \textit{studiolo} interior is that of Federico da Montefeltro, Lord of Urbino. [Figure 3] The walls of the room, designed by Francesco di Giorgio Martini, are paneled from floor to ceiling in intricate wooden intarsia which mimics the appearance of items found in typical \textit{studiolo}. The upper portion of the walls feature faux cabinets, some propped open to display a wide variety of objects such as musical instruments, books, mathematical apparatuses, antique vases, and even exotic birds. Beneath them are embellished panels and a row of illusory tables which, like the cabinet doors above them, employ linear perspective very effectively.

While this highly elaborate and illusionistic design is perhaps more ostentatious than the average \textit{studiolo}, it illustrates the ways in which the room itself could be visually and intellectually stimulating. This style of decoration also makes visual reference to “choir stalls and sacristies,” which were frequently adorned with wooden intarsia.\textsuperscript{11} This creates a parallel between the church and the secular space of the \textit{studiolo}, which for many collectors, was spiritually enriching in its own right. In keeping with the social functions of elite courtly life,

\textsuperscript{10} The term conspicuous consumption was coined by Thorstein Veblen in 1899 to describe the economic activities of the “leisure class,” but has been used by many art historians in discussions of the Renaissance elite. For more information, see Baxandall (1972), Goldthwaite (1989), O’Malley and Welch (2007), and Hohti (2010).
most spaces within a *palazzo* were semi-public and had frequent traffic in and out. There were also very few rooms which were meant entirely for a single person’s use; even the bedrooms and other personal apartments were not exclusively private. The *studiolo*, however, had a clearly defined owner and was not generally entered without invitation. As such, the space served as a place of respite within the bustling court. In their private space, the collector could peruse books of ancient poetry, organize their portrait medals, write letters to friends and colleagues, or create detailed family records. These activities, though productive, were understood as a form of leisure and contributed to the development of one’s Humanist character and virtue.

The *studiolo* was also, for many collectors, the place they kept their most prized possessions. Paintings were often commissioned specifically for the space, sometimes signifying an overarching theme or virtue. Mythological scenes were among the most popular subjects, often representing ideals of scholasticism, wisdom, bravery, love, or morality. These themes interacted with the texts lining the shelves and the various antiquities, medals, and other ornaments in the room, providing a space for immersive, meditative thought about history, culture, and the self. The collection’s presence in the *studiolo* was not simply for aesthetic pleasure, but also for more serious intellectual engagement.

The space was also the setting for a variety of social functions. At times, it served as a private meeting place for business and governmental negotiations, and at others it was the location for small get togethers between friends and courtiers. Many of these social gatherings focused on the same kinds of intellectual and creative topics collectors contemplated alone in their *studiolo*. Attendees listened to the recitation of poetry, performed musical instruments, or debated the symbolism of the paintings on the walls. This communal function of the *studiolo*

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12 Thornton, *The Scholar in His Study: Ownership and Experience in Renaissance Italy*, 1.
underscores the growing concept of intellectual pleasure and leisure. The space served as an intimate setting for personal connections among Humanists, greatly aided by the wealth of art objects surrounding them.

Within the dual context of private contemplation and courtly enactment of Humanist values, Isabella constructed her own collection and studiolo. While there are a number of prominent women who created such spaces for themselves, the studiolo has long been associated with ideas of male intellectualism and leisure.\textsuperscript{13} The legacy of the studiolo in Ferrara began with Leonello d’Este, Isabella’s uncle and prominent Humanist during his reign as Duke. Indeed, Isabella was acutely aware of the masculine connotations of the studiolo, but chose to pursue its creation, taking direct inspiration from her father and brother. It is perhaps because of this gendered transgression that she became so conscious of the ways in which her collection reflected on her, not only as an intellectual but as a woman. These concerns motivated a new kind of feminine collecting in which the express purpose was to uphold their chastity, virtue, and personal character.

**The Feminine Studiolo**

One of Isabella’s first orders of business upon arriving in Mantua was the organization and usage of her personal apartments. Her rooms in the Castello di San Giorgio were primarily located on the piano nobile and were multifunctional, serving as bed chambers, reception spaces, or guest rooms at different times.\textsuperscript{14} The decoration of the rooms changed often, reflecting the present use of the space, though some had more spectacular, permanent decoration like frescoed

\textsuperscript{13} For more information about the gendered connotations of the studiolo, see Campbell (2006), Clark (2013), Rossi (2003), and Thornton (1997).

walls or wooden intarsia. Isabella’s use of intarsia was inspired by the sacristy in the Basilica of San Marco, as well as the aforementioned studiolo in Gubbio. The only rooms which maintained a singular purpose were her studiolo and grotta, which had distinct functions. The studiolo was used as a library and was decorated with mythological paintings. The grotta, located directly below the studiolo, was used as a space for storage and display of antiquities. While the grotta was a separate room, it is considered an extension of the studiolo itself. The creation of this auxiliary room is likely due to the architectural constraints of Isabella’s apartments and her need for extra storage for her large collection. For the purposes of this thesis, the terms can largely be used interchangeably.

It was somewhat unusual for women to dedicate space in their apartments for a studiolo, and even more so to designate two such rooms. Isabella was clear about her desire to have these rooms early on, however. During a 1491 visit to Ferrara—only one year after her marriage—Isabella wrote multiple stern letters to Mantuan painter Giovanni Luca Liombeni concerning the completion timeline of her studiolo. She warned him to hurry up, writing “if you have not finished the studiolo by the time we return, we will have you imprisoned in the bridge dungeon, and that will be no joke.” In her next letter, she provided him with some of the equine devices she wanted included in the frieze and requested that he paint the insides of the armoires. She made clear her expectations, explaining she wanted “nothing gauche: we would only make you redo it all at your own expense and then send you to the dungeon for the whole winter.”

Though Isabella’s tone is less than friendly, her letters unmistakably illustrate the central importance of the studiolo to the construction of her identity. The urgency of her writing conveys

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15 Ibid., 39.
17 Ibid., 47.
the ambition and drive she had to build a collection, as well as a proper place to store it. The *studiolo* was integral to her self-fashioning as a collector, especially as a new figure in the Mantuan court.

Isabella’s early life in Ferrara may have motivated her enthusiasm for a *studiolo* as well, as much of her inspiration was drawn from her father, Ercole. His *studiolo* featured a variety of allegorical paintings, which influenced Isabella’s taste for mythological art. She viewed her parents and her brother Alfonso as her patronage rivals, ultimately striving to build the family’s most prestigious and valuable collection. It is also likely that she hoped to emulate her Uncle Leonello, whose *studiolo* was one of the most prominent in northern Italy. It was particularly unusual for a woman to mimic and even compete with her male family members in the realms of collecting and patronage. However, this was Isabella’s driving strategy, and she took her marriage into the Mantuan court as an opportunity to expand her cultural production.

The initial versions of Isabella’s *studiolo* and *grotta* were located in the Castello di San Giorgio, a traditional, moated castle constructed in the late fourteenth century. These rooms are not as thoroughly documented as her later apartments, as no inventories were conducted of the space during her years there. However, following her husband’s death in 1519, she moved her apartments to the ground floor of the Corte Vecchia, which was the older, medieval portion of the Ducal Palace. This was likely because her son, Federico, desired to use her rooms in the Castello for different purposes. It was also a more easily accessible location for Isabella, as the steep stairs of the Castello became increasingly challenging in her advanced age. Though the layout of her the rooms in the Corte Vecchia were far more open, the functions of her *studiolo* and *grotta* remained consistent. In both iterations of her space, she spent much of her time reading, writing letters, and examining her collection. These activities, as well as the space she
did them in, were fundamentally Humanist, making it ever more important to utilize her collection as a reflection of her feminine virtue.

One such enactment of feminine virtue was her use of the studiolo as a space for ephemeral activities, such as musical performance. Music was taught to girls from a young age, and Isabella was noted for her talents in both singing and playing string instruments, such as the lute and the lira da braccio.\(^\text{18}\) She and her court musicians composed a variety of songs, which eventually developed into the genre of frottola.\(^\text{19}\) These songs were intended for either a single singer-lutenist or a small group of vocalists and had light, secular themes. Isabella enjoyed performing both for small groups of friends and at larger events, including her brother’s wedding.\(^\text{20}\) Her talents even drew the attention of prominent musicians and poets who encouraged her to perform their work. After visiting her in Mantua and enjoying a performance in her studiolo, Venetian poet Pietro Bembo wrote a letter to Isabella complementing the “sweetness and mildness with which [she] sang… on that most happy evening.”\(^\text{21}\) The decoration of her studiolo had a variety of reminders of her musical interests as well, such as her ornately decorated instruments and her array of imprese containing musical notations. Her painting Parnassus, produced by Mantegna in 1497, features a mythological scene in which the Muses sing and dance to Apollo’s music.\(^\text{22}\) [Figure 7] For Isabella, music was both personal and communal, even within the confines of her studiolo. She used these musical references in the

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\(^\text{19}\) Ibid., 688.


\(^\text{22}\) Parnassus is discussed more fully in the section “Isabella’s Patronage and Collecting Practices.” For more information, see Campbell (2006), Jones (1981), Rossi (2003), San Juan (1991), Shephard (2011), and Turner (2017).
cultivation of her own identity, drawing inspirations from the Muses as symbols of chaste and refined femininity.

For a woman, the masculine terrain of patronage and collecting was quite difficult to navigate. The interpretations of the art they commissioned could have real and substantial impacts on their reputation. For example, if a painting’s content was construed as sexually suggestive or implied moral impropriety, questions would be raised about the virtue and chastity of the patron. These were precautions that did not need to be taken by their male counterparts. Female art commissions required a new level of consciousness and consideration on the part of both the patron and the artist. For Isabella, these issues were especially present. Most of her patronage included mythological subjects, which were deeply associated with the male intellectual pleasure of the studiolo. Though she aimed to compete with her male family members’ collections, she also looked to her mother as a model of responsible and honorable female patronage.23 Her collection needed to serve not only a personal, aesthetic function, but also construct a public image as a virtuous woman. In order to grapple with the precarious position she occupied, Isabella used her collection to legitimate and justify her cultural, political, and economic power.

23 Isabella’s mother, Eleonora d’Aragona, and her patronage are discussed more fully in the section “Female Patronage Strategies: A Case Study of Eleonora d’Aragona.”
WOMEN AS PATRONS AND COLLECTORS

While building her collection, Isabella encountered a variety of challenges. For women, commissioning and collecting art transgressed the boundaries of female conduct. These were fundamentally masculine activities, and women’s participation could raise questions about their personal character. In order to avoid these consequences, Isabella used her collection as a tool to control her reputation. She was highly conscious of her public identity both as a courtly woman and active collector. By using the example set by her mother, as well as the guidance of her advisors, Isabella commissioned and collected works that openly espoused her intelligence, prudence, and feminine virtue. For this reason, her collection was critically important to both her public and private image, as well as her negotiation of the complexities of early modern womanhood.

As Humanist thought spread across Italy, a shift occurred in the roles prescribed for women, particularly in the domestic spheres of marriage and family. During the medieval era, women enjoyed a degree of autonomy within the feudal system, including the ability to inherit land and property.24 These rights were largely curtailed during the early modern period, as the turn towards classical values encouraged a subservient role for women. Conduct books, such as Alberti’s I Libri Della Famiglia of the mid-fifteenth century, provide insight on the perceived differences between men and women. The text explains that “men are by nature of a more elevated mind… women, on the other hand, are almost all timid by nature, soft, slow, and therefore more useful when they sit still and watch over our things.”25 This book, like many

others, portrays a model wife who is obedient, chaste, and compliant, concerned only with the care of her children and household. Many of these ideas were borrowed from antiquity, an era in which women were considered “physically imperfect males with deficient mental faculties.” This was set in stark contrast to the Renaissance man, who was erudite, sociable, and sophisticated.

Young girls’ educations were meant to mold them into virtuous women prepared for the demands of marriage, which were often arranged for them early in life. Much of their instruction was dedicated to religious topics, morality, music, and dance. In many ways, these lessons were intended to teach suppression of individual identity and regulation of behavior, as women reflected the honor and respectability of their families and husbands. However, while these ideals were widely recognized within early modern culture, things were often quite different in practice. Many women, including Isabella, received more robust Humanist educations, exploring literature, history, philosophy, and language. While this provided them certain scholarly advantages, it also exceeded female norms. This could lead to speculation on their moral character, as women who participated more fully in intellectual and social spheres were often perceived as morally questionable and unchaste, a disgrace to themselves and their husbands. Striking a balance between expressing personal identity and embodying virtuous femininity was a crucial challenge for many women, shaping the way they interacted with the worlds of patronage and collecting.

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Exchange in the Community of Collectors

Amongst elite male collectors, exchange and trade was an integral facet of collecting. Many viewed collecting as an inherently social activity, especially within the courts. Collectors hosted visitors in their studioli and their meetings frequently included trading coins, books, and small antiquities. To attract visitors, collections were advertised through inventories and letters, such as invitations from the collector him or herself or testimonies from visitors to their friends. These collectors formed active social circles and frequently visited one another’s collections, something Dora Thornton has described as a “visiting circuit.”

Just like these collectors, the objects within a collection were very mobile as well, travelling within the wide networks of trade and gift-giving that extended across the Italian peninsula. Collectors often sent letters to request to borrow books, to give their friends coins and medals, or to ask associates to keep their eyes out for desired objects. The circulation of goods could be driven by friendship or intellectual curiosity, but it could also be strategic and politically motivated. Gift giving amongst the nobility could signify anything from military alliances to marriage arrangements to appeasements, making it an extraordinarily important social language. For a courtly collector, the ownership of such gifts signified their skill in diplomacy and negotiation of relationships with their neighboring city-states. These goods were often proudly displayed and readily shown to visitors, as “good governance was closely linked to the possession and display of culture.”

Likewise, women had their own rich, complex culture of gift-giving and exchange. These practices had deep roots in feminine social culture and generally revolved around the most

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28 Thornton, *The Scholar in His Study: Ownership and Experience in Renaissance Italy*, 114.
important milestones of a woman’s life—her marriage and the births of her children. One such example is *cassoni*, or ornate chests given to women for their weddings.\(^{30}\) Both the interior and exterior of these items were intricately painted, carved, gilded, or decorated with wooden intarsia.\(^{31}\) The imagery often included allegories of love and chastity, as well as “symbols of good luck and fertility.”\(^{32}\) The chests were carried in a processional from the bride’s familial home to that of her husband. Inside were a variety of linens, dishes, dresses, and jewels. These items, along with the *cassone* itself, allowed the bride to set up her new household. It was also customary for expectant mothers to receive maiolica birth trays from their friends, sisters, and other family members.\(^{33}\) These trays were used to serve food to the new mother after birthing, but they were often kept as mementos, either tucked away in storage or left out as decorations.\(^{34}\)

Isabella herself was an active participant in these social exchange networks. She gave and received traditionally feminine gifts, such as birth trays, maiolica dishes, and linens. At the same time, she was also an active participant in the Humanist systems of trade and exchange. This proved to be challenging, as she was simultaneously participating in two separate and highly gendered networks of exchange. Beyond the exchange of objects associated with her role as wife and mother, her ability to meet and negotiate with other collectors was vastly limited. Instead, she used alternative methods to obtain items and raise funds. She often relied on the generosity of her friends and associates to help build her collection, accepting both financial and physical donations. This was an economic necessity for her, as the Mantuan court did not possess the

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\(^{32}\) Ibid., 120.


same lucrative revenue streams as larger courts. Some estimates attribute a substantial portion of her collection to gifts, with Rossi suggesting they account for “over two-thirds of her acquisitions between 1497 and 1506.”

Her own purchases were generally coordinated by agents and contacts she maintained throughout the Italian peninsula. Though Isabella held considerable power as a political figure and prominent collector, women were very much dependent upon others to procure their goods. Leaving home, especially unaccompanied, was a near impossibility for noble women, as it would have severe consequences for their reputation and character. This was perhaps doubly true for visiting antiquity markets or artists’ studios, which were understood as distinctly masculine spaces. The letters Isabella sent to her agents requested the negotiation, purchase, and trade of a wide variety of objects, from fine textiles to ancient coins. These contacts were particularly important for the purchase of antiquities, as the majority were bought in sold in Rome, a significant distance from Mantua.

Isabella was also willing to circulate items from her collection amongst her friends and family, though she did so cautiously and protectively. In a 1518 letter, she provided instructions to Cesare d’Aragona on how to use and care for the book she loaned him by early medieval Greek author Eustathius. She wrote, “I pray Your Lordship please have it kept carefully and see that it does not come into the hands of too many people, because since it is a rare thing it is to be held dear. Nor should you let many people see it, in order not to diminish its reputation.” Isabella’s request that he keep the text to himself is perhaps surprising, as possessing such a rare and special book would surely have given Isabella a great deal of prestige. Rather, her assertion

that she does not wish to “diminish its reputation” seems to imply that her object, and indeed many other collected objects, had a level of exclusivity and required viewers to earn the privilege of experiencing them. In some ways, this personifies the book and imbues it with a sense of agency, suggesting that it had its own life history and social status to protect.\textsuperscript{37} Antiquities, by their very nature, were transitory objects that had connections to a vast web of people across time. Often, collectors “sought to associate their names permanently” with items while they were in their possession, either by altering them in some way or exercising control over their use and circulation.\textsuperscript{38}

Though Isabella’s book had been passed down through centuries and countless owners, it was her possession and its legacy and availability were hers to determine. By trusting Cesare to respect and guard her text, she was enacting the same sort of protections that guarded her personal reputation, both as a collector and a virtuous woman. This letter illuminates the sort of emotional and intellectual value a single item could have to Isabella. Certainly, this contradicts the unfortunate reputation she gained in the twentieth century as an “undiscerning, tyrannical, and greedy” collector who only desired to have largest and most ostentatious collection.\textsuperscript{39} Rather, the objects in her collection were selected for their intellectual, philosophical, and aesthetic values, as well as the networks which trading and sharing the items could open for her.

\textsuperscript{37} This idea of object agency is thoroughly explored by many new materialist scholars. For more information, see Brown (2001), Gell (1998), and Latour (2005).

\textsuperscript{38} Clark, “Collecting, Exchange, and Sociability in the Renaissance Studiolo,” 180.

\textsuperscript{39} San Juan, “The Court Lady’s Dilemma: Isabella d’Este and Art Collecting in the Renaissance,” 67. See also 76n1.
Female Patronage Strategies: A Case Study of Eleonora d’Aragona

Isabella’s mother, Eleonora d’Aragona, was born to King Ferdinand I and Queen Isabella of Naples in 1450. The Neapolitan court was well respected for its cultural influence, Humanist patronage, and economic power, all of which Eleonora brought to her marriage to Ercole d’Este. The union provided a level of social prestige to the Ferrarese court, particularly because the previous Duke, Borso d’Este, was unmarried. This, along with her Humanist education, afforded Eleonora a unique position of power in Ferrara. Like Eleonora’s family, Ercole was a prolific patron and collector of the arts and was quite interested in mythological painting. Eleonora’s inherited income allowed her some economic freedom, and she often used the money to donate to religious and charitable institutions.40 She also constructed a personal library, largely made up of religious texts including “books of hours, Psalters, offices of the Blessed Virgin, and lives of the saints.”41

Eleonora’s piety carried over into her artistic patronage as well, which included various altarpieces and devotional images. Communicating with artists and commissioning works were understood to be primarily masculine activities, which could put women in a compromising position. Those who did exercise patronage generally focused on religious scenes, as this was a more acceptable genre for women. This was perhaps because the piety they demonstrated overshadowed the moral transgression of participating in such worldly activities and reinforced their virtue and chastity.

One notable exception to this was a trio of panels Eleonora commissioned from the Este’s court artist, Ercole de’ Roberti. These paintings depicted three ancient Roman women: Portia,

40 Ibid., 70.
41 Rossi, "Confronting the “Temple of Chastity”: Isabella d’Este in the Context of the Female Humanists," 95.
Lucretia, and the wife of Hasdrubal. This conveys Eleonora’s interest in Roman history, which likewise moved her to sponsor the production of Humanist “works which promoted the edifying potential of classical literature.” Her choice of subject matter is even more telling about her personal character, however, as each of these women displayed undying devotion to their husbands and were willing to accept death over dishonor. Portia is shown with blood trickling from her foot where it was sliced with a blade, a sign to her husband that she was unafraid of the consequences of the coup he led against Julius Caesar. [Figure 4] Lucretia, seen pointing a dagger at her heart, stands before her husband and his comrade. During her husband’s absence, she was raped by a political rival. This compelled her to commit suicide in preservation of her family’s honor. [Figure 5] Finally, the unnamed wife of Hasdrubal is seen leading her young children by the hand to their demise. The three threw themselves into a burning temple upon seeing Hasdrubal’s defeat and capture by the Romans, demonstrating their ultimately mortal patriotism for Carthage. [Figure 6]

These images are decidedly secular, yet still profess the virtue of their patron. Much like the cycles of historical ‘great men’ which were seen in various studioli, this trio of paintings represented a series of great women for Eleonora to identify herself with. Just as the religious objects she stored in her personal apartments may inspire prayer, these paintings could inspire meditation on the importance of trust, chastity, and fidelity to her husband, as well as loyalty to Ferrara. Such moralizing messages were likely just as potent as religious imagery was for legitimating women’s patronage, permitting them to communicate their taste for Humanism and fine arts in a socially viable manner.

42 San Juan, “The Court Lady’s Dilemma: Isabella d’Este and Art Collecting in the Renaissance,” 70.
With these paintings, Eleonora provided a model to Isabella for balancing cultural production with righteous femininity. Both Eleonora’s religious and secular art reinforced her virtue, allowing her to participate in the masculine realm of patronage in a respectable manner. Nevertheless, Isabella had difficulty identifying completely with her mother’s method. Perhaps inspired by the mythological paintings lining the walls of her father’s studiolo, she took less interest in devotional patronage. In an attempt to satisfy both her personal tastes and her feminine expectations, she opted for a blended approach of her parent’s patronage—namely, mythological paintings which advocated for female virtue and chastity. This was not a compromise without hazards, however, as some of her missteps would later cause controversy. With her identity and reputation up for debate, it was likely very challenging to determine her course of action. With careful consultation and her parents as examples, Isabella was able to build upon their accomplishments and negotiate a highly prestigious position for herself as a prolific and respected female patron.

**Isabella’s Patronage and Collecting Practices**

Selecting the subject matter for her first paintings was a decision to be made with careful thought and intention, as the wrong choice of subject matter or theme could damage Isabella’s reputation and even put her chastity into question. While devotional paintings would have been the safest option, she chose to commission mainly mythological imagery. Her Humanist education prepared her to select the figures and narratives which were appropriate for a courtly woman while still acknowledging her intellectual interests. Indeed, she had the “novel idea” of
hanging mythological works by multiple artists alongside one another, prompting “comparisons of artistic styles… [and] learned discussions on mythological invention.”

Issues of virtue and identity came to the fore, however, upon the display of the first painting she commissioned, *Parnassus* by Mantegna. [Figure 7] The image depicts Mars and Venus standing high on a rocky formation before an unmade bed and delicate greenery. Venus, unlike her lover, is nude, and a strip of golden cloth drapes sensuously around her arms and legs, echoing the intertwining of her hands and feet with Mars’. The small cupid next to them aims his arrow at Vulcan, Venus’ husband, who broods in the cave to the left over his sadness and jealousy. Around him are the tools of his forge, which he uses to construct a net to ensnare the adulterous couple. In the foreground, the nine Muses, devoid of their attributes, form a swirling crowd of song and dance. They appear almost weightless, with their drapery floating behind them and their feet lifting off the ground. Apollo is seated to their left, providing music with his lyre. In the right corner, Mercury with Pegasus look on while a pair of Muses glance over at him, pausing in their song.

The subject matter of both Mars and Venus and of the Muses were exceedingly common in the decoration of *studioli*. The painting was intended to convey a moralizing message, with Mars and Venus representing a sort of “virtuous or celestial” love and Vulcan’s dire emotional state conveying the evils of lust. A male collector would likely identify themself with Mars or Apollo, considering their own personal character in relation to these figures. Though Isabella may have identified herself with the virtuous and erudite Muses, the painting proved problematic for a female patron. Many literary versions of the myth present the union of Mars and Venus

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43 Ibid., 74.
“not [as] adulterous or criminal, but generative,” especially regarding their daughter Harmonia.\footnote{James Grantham Turner, “Mars and Venus in the Net of Art: From Classical Models to the Villa Farnesina,” In *Eros Visible: Art, Sexuality and Antiquity in Renaissance Italy*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017), 90.}

However, the insinuation of an adulterous affair was simply too scandalous for an image commissioned by a woman. Courtiers took the implication rather literally, starting rumors that the nude Venus was a portrait of Isabella herself. Poet Battista Fiera was instrumental in spreading this interpretation, though after receiving disapproval from Isabella, he recanted his claim in a poem. He wrote, “hence the poet in a witty poem, having declared you to be Venus, said you had Mars’s marriage bed as your own… Fair Isabella, he is sorry to have called you Venus, but an image of you had been the source of the poet’s fancy. You are not really Venus, are you, (even) if you are united in a chaste bed with a “Mars”? You are not really Venus, are you, (even) if Apelles makes a Venus out of you?”\footnote{Stephen J. Campbell, *The Cabinet of Eros: Renaissance Mythological Painting and the Studiolo of Isabella d’Este*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006): 125.}

After encountering unwanted interpretations of her painting, Isabella insisted that her reputation be repaired. She was unafraid to wield her power in order to maintain control over her public persona. Likewise, the next work she commissioned from Mantegna had a much clearer moralistic message. *The Triumph of the Virtues*, painted a few years later, takes the goddess of poetry, wisdom, and warfare, Minerva, as its heroine. [Figure 8] She is poised for action, her lance in one hand and shield in the other as she drives a hoard of personified Vices from her garden. Behind her stands Daphne in her arboreal form and in the clouds above are the allegories of the Cardinal Virtues of Fortitude, Temperance, and Justice, whom Minerva raises her eyes towards for guidance.\footnote{Daphne is a mythological water nymph who was subject to Apollo’s unwanted sexual advances. In order to evade him and preserve her virtue, she asked her father to transform her into a laurel tree.}
The Vices spill out into a swamp, some peering fearfully back at the tenacious woman behind them. The embodiment of Idleness leads Sloth, an armless and deformed creature, with a rope. In front of them is Hatred, depicted as a monkey-like figure. A satyr representing Suspicion tightly grips an infant, and to the right, the slovenly Ignorance wears a crown while being carried by Ingratitude and Avarice. 48 Behind the group Vices, a pair of nymphs run away in fear, followed by a family of satyrs and a group of cherubs, all symbolic of sexuality. Perhaps the most notable Vice, at least for Isabella’s purposes, is Lust. Represented by none other than Venus, she is perched on the back of a centaur, who appears to be pulling away the cloth that conceals her body. This is a clear condemnation of the insinuations made about her because of Parnassus. Here, there is an explicit distinction between right and wrong, chaste and lustful, providing for only one reading—that in which Isabella is represented by the bravery and intelligence of Minerva.

The iconographical and conceptual differences between the two Mantegna paintings illustrate the great power Isabella’s collection held in determining her public reputation as an elite woman. While the sensual imagery in Parnassus would likely not have been scrutinized in a male’s collection, it presented real social consequences for Isabella, raising questions about her personal virtue and fidelity to her husband. This error was a lesson both for Isabella and her artist, as the messaging of her next commission needed to be recalibrated specifically for a female patron. Therefore, The Triumph of the Virtues was effectively designed for dual purposes. The painting fulfilled Isabella’s request for Humanist, mythological art, but it also served to uphold her virtue through its content. Isabella greatly expanded her collection in the following years, but she continued to keep these considerations in mind during her subsequent

commissions and acquisitions. In this way, her collection became an effective social tool for positive self-representation as a chaste, intelligent, and virtuous female collector.

Issues of virtue and personal character were perhaps of less concern in relation to collecting texts and antiquities. While collecting was construed as a masculine activity, books and antiquities reflected less directly on the character of their collector. Rather, such items were understood collectively in relation to different Humanist and aesthetic values. Isabella, for example, was an avid collector of both ancient and contemporary small-scale statues. She purposefully juxtaposed these works in her personal apartments to encourage comparison and discussion amongst her visitors. Perhaps the best example of this was Isabella’s duo of Cupid statuettes which she displayed in her *grotta*. The first piece was Michelangelo’s now lost *Sleeping Cupid*, which she requested from Cesare Borgia after the sack of Urbino. She felt she had legitimate claim to the item, citing her greater respect and care for such objects than Cesare was willing to provide.49 Furthermore, when the original owner, Guidobaldo da Montefeltro, asked for the statue back, Isabella refused and stated that it was a gift.50 Her other Cupid was attributed to Praxiteles, an ancient Greek artist active in the fourth century BCE. She fought equally hard to acquire this work, likely in hopes of displaying it alongside the contemporary iteration. While mythological in nature, these sleeping Cupids were particularly suitable for a female collector, signifying love and passivity.

Isabella was likewise quite interested in collecting smaller items, like ancient coins, portrait medals, cameos, and gems. Some scholars have characterized this kind of collecting as a distinctly feminine impulse, though it was entirely consistent with the practices of many

prominent male collectors, including her father, brother, and even Lorenzo de’ Medici.\textsuperscript{51} Isabella kept these objects scattered around her \textit{grotta}, the extension of her \textit{studiolo} meant for antiquities. They were tucked away in cabinets and stacked in small piles on her benches and tables, allowing for an experience of discovery for herself and her visitors.\textsuperscript{52} In this space, they explored the troves of coins and gems, sifting through them and comparing them against one another. Numismatic collecting was integral to Isabella’s larger oeuvre, and eventually led to the production of her large, ornately embellished medal, itself displayed in her \textit{grotta}.

\textsuperscript{51} San Juan, “The Court Lady’s Dilemma: Isabella d’Este and Art Collecting in the Renaissance,” 74.
\textsuperscript{52} Rossi, "Confronting the “Temple of Chastity”: Isabella d’Este in the Context of the Female Humanists," 100.
NUMISMATICS AND MEDAGLIE IN THE RENAISSANCE COLLECTION

In many early modern texts, the term medaglie is used interchangeably for ancient coinage, contemporary portrait medals, and everyday currency. Medaglie was an integral category within a Humanist’s private collection, representing not only their interest in antiquarian culture and history, but also their social and political alliances. These objects were not confined to the studiolo, however. They were the medium through which a rich and complex network of exchange was formed, with collectors from across Europe purchasing, selling, and trading with one another. Isabella herself both collected and commissioned medaglie, positioning herself to participate in this dynamic community.

Isabella’s affinity for numismatics was likely sparked during her early life in Ferrara. The Este family had an extensive history of coin collecting, stemming back to Leonello d’Este who took power in 1441. By the end of the fifteenth century, the collection was comprised of over three thousand five hundred pieces and required staff members to manage their organization, study, and acquisition. Upon beginning her collection and patronage of medaglie in Mantua, Isabella looked to her father and brother as examples. Both men enjoyed not only collecting and trading, but also commissioning personal portrait medals and monetary coinage. Isabella took up these practices herself, constructing a collection which included ancient Roman coins, religious medallions, and portrait medals of friends, family, associates, and mentors. This

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55 Ibid., 459-460.
56 For more information about the Este family’s commissioning of personal coinage, see Nygren (2016) and Shepherd (1999).
provided her an entry point into the network of Humanist and antiquarian numismatic collecting and trade, as well as introducing her to the rapidly growing field of scholarship and philosophy surrounding medaglie.

In the sixteenth-century inventory of the Gonzaga family’s collections conducted shortly after Isabella’s passing, the description of her bountiful numismatic collection illustrates how the items were stored, displayed, and valued. In the inventory, the medaglie in her grotta are given their own section and are variably described by their subjects, material, and place of storage. The valuation of the objects is generally noted by their weight, with measurements in ounces and comparisons to Roman and Veronese standards. Because of the lack of a universalized currency system across the Italian peninsula, this information about material and weight was important for proper appraisal of the collection.

Various groups of medaglie were tucked away in small boxes, chests, and drawers, often organized by some unifying feature. For example, one box contained only ancient silver coins, while another held only medals from the Papal Jubilee. Isabella’s medaglie were not strictly divided by subject or era, however. One entry describes four silver medals stored together, amongst which were the former Duke of Milan Ludovico il Moro, contemporary Venetian poet Zuan Francesco, Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian, and a Roman coin bearing an unnamed deity and the inscription ‘S.P.Q.R.’ Perhaps the grouping of these objects was random, or perhaps they were categorized by some personal criteria. Isabella may have found the figures inspiring or felt they shared some common traits which she valued and aspired to. This suggests that the organization of one’s collection did not follow strict encyclopedic guidelines, but rather

58 Ibid., 350-351.
59 Ibid., 351.
could be tailored to one’s personal interests and desires. Philosophical, emotional, or personal reasons for sorting numismatics in a particular way seemed equally valid with separating them by date, subject, or material.

Other medaglie in Isabella’s collection, particularly bronze medals, are described as being inlaid in tablets. Wooden display panels like these were present in various collections, including that of the Este family in Ferrara. While the items stored in boxes would need to be taken out and held in the viewer’s hands, the tablets provided a different viewing experience. They were displayed in Isabella’s armoires, either propped up or suspended, alongside the aforementioned duo of Cupid statuettes. The tablets would have been visible whenever the doors of the cabinets were open, providing a more static and immobile method of display akin to the statuettes. While loose medals could be mixed around and grouped in different ways, these mounted medals were permanently displayed together. This illustrates the bimodal display strategy employed in many collectors’ studioli, in which some objects were displayed in a fixed, stationary manner, while others were left free, able to be held, turned over, and passed around.

**Antiquarian Roots of Renaissance Numismatics**

In the late medieval period, early archaeological efforts led to the discovery of sculptures and architectural structures, but also vast quantities of Roman coins. Small and easily transportable, coins spread quickly throughout the population and inspired the turn towards antiquarianism. The Renaissance revival of classical style in philosophy, scholarship, and the arts was motivated in part by these objects, which were packed with iconographical information

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60 Ibid., 350.
62 Ibid., 241.
about Roman culture, emperors, and mythology. Artists filled sketchbooks with copies of Roman motifs, incorporating them into their later work. The desire for antiquarian knowledge rapidly became a cultural preoccupation and archeological projects commenced across the Italian peninsula. Many of these ventures were motivated by the imagery of particular cities or regions on the ancient coins, enticing scholars to rediscover the buildings and artifacts seen on the coins’ reverses.63

While a few gold and silver Roman coins have survived to the present day, the majority are bronze or copper. This is likely because the more expensive metals were melted down and repurposed in the intervening millennia for monetary, artistic, or militaristic needs. The format and popular conventions of Roman coinage were widely recognized, ultimately setting a global standard for metallic currency. The coins featured a profile portrait of the issuing leader on the front, or obverse, and symbolic or mythological imagery on the back, or reverse. This arrangement was appropriated in the Renaissance for both decorative and monetary medaglie.

As curiosity built around this Roman coinage, antiquarian scholars began commissioning woodcut prints which compared various obverses and reverses. These prints were often bound as books and the images within were accompanied by biographical information about Roman Emperors and speculations on the meaning of iconography. The first such book, Illustrium imaginibus, was written in 1517 by Andrea Fulvio.64 One page from this volume, focusing on Emperor Gaius Julius Caesar, is characteristic of the style Fulvio pioneered. [Figure 9] The design of the portrait medallion was taken directly from one of Caesar’s coins, or more likely, from a Renaissance imitation. The workshop of Giovanni da Cavino in Padua, well known for its

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64 Ibid., 6.
Roman replicas, produced such a copy. [Figure 10] Fulvio included the star in the upper left and the lituus behind his neck, but omitted the identifying text along the edges. The decorative border surrounding the biographical text, which provides a short account of the emperor’s life, was inspired by ancient Roman gravestones.65

A later volume by Enea Vico, entitled *Omnium Caesarum verissimae imagines*, includes a number of pages depicting the reverses of Gaius Julius Caesar’s coins. [Figure 11] The designs are presented for comparison and study, depicting mythological figures, animals, and various mottos. Humanist collectors would examine these prints not only to learn more about the historical figure, but also to inform themselves about what coins had been produced and might be available to collect. Isabella herself likely examined these sorts of texts during the construction of her collection. In a 1499 letter to Antonio Maria della Sala, she requests to borrow an unnamed book of antiquities, perhaps containing prints such as these.66

Numismatic prints would have provided Isabella the experience of examining these coins up close and determining which pieces she desired for her collection. Women, especially those of Isabella’s status, were not permitted the social freedom to visit markets and numismatic purveyors for trade and purchasing. Rather, she had to do much of her shopping through courtiers, friends, and family.67 Upon his departure from Mantua, Isabella wrote to Gian Cristoforo Romano, the artist of her personal portrait medal, to “please be on the alert for any beautiful and ancient bronze medals and other excellent things and inform me of their price and quality.” She continued, writing “you can also just buy the medals if they are good without awaiting other response, and we will send you payment for them, provided they are absolutely

65 Ibid., 9.
67 For more about Isabella’s methods for acquiring goods, see Welch (2005).
perfect.” Though she could not inspect the medals firsthand, this did not mean her standards were any more lenient. Rather, she expected the highest quality of items be sought out by her agents and delivered to her. With respect to quality and diversity, her collection was on par with that of many prominent male collectors, despite the more circuitous routes she had to take to build it.

A vast network of numismatic exchange developed throughout Europe and included scholars, nobility, and even casual collectors. *Medaglie* changed hands frequently and became a vehicle for social connection, intellectual discussion, and physical trading. Friends and associates would gather around in the *studiolo*, showing one another their collections and offering up items as gifts or as objects to be traded. The process was often quite spontaneous and pieces were given and taken based on a collector’s interest in the iconographic content, subject, or personal significance. *Medaglie* were also exchanged via mail or other intermediaries. If a collector received a piece with which they were unfamiliar, they sometimes sent it to a scholar requesting interpretations of the coin’s symbols. In some cases, the coins were gifted to the scholar as a token of appreciation for the interpretation services, and in others they were returned to their senders. This was a very active and intellectually rich community which served as a foundational component of Humanist culture. Isabella’s participation in this network solidified her role not only as an elite collector, but as an engaged Humanist intellectual.

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Early Modern Personal Portrait Medals

Inspired by Roman coins and their various printed counterparts, Renaissance artists began designing and producing medals which featured their patron’s profile portrait on the obverse and their personal symbols, *imprese*, or chosen mythological figures on the reverse. Scholars often connect the growth of the portrait medal to the texts of Petrarch, an early Humanist author and numismatic collector. Petrarch’s writings preached individualism and personal virtue, and the portrait medal was a particularly apt medium for these aims. The strength of the portrait medal as a tool for identity building lies in its ability to simultaneously communicate two dimensions of a patron—both their physical appearance and their inner values and interests. Furthermore, the very form of medal connected it to the antiquarianism that was so highly valued in this period.

These medals ranged widely in material value, from simple lead to Isabella’s diamond-encrusted gold medal. The majority, however, were made from the same materials as Roman coins—copper and bronze. The decision to use a particular metal was likely influenced by a number of factors, including cost, availability, artist’s expertise, production method, quantity produced, and purpose of the medal. It was also common for different batches of the same medal to be produced with different materials. Most portrait medals were produced in one of two ways. Medals could be struck, which entailed pressing soft, malleable metal between two dies. This was the more expensive option, but the batches could be much larger, making it appropriate for more ambitious political projects. Casting was the other common technique, in which liquid metal was poured into a mold where it would harden. This method was often used for smaller runs of personal medals that were frequently made of less expensive materials.

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Medals functioned in a variety of ways in early modern society, often depending on how they were circulated. A political figure may produce in large quantities of a medal in a cheaper material to be distributed amongst their citizens or given out to attendees of an event. Some medals would commemorate an important occasion, such as a wedding or the ascendance of a new leader. The items provided an introduction of the figure to citizens and conveyed some facet of their personal identity. The act of giving out medals also communicated their benevolence and generosity, ingratiating them to their public. Recipients often kept the medals as mementos and even displayed them in their homes.

Portrait medals were also frequently given as personal gifts from the patron themself to their friends, associates, and allies. In these cases, the medal served as a tangible symbol of courtly favor and political allegiance. By possessing a portrait medal of the sovereign of their city-state, a citizen could be afforded certain securities or favors when traveling across the Italian peninsula. The medals were also collected, much like Roman coins, and they served as status symbols and markers of one’s connections and social standing.

An example of the prestige associated with owning such a medal can be seen in Sandro Botticelli’s 1474 painting entitled *Portrait of a Man with a Medal*. [Figure 12] The young man in the image proudly displays his copy of a portrait medal, which can be firmly identified as Cosimo de’ Medici’s first medal, designed and cast shortly before his death.\(^\text{72}\) [Figure 13] Beyond simply suggesting an interest in numismatics, this painting gives a clear indication of the man’s political association with the powerful Medici family of Florence. This sort of public declaration of loyalty—especially to the controversial Medici family—could reap both positive and negative consequences. While the Medici offered protections and political benefits to their

allies, there was often fervent opposition to the family. In fact, roughly twenty years after Botticelli’s painting was produced, the Medici were temporarily expelled from Florence. Though the identity of the subject has not been determined, these medals were often given as “gifts for service or exchanged by ambassadorial envoys,” perhaps hinting at his line of work and social station.73

Botticelli’s painting also provides some insight into the physical experience of handling portrait medals. The man holds the large medal with two hands, not only to frame the object but also because of its sheer size and weight. A medal of this diameter could weigh upwards of one hundred and fifty grams, equivalent in weight to dozens of our contemporary coins. The texture of the medal is also quite evident here, in part due to Botticelli’s use of plaster to create a shallow relief. Early modern viewers of the painting would be able to relate to the experience of holding and examining a medal like this up close, feeling the cool, heavy bronze in their hands. They may even have been tempted to reach out and touch the painted medal, checking if it was real and feeling the raised surface of Cosimo’s face and hat. The tactility of a medal was perhaps equally important to its visual qualities, as it was an art form meant to be handled, touched, and moved about.

The display and storage methods used by collectors varied, with some preferring to have their collections easily accessible and visible and others keeping them more securely stored. Some collectors, especially those with particularly large collections, would use a hybrid approach. Some medaglie were left out on tables and other conspicuous locations, while others, often the most precious and valuable pieces, were placed in storage cabinets, only to be brought out for special occasions.74 One of the most common methods for displaying portrait medals was

73 Ibid., 17.
74 Flaten, “Identity and the Display of Medaglie in Renaissance and Baroque Europe,” 61.
by hanging them on the wall, either with ribbons or small metal hooks. Earlier medals tend to have the holes added post-production, as evidenced by their sometimes haphazard placement and the obstruction of the medals’ designs. However, in the sixteenth century, artists began designing their medals with loops attached to the tops, allowing for easier display. Larger portrait medals were more likely to have a hole or loop, likely because they were impractical for frequent handling and were seen as more decorative. The prevalence of these loops led to some medals being designed with less detailed reverses, and in some cases, with no reverse design whatsoever. This suggests a shift towards a more static mode of display in which the medal is not regularly removed from the wall to be more closely examined.

Whether they were stored within the studiolo or used as objects of exchange, medaglie were privileged objects within early modern culture. Their antiquarian history and iconography promoted Humanist ideals, which were increasingly prevalent amongst scholars and the nobility alike. Medaglie were indispensable tools for learning about and engaging with Roman history, mythological iconography, and contemporary political figures. However, collectors used these objects not only to reflect on their personal erudite interests, but also as means for broader social engagement. Numismatic collectors formed vast networks of dialogue, study, and exchange, presenting a new kind of far-reaching intellectual sociability. Likewise, these relationships gave patrons of personal portrait medals the ability to disseminate their image and individual identity much more widely. As a patron, Isabella had to consider both the public and private functions of her portrait medal. Publicly, she wanted her medal to positively represent her as a noblewoman, wife, and leader. Privately, however, she used the medal as an expression of her Humanist interests and magnificence as a collector. For these reasons, she commissioned both the

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75 Syson, “Holes and Loops: The Display and Collection of Medals in Renaissance Italy,” 231.
76 Flaten, “Identity and the Display of Medaglie in Renaissance and Baroque Europe,” 69.
traditional, common versions of her medal, as well as the highly wrought, ornate, and ultimately quite unusual copy for herself.
THE MEDAL, THE COLLECTION, AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

When Isabella arrived in Mantua following her proxy marriage to Francesco II Gonzaga, she was only fifteen years old. Though she had received a comprehensive education from Ferrara’s elite scholars, musicians, and Humanists, she had not yet formed a concrete personal identity. In her early years, she was greatly influenced by her family and the members of her court. However, when she left home, she aimed to differentiate herself as a distinct individual with her own interests, passions, and motivations. With her ardent interest in art and antiquities, it was perhaps lucky that she was betrothed to the Duke of Mantua. Francesco was a high-ranking condottiero in the Venetian army and often spent long periods away from home.77 This career left him little time for art patronage and collecting, which were activities expected for court leaders. Isabella, however, gladly filled this role and devoted much of her time, energy, and resources to the cultural and artistic growth of Mantua. This was not the end of her duties, though. She also handled the bulk of the political, diplomatic, and financial business of the court while her husband was away. This put Isabella in a unique position of power, both in her Humanist intellectual and artistic circles and in the broader political landscape of Italy.

As a woman, this was a precarious role to fill. Members of both the nobility and general population felt uncomfortable with the prospect of women holding too much power. This frequently sparked questioning about their competency and worthiness, and perhaps most detrimentally, their virtue. Isabella made consistent efforts throughout her life to justify her actions and authority by demonstrating her feminine virtue. While her paintings are frequently cited as examples of this, it seems that her earliest attempts were made through the production of

77 Condottieri were soldiers and mercenaries who protected both civic and religious groups or leaders.
her portrait medal. This medal allowed Isabella to circulate herself—her likeness, her identity, and her values—throughout Mantua and beyond. The iteration of the medal she commissioned for herself, however, presents a different sort of identity. In private, she represented herself as a Humanist intellectual and the owner of a magnificent collection. Comparing these versions demonstrates the multifaceted power of her self-fashioning, presenting herself as a woman who was both powerful and virtuous, erudite and prudent, accomplished and feminine.

The Public Portrait Medal

In 1495, about five years after her arrival in Mantua, Isabella wrote a letter to Milanese court artist Gian Cristoforo Romano requesting designs for a personal portrait medal.\textsuperscript{78} The resulting medals did not begin production until September of 1498 but were eventually manufactured in large quantities. [Figure 2] Batches were made both from cast lead and bronze, which were relatively inexpensive and made specifically for wide distribution. With a diameter of less than four centimeters, these were considerably smaller than traditional Renaissance portrait medals. Rather, they echoed the size and style of antique coins. This was perhaps a deliberate choice intended to align Isabella with leaders of ancient Rome, but the small size also made the medals easier to circulate.

While they played a significant role within the courts and in elite collections, the medals also had important functions amongst the Mantuan public. Citizens often had a tenuous relationship with royalty. Though they saw them relatively infrequently, the nobility dictated the material conditions of their lives and the peace and safety of their city-state. One strategy sovereigns used to ingratiate themselves to the citizenry was hosting public celebrations. These

\textsuperscript{78} Chambers and Martineau, \textit{Splendours of the Gonzaga}, 160.
events marked important milestones, such as marriages, births, dedications of civic and religious buildings, or honoring guests. One such public celebration was held in Mantua shortly after Isabella’s medal was minted and copies were tossed from the balcony of the Castello. This put the medal into the hands of common people, introducing them personally to their female monarch. This kind of mass gift-giving was certainly recognized as a generous act, but it also had important ideological functions for Isabella. By distributing the medal on such a large scale, she disseminated her likeness, her individual identity, and her benevolent authority.

Despite being only about twenty-four years old at the time of production, Isabella’s status as Marchioness was well established and she had already spent considerable time as regent during her husband’s extended absences. For her Mantuan subjects, the medal provided a tangible connection to their leader, ideally inspiring their loyalty and trust. This was accomplished iconographically with the reverse of the medal. Standing in the center is a winged female figure who has been variously identified as an allegory of victory, astrology, or the goddess Hygieia. The woman carries a staff or wand in her right hand, which she appears to be pointing at the coiling serpent beside her. In her left hand she holds a quill, symbolic of knowledge and scholasticism. This figure’s dual qualities of victorious leadership and intellectual drive were fundamental to the public identity Isabella wished to construct.

Above the woman is a centaur with a bow and arrow representing Sagittarius, an astrological sign that spans the period from late-November to late-December. The reasons for including this figure are contested, as Isabella’s astrological sign is Taurus. Likewise, none of

80 Chambers and Martineau, Splendours of the Gonzaga, 160.
81 Ibid., 160.
her close family members were Sagittarians and no major life events occurred for Isabella during that season. According to some natal charts, Sagittarius was Isabella’s ascendant sign, though it is unclear if she had access to this knowledge.\textsuperscript{82} An alternative explanation may be that Isabella was alluding to Jupiter, the chief god of the Roman pantheon, as he ruled over this astrological sign. The motto framing the reverse reads “BENEMERENTIUM ERGO,” or “on account of high merits” in Latin. The phrase, in tandem with the imagery, indicates that her ability to govern stems not only from the “high merits” of her knowledge and character, but also that of her astrological and celestial destiny. When these medals were tossed from the balcony to celebrating Mantuan citizens, they received a physical testimony of Isabella’s worthiness to hold her political position. Though most portrait medals had some propagandistic function, this was particularly important for a woman looking to legitimize her power.

These medals also had lasting resonance in the lives of their owners, particularly those in the under classes. While elite collectors often owned hundreds of these objects, less wealthy citizens rarely possessed medals. Their recipients would sometimes use them as decorations in their homes, as was the case with a copy of Isabella’s medal in The British Museum. [Figure 2] The medal has two small holes drilled on the left and right sides, which were likely for hanging purposes. When displayed on the wall, the placement of the nails would not allow the medal to be easily flipped to show the reverse. Rather, it would be a fixed ornamental object with only the portrait side visible. This is supported by the traces of gilding that remain on only the obverse of the medal.\textsuperscript{83} Though the base material of the medal is of lower quality, the owner of this copy clearly found it to be a valuable item. This suggests that there was perhaps an inherent cultural

\textsuperscript{82} Syson, “Reading Faces: Gian Cristoforo Romano’s Medal of Isabella d’Este,” 288.
\textsuperscript{83} Syson, “Holes and Loops: The Display and Collection of Medals in Renaissance Italy,” 234.
value in the portrait of Isabella sufficient to motivate the owner to invest the time and resources required to gild and display it.

This presents an alternative reading of the medal and its ideological impacts. The reverse includes a great deal of allegorical and symbolic meaning intended to communicate aspects of her identity and values. Conversely, the face of the medal includes only Isabella’s portrait and name. The person who hung this medal in their home, however, seemed to place less value in the reverse’s imagery and significance. Rather, they found the portrait was more important to exhibit. While this may have been somewhat counter to Isabella’s intentions, there are some plausible explanations for this display method. Receiving a portrait medal from someone as powerful and influential as a Marchioness was certainly a special occasion. The medal may simply have been kept as a memento of the event, as the recipient likely felt a sense of gratitude toward the pictured figure. It was also a point of pride to own portrait medals, as was demonstrated in Botticelli’s painting of young man holding a Medici medal.84 [Figure 12] By hanging the medal on the wall, the owner professed their association and allegiance to the depicted leader.

It is also conceivable that Isabella’s portrait served as a legitimator of her status in its own right. While the messaging of the allegorical reverse is much more overt, there are certain implicit meanings contained in Isabella’s image. In her portrait, she appears youthful, feminine, and has idealized features. Her nose is prominent but straight, and her eyes and lips are delicate. Her hair is gathered loosely at her neck with a plait twisted in amongst her curls, a style reminiscent of antique statuary. She wears a simple and modest gown with an embellished neckline. The implications of the pose are twofold. Firstly, profile portraits were the established

84 This painting is discussed in greater detail in the section “Early Modern Portrait Medals.”
standard for numismatics and made clear reference to Roman leaders and their coinage.

However, profile portraits were also a long-standing norm for women, particularly in painting. By the late fifteenth century, depictions of women in three-quarter poses became more common. However, preceding this development, they were almost exclusively shown in profile. This was not simply for aesthetic reasons, but also a demonstration of the woman’s virtue. Eye contact between men and women could be understood as a sign of sexual impropriety. By averting her eyes, she avoids the gaze of men and preserves her chastity and reputation. Along with her idealized beauty, which also connoted virtue, Isabella’s medal presented her as a respectable woman of good character. Her status is further validated by her name and titles surrounding her portrait. By including reference to both her familial name and her marital court, she indicated that she is royal both by birth and marriage, thereby touting her prestige.

Isabella’s medal also circulated widely amongst elite Humanist collectors. In these circumstances, collectors may have obtained the medal directly from Isabella, from members of her court, or through the vast trading networks spanning early modern Europe. These exchanges could be casual, with friends and associates giving one another their medals as small gifts. It could also be politically motivated, however. It was not uncommon for members of the nobility to use medals as tools in power brokering, signifying agreements or alliances. Within the realm of educated collectors, Isabella would have also used her medal as a means of self-fashioning and legitimization, albeit for different purposes. In this context, the medal’s mythological and astrological symbolism would represent her intellectual prowess. The motto’s meaning, “on

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86 Ibid., 12.
87 For more information about physiognomy and early modern correlations between appearance and character, see Leitch (2015).
account of high merits,” can likewise shift to accommodate this secondary reading, validating her presence in the male-dominated world of Humanist erudition.

By actively participating in this community, Isabella claimed a space for herself as an educated and influential female patron and collector. Building connections with other collectors was vitally important for the growth of her own collection, as she depended on various benefactors and agents to acquire art and antiquities. Regardless of Isabella’s motivations behind gifting her medal, those who acquired it likely kept it with a wide variety of other medaglie. Due to its size, it would be easy for her medal to be mixed in with antiquarian coins, rather than the larger contemporary medals. This was perhaps surprising to encounter when sifting through a stack of coins, though it also may have been thought provoking. Nygren describes the meditative experience of examining ancient coinage, describing them as a “secular analogue to miraculous images.”88 When looking at these objects, a collector could reflect on the virtues and spirit of a Roman leader, perhaps measuring themselves up in comparison. It seems plausible that this same sort of contemplative practice could be applied to portrait medals, as they too communicated the individual likeness and identity of a powerful figure. In the case of Isabella, this may elicit thoughts about gender, knowledge, and power, even causing male collectors to compare themselves to a woman. In this context, Isabella was imbued with a power and prestige on par with that of the ancients. These intellectual and meditative issues were at stake in Isabella’s private use of her medal as well, where her self-fashioning focuses more on her role as a patron and collector.

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The Private Portrait Medal

Isabella’s bountiful collection of *medaglie* was largely housed in her *grotta*, hidden away in drawers and boxes. Her copy of her own portrait medal, however, was hung in one of her armoires for display. [Figure 1] This medal, though cast from the same mold as her lead and bronze batches, is entirely unique. Her heavily ornamented version expands on the sense of personal identity established in circulated version. Here, Isabella is recognized for her Humanism, her interests in antiquity, and her position as a collector. The object also provides some perspective on the luxury and opulence Isabella enjoyed in her private life.

The original form of the portrait medal is cast from gold and set in an ornate frame. Her name, along with an ‘M’ for Mantua, is spelled out in diamonds encircling the portrait. The letters are interspersed with flower-shaped gems and the edge features braided strands of gold set with more small gemstones. The reverse is incised with a decorative foliate pattern and the top is fitted with a loop for hanging. While it would have been easy enough for Isabella to obtain regular copies of her medal, this iteration would have been specially ordered. Unfortunately, letters or contracts discussing this medal’s production have either not survived or have not been published. Even without a firsthand account, however, some supposition can be made about Isabella’s intentions with the item.

As an avid patron and collector, Isabella was forthright about her “appetite for beautiful things.”\(^89\) She was very discerning in the quality of materials and craftsmanship and made her standards abundantly clear to those who made or procured items for her. In terms of portraiture, however, she was often unsatisfied. Though she was acutely aware of the power portraits held in identity construction, she almost always refused to model for them. In a letter to her half-sister...

Lucrezia d’Este Bentivoglo, she recounted that “since the last time we had our portrait done, we found it so irksome to have to sit patiently still and immobile that we would never do that again.”\textsuperscript{90} She was also generally displeased with her appearance in these works, and she either rejected or gave away both her portraits by Andrea Mantegna and Francesco Francia, finding them unflattering and poorly executed.\textsuperscript{91}

This may relate to her personal insecurities about her self-image, as she expressed concerns about her weight and appearance from a young age.\textsuperscript{92} This anxiety permeated into her adult life, and in a letter to her husband she lamented that perhaps if he’d allowed her to be “more fully involved in the government of the state she would not have grown so fat.”\textsuperscript{93} Likewise, she wrote in a 1499 letter to the Duke of Milan that she would oblige his request for a portrait of herself, albeit reluctantly. She prefaced by explaining to him and his wife that the portrait “is not very much like me because it is a little fatter than I am.”\textsuperscript{94} However, her distaste for portraits may also relate to her desire for control over her public image. If a painting depicted her in an unsatisfactory manner, it was detrimental to her self-concept and the construction of her identity. It is perhaps for these reasons that she sought to use her collection as a means of self-fashioning, rather than traditional portraits.

With this in mind, it is somewhat surprising that Isabella chose to invest in such a luxurious portrait medal. However, it is also plausible that the addition of these gems and precious metals augmented her physical appearance and reinforced her identity as a Marchioness, a collector, and a lover of beauty. These readings were a function of the medal’s

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., 349. In this letter, Isabella is using the “royal we,” but is referring only to herself.
\textsuperscript{91} For more information about Isabella’s portraits by Mantegna and Francia, see Hickson (2009), Syson (1997), and Woods-Marsden (1987).
\textsuperscript{92} Syson, “Reading Faces: Gian Cristoforo Romano’s Medal of Isabella d’Este,” 282.
\textsuperscript{94} Shemek, ed., \textit{Isabella d’Este: Selected Letters}, 129.
place in an elite collection which was understood as both magnificent and luxurious. Socially and politically, magnificence connoted large-scale expenditure on art, antiquities, and architecture, often in the service of promoting the leader and their court. This kind of spending also affected the collector’s reputation, as it “promoted the beneficence of elites and justified their social position.”\textsuperscript{95} Privately, lavish spending fell into the category of luxury, which was alternatively characterized by “‘extravagance’, ‘profusion’… and ‘excess’.”\textsuperscript{96} Isabella’s collection engaged both of these concepts. To the public, Isabella’s collection highlighted Mantua as culturally and artistically vibrant court. Within her inner circle, however, Isabella’s collection and her medal communicated her identity as an intelligent, prolific Humanist thinker and collector.

The medal is not only unique in appearance, but also invites unusual modes of interaction. When hung up in the armoire, it would have been eye-catching and aesthetically pleasing, though the individual letters encircling the medal would have been difficult to see. Only upon removal and closer physical examination would the full complexity and beauty of the object dazzle its beholder. Because of the quality and volume of materials, the medal would feel quite heavy and substantial in the hands. The texture would be unique as well, especially around the braided edges and gemstone settings. This tactile and sensory experience would be much richer and more complex than that of standard medaglie, encouraging the beholder to observe it more slowly and thoughtfully. This contemplation would extend to the image of Isabella herself and the iconography of the reverse. This creates a dynamic interplay between the conceptual meanings of the medal and the sheer luxury that surrounds it.

\textsuperscript{96} Ibid., 5.
While her previous painted portraits could not adequately represent Isabella’s self-image, her embellished portrait medal incorporated the facets of her identity that she valued more than her physical appearance. Small enough to fit in the hand, the medal could serve as a stand-in for Isabella’s enormous and magnificent collection. It not only indicated her rich tastes and discerning eye for luxury, but also communicated her intellectual passions for antiquity, mythology, astrology, and Humanist thought. Likewise, Isabella’s political acumen and discernment is foregrounded in the medal’s references to her city-state and personal merits. This private version of the medal inventively portrays Isabella as a prominent and prolific collector, operating seamlessly in a realm normally reserved for men. For both herself and her guests, the medal was a luxurious, tangible encapsulation of the identity she worked so diligently to construct both publicly and privately.
CONCLUSION

Isabella d’Este’s portrait medal is an extraordinarily unique object. Despite her resistance to painted portraits, her luxuriously decorated medal provided her an opportunity to express her identity while maintaining control over her image. This is likewise true with the inexpensive, widely circulated versions of her medal. Within Mantua and beyond, these medals served as tangible demonstrations of her great ambitions as a sophisticated collector in the model of her Ferrara lineage, and as an exemplary Marchioness of Mantua. Though it was one of her earliest commissions, her medal firmly established her personal identity as a female collector. The medals were produced and distributed over a period of many years. In 1506, eight years after the initial batch was made, Isabella continued to discuss the medal in her letters to the artist, Gian Cristoforo Romano. The interests and personal values she presented in the medal continued to have resonance even as she aged.

As this thesis has demonstrated, Isabella’s used her portrait medals as a means of identity construction both within the private, elite space of her studiolo and wider realm of public exchange and discourse. Her medal’s inventive form of self-fashioning presents us with a rich understanding of what was at stake for female collectors in terms of their social positioning and personal reputation. Her medal worked in tandem with her larger collection as a means of identity construction and self-legitimation, presenting a composite portrait of Isabella. Publicly, her collection upheld her virtue and justified her presence in the masculine spaces of diplomacy and patronage. Within the private, elite space of her court, Isabella presented herself primarily as an intellectual, a collector, and a tastemaker. Her differing identities do not contradict, but rather

enrich each other. By embodying both roles, Isabella skillfully navigated the challenges of female leadership, patronage, and Humanism. The portrait medal, produced in its distinct forms for both the wider public and the elite world of the court, artfully conveyed to her subjects and courtiers her excellence and “high merit” in all these domains.
Figure 1. Gian Cristoforo Romano, *Portrait Medal of Isabella d’Este*, 1498, cast gold with diamonds and enamel, diameter 7 cm, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, https://www.wga.hu/html_m/r/romano/p_medal.html.
Figure 3. Francesco di Giorgio Martini, *Studiolo from the Ducal Palace in Gubbio*, c. 1478-82, walnut, beech, rosewood, oak, and fruitwoods in walnut base, h. 485 x w. 518 x d. 384 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/198556?searchField=All&amp;sortBy=Relevance&amp;ft=Francesco+di+Giorgio+Martini&amp;offset=0&amp;rpp=20&amp;pos=2.
Figure 4. Ercole de’ Roberti, *Portia and Brutus*, c. 1490, tempera or oil and gold on panel, 48.7 x 34.3 cm, Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, https://www.kimbellart.org/collection/ap-198605.
Figure 5. Ercole de’ Roberti, *Lucretia, Brutus, and Collatinus*, c. 1490, tempera or oil on panel, 48.7 x 35.5 cm, Galleria Estense, Modena, https://www.gallerie-estensi.beniculturali.it/en/digital-archives/id/39477.
Figure 6. Ercole de’ Roberti, *The Wife of Hasdrubal and Her Children*, c. 1490, 47.3 x 30.6 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.50292.html.
Figure 12. Sandro Botticelli, *Portrait of a Man with a Medal of Cosimo the Elder*, c. 1474, tempera on panel, 57.5 x 44 cm, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, https://www.wga.hu/html_m/b/botticel/7portrai/04medal.html.
Figure 13. Unknown Florentine artist, *Portrait Medal of Cosimo de’ Medici*, c. 1465, bronze, diameter 7 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., https://www.wga.hu/html_m/m/master/xunk_it/xunk_it7/03medal.html.
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