



EDITED BY
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VENICE AND THE VENETO DURING THE RENAISSANCE

THE LEGACY OF BENJAMIN KOHL



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**Venice and the Veneto during the
Renaissance: the Legacy of Benjamin Kohl**

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Willing Patronesses: Choosing, Loosing, and Binding in Venetian Noblewomen's Wills

by Stanley Chojnacki

Among the other bequests in the 1484 will of Andriana Michiel, wife of the Venetian noble Francesco Priuli, was a contribution of 2,000 ducats toward the dowry of Andriana's daughter, Eugenia. If, however, Eugenia chose not to marry but instead to become a nun, the bequest was to be halved and the remaining 1,000 ducats allocated as follows: 550 to finance the building of a chapel to the Virgin at the convent of Santa Maria degli Angeli on Murano, where Andriana wished to be buried, and the remaining 450 to endow daily mass in perpetuity in that chapel for Andriana's soul¹. In making those provisions Andriana resembles Fina Buzzacarini, the wife of the fourteenth-century lord of Padua, Francesco da Carrara, as revealed in Ben Kohl's study of her will². Kohl portrayed Fina under three heads, as wife, as mother, and as patron. But in his subtle analysis these separate categories converged as dimensions of a single attribute, that of benefactress, of the many people, including her daughters, whom she benefited as well as of the fresco cycles that she commissioned for the baptistery of the church of Il Santo in Padua. Like Andriana Michiel, Fina da Carrara used her will and her wealth to impose her identity lastingly as a patron – of family members and other persons, of institutions, and of a visible monument to her piety.

The two women used their wills as vehicles for the two most familiar kinds of patronage, maecenatism, or the encouragement of artistic production, and clientelism, a relationship involving the performance of reciprocal but differential functions between more and less powerful interests³. Renaissance maecenatism by women has come under increasing scholarly scrutiny, prominently and early in the collection that hosted Kohl's article⁴. Other Venetian patrician women besides Andriana Michiel used their wills to

¹ Archivio di Stato, Venice (ASVe), Archivio Notarile, Testamenti, busta (all hereafter abbreviated NT) 68, notary Girolamo Bonicardi, no. 11, 23 April 1484.

² Kohl, 2001, 19-35.

³ These are anglicizations of the Italian *mecenatismo* and *clientelismo*, which distinguish more clearly than in English between the two forms of patronage. See Ianziti, 300.

⁴ See also King; Hurlburt; and McIver 2012, notably the essays of Dennis and Frank; Frank.

authorize artistic production. Holly Hurlburt has recounted dogaressa Agnese da Mosto Venier's authorization of a tomb for herself in the church of Santi Giovanni e Paolo, near that of her late husband, Doge Antonio Venier, which as one of his executors she may have a hand in commissioning⁵. The lavish commissions to Tullio Lombardo by Agnesina Badoer Giustinian for family tombs at San Francesco della Vigna and for her villa at Roncade have been much studied⁶. In addition to these prominent women patrons, Orsa Surian Loredan commissioned an altar painting in the convent church of Sant' Andrea della Zirada, where she wanted to be buried. Vittoria Vitturi Zeno bequeathed ten ducats for a marble tablet to be installed over her chosen burial place, her natal family's tomb in the monastery of the Servi⁷. More ambitious, Chiara Barbaro Zane was elaborate and precise:

"Item: I wish to be buried under the portico of San Stae, where my husband is buried. I also want built in that church an altar in honor of Our Lady. In the space for the altarpiece I want my icon with relics, to be flanked by two wings. On one, I want depicted four figures, namely San Giovanni Battista, Santa Chiara, San Bartolomeo, and Sant' Alvise. On the other wing I want a representation of the Visitation of Our Lady, different from another altarpiece of Our Lady in the same church. My altar is to be called the altar of the Visitation. Item: I want it to have an altarcloth, a chalice, and at the foot of the altar a cloth or an altarpiece that blends with the altarpiece above. And for all of this I allocate 100 ducats"⁸.

To this bequest she added three ducats for an altar lamp ("cesendolo"), which was to burn continuously, and a sufficient amount to be invested in a state fund to yield three ducats annually for a priest "de bona conditione e fama" to celebrate daily mass for her and her husband's souls.

Chiara Zane knew exactly how she wanted her commission executed, making her exceptional among the small number of women who authorized the construction or embellishment of tombs and altars; most left the details to their executors⁹. The few male testators who commissioned tombs did as well, though the evidence of men building original tombs is as rare as it is for

⁵ Hurlburt also discusses the tombs of other *dogaressa*: 132-40.

⁶ King, 48-63; Lewis, 355-68; McIver, 2012, 63.

⁷ NT 68, Bonicardi, no. 308, 5 April 1486 (Orsa); NT 852 Francesco Rizoto, no. 349, 31 July 1427 (Vittoria). For the *lapide* bequest of the dogaressa Agnesina Venier, see Hurlburt.

⁸ "Item voio esser sepolida soto el portego dela gliexia de San Stadi dove è sepolto el corpo de mio marido, in la qual giexia voio sia fato uno altare a reverentia de nostra dona. Et in luogo de la palla voio chel sia posto la mia anchona dale relige azonzandoli do ladi. In un ladi voio chel sia quatro figure zioè San Zan Batista, Santa Clara, San Bortholamio e Santo Alvixe. In laltro ladi sia la representation de la visitacion de nostra dona a diferentia de uno altro altare che [=che è] in la giexia dela nostra dona. E sia clamado laltare dela visitacion. Item voio chel dito altare habia uno paramento e uno calexe e uno pano davanti over una palla dal pe' del altar conveniente ala palla de sora. Et per queste cosse sia spexo ducati cento". ASVe, Procuratori di San Marco, Commissarie [hereafter PSMC] de Ultra, b. 315, "Chiara Zane", unnumbered parchment, 29 September 1440.

⁹ Hurlburt, 143-44, suggests that dogaressa Agnese Venier's tomb, which she specifically requested for herself, was turned by her son, as her executor, into instead a celebration of her family, thus circumscribing the *dogaressa* within the traditional female role.

women¹⁰. Most men wanted to be buried in existing family tombs (which of course had been built by men of previous generations). In a group of forty-two men who specified their preferred burial sites, twenty-five, or three-fifths, requested interment with members of their lineage, as did Paolo Priuli, who stated his preference for “our tomb of Ca’ Priuli,” and Piero Morosini, who specified “the tomb of my grandfather, Francesco Morosini ‘the Stout’”¹¹. Another six referred to “my tomb [*monumento meo, archa mea*],” which may also have denoted family tombs built by male ancestors, although at least two of the testators left instructions and allocated funds for the construction of new tombs¹². Women’s burial preferences were oriented less to family and lineage, more toward communities of women. In a group of 111 women who chose burial sites, sixty-eight elected interment in a female convent – at 61.3 percent almost the same proportion of men who wanted burial with their patrilineage¹³.

Choosing a burial site, as Chiara and other women already mentioned did, is a form of patronage to be treated elsewhere, though we have already noted above that Orsa Loredan wanted her commission of an altar painting executed in the convent where, like three-fifths of the women, she requested entombment among the nuns. However, maecenatism, cultural patronage such as Andriana Michiel’s, Orsa Loredan’s, and Chiara Zane’s, is not the main subject of this essay but rather the presence in women’s wills of the other main kind of patronage, clientelism, patronage as a form of social and political relations. It has long attracted the interest of scholars, from historians of ancient Rome to anthropologists of Mediterranean regions to interpreters of modern Italian politics¹⁴. Two themes appear regularly in this body of writing. One is the hierarchical nature of the patron-client relationship: a stronger, more authoritative or influential person providing some benefit to a dependent, either on a particular occasion or in an enduring relationship of recurring benefactions in exchange for the client’s loyalty and support. Richard Graham gives a succinct definition of this function as normally rendered: “Clientelism involves asymmetric but mutually beneficial relationships of power and exchange, a nonuniversalistic *quid pro quo* between individuals or groups of unequal standing”¹⁵. Graham’s definition also includes the second

¹⁰ For examples of tomb commissions by men, see Goffen, esp. 37-68.

¹¹ Paolo: “larcha nostra da cha de Prioli”, NT 1254, Pietro Zane, 215, 27 January 1466/67. Piero: “larcha fo de mio avo miser Franzescho Moresini dito lo graso”, NT 567 Bartolomeo fu Benvenuto, unnumbered, 1 June 1397.

¹² Bartolomeo q. Piero Bragadin, San Severo, NT 1238, Tomeo Tomei, 2nd numbering, no. 91, (date and month left blank) 1474; Donato q. Prodocimo Arimondo, NT 66 Busenello, no. 126, 8 September 1499.

¹³ I discuss gender differences in the choice of burial sites more fully in Chojnacki forthcoming.

¹⁴ See, respectively, Syme, Campbell and Putnam.

¹⁵ Graham continues: “Those in control – patrons, subpatrons, and brokers – provide selective access to goods and opportunities and place themselves or their supporters in positions from which they can divert resources and services in their favor. Their partners – clients – are expected

prominent theme in clientage studies, reciprocity between patron and client. The asymmetry in a clientelist relationship refers not only and not always to the superior status or power of the patron but to the different forms of the exchange, with the client, in return for material or other benefits, giving the patron political support, dutiful functions, or loyalty that enhances the patron's prestige.

This hierarchically inflected transaction has been well studied in the case of Renaissance Florence¹⁶. Nevertheless, some commentators argue that it could also exist as a pattern of favor-exchange among equals or near equals. For Ronald Weissman, "The frequent blurring of patronage and friendship in ancient Rome and Renaissance Florence should warn us against overemphasizing the socially hierarchical features of patronage to the exclusion of other aspects of the relationship"¹⁷. Dale Kent emphasizes the critical role of friendship in Florentine society: "Economic and business transactions – loans, partnerships, and credit – depended, like friendship, on trust (*fede, fiducia*), and trust depended on the existence of personal ties between the parties". The result, according to Kent, was that "the most significant patronage relations frequently existed between social equals"¹⁸. In this register, favors and gifts between equals could be configured as a potlatch, with both persons in the sequence of exchanges taking turns as patron¹⁹. Closer to home, in a series of studies on Venice, Dennis Romano also found that "clientelist" patronage consolidated relations between equals as well as ties across class lines such as those between masters (and mistresses) and servants²⁰.

This latter form of patronage, members of social networks exchanging conferrals of responsibility and authority, is the focus of this essay, with particular emphasis on reciprocal delegations in the wills of wives and husbands. Central to such mutuality is the evolution of relationships between spouses within the orbits of the social networks of each. Analyzing the necessity of constantly renewing network associations, also with a focus on Florence, Paul McLean emphasizes what he calls "the interactionally constructed identities" of the parties in a patron-client relationship. McLean elaborates: "We become more fully the persons we are through interaction, our personhood being constructed out of a number of different identities we adopt, singly or in combination, in different interactional settings"²¹. Looking at reciprocal gestures of friendship as a way of imprinting identities on one

to return their benefactors' help, politically and otherwise, by working for them at election times or boosting their patron's prestige and reputation". As quoted in Roniger, 353-54.

¹⁶ See, e.g., Kent, 1987, and Weissman.

¹⁷ Weissman, 35.

¹⁸ Kent, 2009, 8-9.

¹⁹ For an interpretation of Venetian patrician marriage and dowry practices as potlatch, see Sperling, 18-24.

²⁰ Romano, 1984, 1989, 1993.

²¹ McLean, xi, 1-2.

another echoes observations made some years ago by Thomas Kuehn, also with reference to Florence. Discussing female gift-giving there, Kuehn argued that personhood “arises within a complex of social relationships, and the more relationships acquired the more complete personhood becomes”²². One of the ways in which clientelism and interactionally constructed identities overlap is in their continuous reiteration over time, with actions of patronage and clientage alternating between the parties, renewing and strengthening existing relationships. Again to cite McLean, “Networks, are, ironically, more about flux than stasis. . . . Relationships with others to whom one is connected must be repeatedly managed, deepened, or contained as circumstances change. Positions must be improved or the persons in them languish”²³. Ben Kohl’s account of Fina da Carrara’s will offers a good example. The lavish frescoing of the baptistry of Il Santo that she commissioned included portraits of herself and her three daughters, providing a visual record of her patronage that would endure into the future. At the same time, her will also included generous dowry portions to her ladies-in-waiting, rewarding their past loyalty to her and similarly recasting her continued identity as their beneficent patron after her death²⁴.

By their very nature, Fina da Carrara’s and Andriana Michiel’s bequests, like all such benefactions in wills, document existing relationships and promote their continuation, shaping their future psychological contours by eliciting from beneficiaries reciprocity in the form of gratitude and the performance of certain functions designated by the testator. Bequests could also add new dimensions to relationships. Both Fina and Andriana extended their benevolence to their husbands’ bastards: Fina bequeathed 200 lire to Margherita, Francesco da Carrara’s daughter by his mistress, and Andriana left 200 ducats for the marriage or monacation of Lucrezia, “the natural daughter of my husband, Francesco”. These bequests may have been bids for the grateful loyalty of the illegitimate girls while at the same time leveling subtle reproofs to the girls’ errant fathers. That suggestion is reinforced by the women’s provisions for their husbands. Neither Fina nor Andriana made a direct bequest to her husband; Andriana only stipulated that her Francesco was to get Lucrezia’s 200-ducat legacy if the girl died before choosing her vocation²⁵. Yet in a further sign of distrust, Andriana also mandated that her executors remove her property from her husband’s possession immediately (“subito”) after her death²⁶. The two women’s wills are also different in that Fina appointed her husband, Francesco

²² Kuehn.

²³ McLean, 226.

²⁴ Kohl, 2001, 23-24.

²⁵ He was also to get half of her residual estate, after all charitable and family bequests were disbursed, but only if her daughter Eugenia, who was to receive the *residuum* in addition to her dowry bequest, died young. The other half was to go to Andriana’s married sister.

²⁶ “Hoc tamen declarato et volo quod subito post mortem meam omnia et quecumque bona mea extrahantur de manibus ipsius domini Francisci viri mei”. NT 68, Bonicardi, no. 11, 23 April 1484.

da Carrara, as executor of her will. By contrast, and consistent with her instruction to extract her property from her husband, Andriana Michiel left him out of the administration of her estate, instead naming as executors her brother, a cardinal of the church; her sister, prioress of the convent where Andriana wanted her burial and endowed a chapel; a married sister and the latter's husband; and a cousin from her natal Priuli lineage.

In this paper I concentrate on the kind of clientelist patronage just mentioned in reference to Andriana's will, namely, her choice of executors, with some additional discussion of women's family orientation as it affected their participation in the vocations of their children. Material benefactions are another, and perhaps even more obvious, form of testamentary patronage, and some of these will find their way into the discussion. But they entail reciprocity to a lesser degree than the designation of executors ("commissari"). Moreover, where married women are concerned, the bulk of benefactions went to their children, so they display less than does the appointment of *commissari* the central concern of this paper: the social orientation of patrician wives and how it compares with that of their husbands.

Andriana Michiel's choice of executors displays the range of patronage possibilities available to married Venetian women who, as freely as men, were able to choose their beneficiaries, unlike their Florentine counterparts whose dowry property from 1415 was statutorily destined for their husbands and children²⁷. With more reason to write wills, therefore, they had more occasion to select executors to carry out their intentions. The appointment of executors, who as a group constituted a *commissaria*, was, like Fina da Carrara's bequest to her ladies-in-waiting, the reformulation of a testator's relationship with them, a means by which the relationship was, recalling McLean's words, "managed, deepened, or contained as circumstances change". Testators chose a group of executors whose past acquaintance encouraged trust, and discharging the duties of an executor by its nature entailed a changed relationship with the testator. More particularly, the appointment of executors was an act of patronage, in the obvious sense that most testators left bequests to their *commissari*, but also in two other ways. For one, it assigned them the management of property. Venetian testators usually targeted their bequests specifically, but they also often gave their *commissari* discretion in administering estates, particularly in carrying out their charitable and pious bequests. For example, like many other Venetians, Andriana Michiel financed the marriages of "three poor maidens of good standing and reputation," allocating sixty ducats to beneficiaries to be selected by her executors²⁸. *Commissari* were also empowered to administer

²⁷ On the restrictions limiting Florentine married women's rights to dispose of their wealth, see now Chabot, 2011, 43-60. Chabot's discussion surveys testamentary rights of women elsewhere in Italy and in France.

²⁸ "Tribus pauperibus novitiis bone conditionis et fame". Another example: "Item dimitto quod dari debeant ducati quinquaginta auri ex bonis meis pro subsidio maritandi quinque ex nostris

other kinds of charitable bequests: Maria Venier, wife of Piero Sanudo, wanted five ducats to be distributed to the poor of her home parish of San Felice “per i mie commessarie”²⁹.

Thus executors administered the property bequeathed in wills, exercising the latitude granted them in dispensing and investing it, especially in cases like Andriana Michiel's and that of Maria Venier Sanudo, just mentioned. Like Andriana, Maria declined to appoint her husband as an executor, instead naming only her father, mother, and three brothers. Their examples were not rare. In a group of 205 married women's wills, thirty-six of the testatresses, 17.6 percent, left their husbands out of their *commissaria*. In such situations of apparent distrust, a married woman chose executors who could be relied on to protect her estate against a rapacious or dilatory widower. That meant, first of all, retrieving her dowry, which her husband enjoyed the use of during marriage but which remained her property, to be dispensed as she chose in her will or when widowed³⁰. Thus Bernardo Bembo, one of the executors of his sister, a deceased widow, was authorized by the Giudici del Proprio to retrieve her dowry from the estate of her late husband, Bernardo Grimani; Vinciguerra Giustinian, an executor of his sister, late wife of Marco Querini, received similar authorization³¹. These two cases alert us to the role of natal kinsmen in safeguarding the interests of married women, and signal the women's complex familial orientation.

In the event of non-compliance by a surviving husband or the administrators of a deceased husband's estate, it fell to the woman's *commissari* to pursue the claim in court. Wives were aware of that prospect. Cristina Priuli urged her husband to transfer her property to her estate within two months of her death on pain of forfeiting her 150-ducat bequest to him³². Maria Valaresso's bequest to her husband was to let him keep her dowry. But if he challenged (“molestare”) any of the other provisions of her will, her sister Cristina, as her sole executor, was to force him to yield that property up³³. Maria Sanudo urged her *commissari* “to be vigilant and solicitous in obtaining my residuary estate and investing it immediately [*in presenti di*]” in shares of the state's funded debt (*prestiti*), letting income accrue to the principal for any children she might have; if there were no children the residuum was to go to her father, “from whom I received that

dominabus nobilibus pauperibus pro anima mea, vz ducati decem pro qualibet earum”. Will of Suordamor Contarini Morosini, 23 December 1482. NT 68 Bonicardi, no. 289.

²⁹ NT 1186, Domenico di Groppi, no. 100 in protocollo, no. 122 in loose sheets.

³⁰ On the husband's possession of the dowry, while the wife retained proprietorship of it, see now Bellavitis, 58-59. On the procedure and practice of dowry restitution, see Chojnacki, 2000b.

³¹ ASVe, Giudici del Proprio, De Giudicato, reg. 2, fols. 38v, 78v.

³² “[V]oglio che mio marido dia sti danari fuora fra mexi do, e non fazendo voio sia privado de quello i laso qui de soto”. NT 986, Francesco Rogeri, no. 8, 13 January 1442/3. In Genoa, according to Epstein, legacies were normally paid out within one year of the testator's death, 221-22.

³³ “Christina possit et debeat predictum virum meam astringere de tota illa quantitate quam michi tenetur et obligatur predictus vir meus”. NT 985, Francesco Rogeri no. 3, 6 March 1441.

property”³⁴. Andriana Michiel, Maria Valaresso, Maria Sanudo, and the thirty-three other married women who left their husbands out of the administration of their estates were exercising a kind of negative patronage, denying them their trust and the authority to manage the wives’ property, and identifying natal kin as more likely to carry out the testatress’s instructions with discretion and fidelity, another indication of enduring ties between married women and their families of origin.

Whether or not husbands were among them, the executors appointed by married women shared in the credit for the distribution of bequests, especially when they were assigned to choose the recipients. Providing this credit, and the moral and social prestige that flowed from it, was the other kind of patronage that testators bestowed on their *commissari*. Bianca Lando in 1452 instructed that if she died childless, half of her residuary estate was to go to her husband, the other half to be distributed to the parishes of San Canciano and Santa Margherita “per mie comessarii per anima mia”³⁵. Orsa Contarini in 1419 made several pious bequests: fifteen soldi each to watchers who were to keep a vigil over her body for a day and a night before its interment in the convent of Corpus Domini; four ducats to each of twelve unmarried girls for their dowries; five ducats each to ten poor prisoners, presumably for lamp oil; payment for masses of St. Gregory and an additional one thousand masses; and expenses for pilgrims to Compostela, Assisi, and Rome to pray for her soul: “and all these bequests are to be carried out at the discretion of my executors,” who were her husband, his mother, one of Orsa’s married sisters, and an aunt³⁶. In selecting the recipients of such bequests, executors participated in the patronage of the testator, managing the property from which the bequests were to be paid and disbursing them. Indeed, whether authorizing them to choose beneficiaries or directing them to convey bequests to specific recipients, a testator’s choice of executors reflected trust in their capacity and willingness to preserve the testator’s identity beyond the grave by realizing her or his ultimate intentions.

Nowhere did this transaction associate testator with executors more intimately than in assignments to decide the vocations of daughters. Many male testators entrusted that responsibility to their wives, as Filippo Priuli did in 1485: “my daughters should be married or monacated when it seems appropriate to Cristina, their mother and my executor”³⁷. Similarly, Piero

³⁴ “Item voio che i mie comessarii siano vigilanti he soliziti de aver el mio rexidio he de quello conprar in presenti di [prestiti] che el debia conservar pro sora cavedal”; “voio che quel mio rexidio sora dito vegna in mio padre dal qual ho rexevuto i diti beni”.

³⁵ NT 1156, Benedetto dalle Croci, no. 512, 11 September 1452.

³⁶ “[L]aso che a tutti questi sia satisfado secondo la discrecion di mie comessarii”. NT 1254, Pietro Zane, no. 25, 6 October 1419. Orsa’s arithmetic was faulty: she specified four ducats for each girl’s dowry, but allocated a total of 50 ducats for the bequest.

³⁷ “Filie mee maritari aut monacari debeant quando videbitur ipsi Christine earum matri commissarie mee”. NT 68, Girolamo Bonicardi, no. 72, 22 December 1485.

Morosini, instructing that his daughter was not to marry before age fourteen, added, "Item, I will that my aforesaid daughter is not to marry without the consent [*senza volentade*] of my aforesaid wife, Valvina," who was one of his executors³⁸. Such commissions reflected a high degree of trust and understanding between wife and husband; it also gave the delegated widows the means of forging or strengthening ties to other families by negotiating marriage alliances. Testating wives had no need to authorize their husbands to arrange daughters' marriages, which of course was normally the men's prerogative as heads of their families. Despite customary paternal authority, however, some mothers assigned that responsibility to the executors they selected, leveraging the influence they gained from their contributions to their daughters' dowries³⁹. Isabetta da Lezze, who counterbalanced her husband's presence among her executors by also including her two brothers, "besech[ed]" the three to marry her daughter, whom Isabetta had made her residuary heir, before her eighteenth birthday⁴⁰. Maria Soranzo also made her daughter her residuary heir, but she instructed that if she gave birth to a boy, the residuum was to be divided between him and the girl, "and I want my daughter Prudenza to have, over and above her share of the residuum, enough extra as my *commissari* deem necessary for her marriage – though not more than 200 ducats extra"⁴¹. Those *commissari* were her husband, her mother, and her three brothers. Similarly protective of her sons, Orsa Balbi bequeathed her residuum to her children, but advised her executors – her husband, her mother, two aunts and two uncles – that "if I have daughters, they should have for their marriages whatever share seems right to my *commissari* – as long as my sons do not suffer"⁴². Like the mothers commissioned by husbands to arrange their daughters' marriages, executors given that assignment by married women could enhance their own social positions by brokering alliances between families.

Because executors had the responsibility of managing property and children, married testatresses took thoughtful care in choosing them. In doing so most seem to have been influenced, like Cristina Priuli mentioned earlier, by the need to retrieve their dowry property from their husbands' control in order to finance their bequests. We noted that thirty-six of the 205 married testatresses left their husbands out of the management of their estates. But even those who did appoint them for the most part bracketed that choice with others, chiefly their natal kin. Twenty of the women named their husbands as their sole

³⁸ NT 567, Bartolomeo fu Benvenuto, unnumbered, 1 June 1397.

³⁹ On mothers' contributions to their daughters' dowries, see Queller and Madden; Bellavitis, 197-98.

⁴⁰ "Obsecrans meos commissarios ut eam maritare vellint antequam perveniat ad etatem annorum decemocto". NT 1238, Tomei, part II, no. 220, 4 May 1465.

⁴¹ "Volo quod dicta Prudentia filia mea habeat et habere debeat ultra suam partem dicti mei residui pro suo maritare illud plus quod videbitur dictis meis commissariis. Ita tamen quod id plus non ecedat ducatos ducentos". NT 558, Gambaro no. 54, 10 January 1437/38.

⁴² "Et se havesse fie, voio che al suo maridar le habino la sua parte, secondo che parerà ali mie commessarii, tutavia che li mascoli non remagnino desfati". NT 68, Bonicardi, no. 329, 26 October 1489.

executors, clearly a sign of trust and regard, and another sixteen appointed their husbands together with their adult children. In three and possibly four of these last cases, however, the adult children were married daughters, as was true of Isabetta Pisani's *commissari*: her husband and her two sons, but also her two married daughters and their husbands⁴³. Another Isabetta, married to Nicolò da Canal, left her residuary estate to her daughter Andriana "pro eius maritare," and only if the girl instead chose the convent would Isabetta's son, Alessandro, inherit the residuum, minus 200 ducats for Andriana's convent dowry. To ensure that these daughter-favoring provisions were carried out, Isabetta appointed as *commissari* her husband and also Andriana herself and her other daughter, Franceschina, and the latter's husband⁴⁴.

Married daughters and sons-in-law could neutralize or even outvote husbands, if necessary. Despite the power of paternal authority, the bequest choices of a woman whose substantial dowry property could significantly enrich her daughters' dowries, as enforced by executors, exerted considerable influence on daughters' vocations. Maria Zane bequeathed 600 ducats to each of her three daughters. More precisely directive was Franceschina Contarini, who showed her awareness of dubious activities in some convents by giving her daughter 500 ducats whether she married or entered an observant convent, but nothing if she chose a non-observant one. And Caterina Querini willed her married daughter, Lucia, the 2,000 ducats she had promised in Lucia's marriage contract⁴⁵. Each of these bequests was made at a time when the average patrician dowry was 1,230 ducats and the maximum allowed by law 1,600 ducats⁴⁶. To further enforce heavily subsidized preferences such as these, moreover, 119 (70.4 percent) of the 169 women who included their husbands among their executors divided responsibility for children and estate between their husbands and members of their own families of origin; and 95 of these 119 (80 percent) included more than one natal family member in their *commissaria*. This weight of numbers served as a deterrent to potential efforts by husbands to deviate from their wives' intentions. Viewing it more positively, it also promoted the involvement of a woman's natal family in her children's futures, if not outright collaboration between them and her husband, providing the children oversight and support from two families and kin groups. Examples of such planning are Lucia Trevisan, who appointed both her husband and his father and offset, or complemented, them by also naming her mother and her four brothers; and Cateruzza Venier, who chose her father and mother as well as her husband and his mother⁴⁷.

⁴³ NT 1238, Tomei, part II, no. 258, 20 October 1467.

⁴⁴ NT 1186, Groppi, no. 33, 9 January 1481/82.

⁴⁵ NT 68, Bonicardi, no. 210, 16 May 1479 (Maria); NT 986, Rogeri, no. 18, 20 June 1447 (Franceschina); NT 131, Pietro Bon, no. 160, 28 July 1504 (Caterina).

⁴⁶ For the dowry average see Chojnacki, 2000b, 97; for the legal maximum see Idem, "Marriage Regulation" in *ibid.*, 54.

⁴⁷ NT 558, Gambaro, no. 141, 25 October 1446 (Lucia); NT 859, Ravagnan, no. 311, 17 November

Naming their natal kin as executors alongside their husbands is the most telling demonstration of the patronage aspect of married women's *commissari* choices. It affirmed the women's loyalty to both families, reinforcing the ties of trust and affection that endured between married daughters and their families as well as those forged between spouses. That only small minorities of testatresses either left their husbands out of their *commissarie* (17.6 percent) or, in contrast, appointed them as their sole executors (9.6 percent) underscores the predominance of the collaborative ideal espoused by the more than two-thirds of women who safeguarded their wills and enhanced the prospects of their children by blending natal and marital kin, chiefly their husbands, in their *commissarie*. The careful thought they gave to these choices shines forth in the designations of principal, or determining, executors. Maria Zane, for instance, devised a balanced group including her husband, his mother, two of her sisters and the husband of one of them, and the wife of one of her brothers; but she made clear that in any disagreement that might arise among them regarding her estate her husband had the deciding vote⁴⁸. Contrarywise, Chiara Arimondo appointed a *commissaria* consisting of her husband, her brother, her father and her father's sister; and whatever her father and her aunt decided would constitute the majority decision⁴⁹. Lucia Contarini also weighted her *commissaria* in favor of her natal family, appointing her husband but also her mother, her late father's sister, and the latter's husband; but she ensured balance and perhaps encouraged comity by designating her mother and husband as together constituting the "maior pars"⁵⁰. Lucia was unusual in that joint designation, but she was hardly alone in balancing patronage of both husbands and natal families in choosing dominant executors; six other wives made their husbands the automatic majority and eight others besides Lucia designated a natal kinsman, usually a parent.

Married patrician women's choices of executors show their multiform loyalty and self-identification as they patronized members of their array of relationships in matters with heavy material and psychological stakes. In nearly every case the relationships were with family – natal, marital, or both; only thirteen of the 205 married women in the sample named priests, officials, or nobles of unknown relationship, if any, to the testatress, and always together with at least one relative. The testimony provided by wills of the patronage activities of married women extends beyond the executors they chose, however. Shifting the focus to their husbands' wills sheds additional light on women's roles as mediators between their marital and natal families, as patronesses of the social cohesion that helped the patrician regime in the Quattrocento

1406 (Cateruzza). On mothers promoting support of their sons by their brothers, see Chojnacki, 2000c.

⁴⁸ "Maiorem partem volo esse et intelligi debere ipsum dominum Hieronimum maritum meum solum". NT 68, Bonicardi, no. 210, 16 May 1479.

⁴⁹ NT 41, Bonamico, no. 54, 7 October 1490.

⁵⁰ Ibid., no. 113, 7 January 1493/94.

weather internal stresses as well as the hostility and resentment of other Italian states and the menace of Ottoman expansion in the East⁵¹.

Just as testating women authorized their executors, who in most cases included their husbands, to participate in their testamentary patronage, husbands responded in kind. Indeed, men appointed their spouses to their *commissarie* just as frequently as did women. Out of a sample of seventy-seven male testators with living wives, nearly four out of five, sixty-one or 79.2 percent, did so, as compared with the 82.4 percent of wives who appointed their husbands. Sometimes this reciprocity was perfectly symmetrical. Dictating his will on 2 December 1445, Valerio Zen named his wife, Vittoria, as his sole executor; nineteen days later Vittoria dictated her will to the same notary, in it naming Valerio as her sole executor⁵². Valerio and Vittoria appear not to have had children, but husbands with children also made their wives their only executors. Marco Loredan in 1441 appointed his wife alone and urged her to love their children “chome padre,” and Moisè Venier not only wanted his wife, pregnant with their third son, to be his sole executor even if she remarried (“vedoando o no”) but also authorized her to choose the *commissari* who would administer his estate after her death⁵³.

Such men’s exclusive reliance on their wives as executors deserves comment. All three of the husbands just named had natal relatives, Valerio and Moisè brothers and Marco unspecified kinsmen, but they all bypassed the lineage loyalty that supposedly nourished the structural sinews of the hereditary ruling class. Marco and Moisè gave reasons for neglecting their agnatic kin and investing their wives with responsibility for their property beyond the grave: Moisè stated that he was in litigation with his three brothers over financial matters and was silent about his paternal uncles. Marco said that none of his relatives would be surprised (“non parà da nuovo ad algun di mie”) that he left them out of his *commissaria*, because all knew of his obligation to his wife for her devoted care during his illness; his gesture of gratitude and explanation of it show how appointing executors, whether by husbands or wives, was an empowering act of patronage. Valerio Zeno made no mention at all of natal kin, though in her will his wife made a dowry bequest to a daughter of her husband’s brother, but Valerio added to his will a long, emphatic, and somewhat defensive insistence that no challenge be admitted to his designation of her as his universal heir⁵⁴. He evidently was worried that his natal kin might try to wrest his estate from her.

⁵¹ For a searching account of fifteenth-century patrician politics, see Romano, 2007. For anti-Venetian sentiment in Italy, see Rubinstein.

⁵² Valerio: NT 558/a, Antonio Gambaro, no. 124; Vittoria: *ibid.*, no. 123. Vittoria had written an earlier will in 1427 in which also she appointed Valerio to be her sole commissario, NT 852, Francesco Rizoto, no. 349.

⁵³ Marco: NT 1157, Croci, prot. 2, fol. 33v, 24 June 1441; Moisè: PSMC Misti, busta 3A, Moisè Venier, parchment 26 July 1448.

⁵⁴ “quia intentio mea est et volo quod non obstantibus neque impredientibus aliquibus condicionibus neque oppositionibus que quo jure modo et forma opponi et fieri possint contra

In all, eleven of the seventy-seven husbands made their wives chief patrons of the husbands' estate. Four named them as their sole executor, and another seven designated them as the deciding member of a group of executors. An example of the latter provision is the will of Donato Arimondo who, after appointing a *commissaria* consisting of his wife, his married sister, and two male cousins, added "I want the dispensing [of my bequests] always to be done under the direction of madona Bianca, and indeed she is to be considered the majority"⁵⁵. Another is the will of Marino Pisani, who wanted decisions regarding his estate to be made by a majority of his *commissaria*, which included his wife, his brother, his father-in-law, and all his sons and daughters when they reached age fifteen, but "nothing is to be done without the consent of my wife, Cateruzza"⁵⁶. After enumerating his bequests, Giovanni da Mula requested that "all this be carried out as quickly as possible by my *commissari*, or by the majority of them, and I want that majority to be my darling [*amabele*] consort, Lucia", who was joined in Giovanni's *commissaria* by two of their sons and all their other children when they reached age fourteen⁵⁷. These appointments attest to husbands' confidence that their wives either could be trusted to execute the men's intentions or, acting as co-patrons, would on their own choose suitable recipients of their husbands' largesse.

The eleven men who gave their wives exclusive or majority control over their estates, 14 percent of the seventy-seven man sample, must be set alongside husbands who authorized their wives' discretion in carrying out particular family responsibilities. A frequent assignment with vital social and economic stake was to decide daughters' vocations: Filippo Priuli ordered that his five daughters "should marry or enter convents [*maritari aut monacari*] when it seemed right to Cristina, who is my executor and their mother;" Filippo's other executors were those five daughters, which effectively gave Cristina sole management of his estate as well as their daughters' futures⁵⁸. On the chance that his wife might give birth to a daughter, Piero Morosini made the girl his residuary heir with instructions that she wasn't to marry before age fourteen, and "the said daughter is not to marry without the consent of her mother"⁵⁹. Another Morosini, Fantin, was even more explicit, having a

hanc presentem meam ordinationem et voluntatem, dicta Victoria semper et in omni statu et termino, et tam viduando quam non viduando et in quocumque alio statu et termino esse possit et declarari, semper habeat et habere debeat totum illud quod sibi dimitto".

⁵⁵ "Ma nela dispensazion volo se fazi senper [sic] con la volontà de madona Bianca e che perfino la in vera la se intenda lei eser per la plui parti". NT 66, Priamo Busenello, no. 126, 8 September 1499.

⁵⁶ "E chel non se posa far alguna chosa zenza la voluntade de mia muier Chataruzia". NT 859, Egidio Ravagnan, no. 236, 24 March 1404.

⁵⁷ "Le qual tute chose voio sia andade a sequicion plu presto se puol per i mie chomesari, over per la maor parte, la qual maor parte voio sia la mia amabele consorte Lucia". NT 1157, Croci, Prot II, fol. 56v, 15 September 1451.

⁵⁸ NT 68, Girolamo Bonicardi, no. 72, 22 December 1485.

⁵⁹ "Item voio la dita fia no se podesse maridar senza voluntade de la dita soa mare, madona Valvina". NT 567, Bartolomeo fu Benvenuto, unnumbered wills, 1 June 1397

procura notarized which gave his wife, Franceschina, “full authority and power to marry our daughter, Eufemia, to whoever seems to you most suitable and to promise him whatever dowry and trousseau seem to you appropriate”⁶⁰. Fantin was authorizing Franceschina to make decisions that would not only place Eufemia in marriage but also create or reinforce alliances between two families. Such delegations by husbands to wives were discharged in practice. Among 101 patrician marriage contracts from the fifteenth and early sixteenth century, mothers took an active part in more than half, fifty-seven, either as contractors, or by contributing to the bride’s dowry, or by backing up with their own property the groom’s capacity to repay it at the end of the marriage⁶¹.

Some husbands formally assigned their prospective widows the status of “*donna et domina* [vernacular *donna e madonna*] in domo sua,” which gave them the statutory right to material support at the expense of the husband’s estate as well as authority over the household⁶². Giulio Contarini made it clear that giving his wife, Agnesina, that designation was part of a bargain putting the prospective widow in charge of the children’s upbringing. After bequeathing her and their children equal shares of his residuary estate, he specified that Agnesina’s share was conditioned on her leaving her dowry in his estate rather than reclaiming it, as was her right. But whether she reclaimed it or not, she was still to be “*donna e madonna* with authority over her sons and daughters as long as she lives,” with his estate paying her living expenses⁶³. Paolo Morosini made the same bargain, with an additional sanction. He too wanted his wife to “stay with my sons” with their expenses borne by his estate, and he instructed the sons “to treat their mother as *donna e madonna*”. To put steel into his order he added, “and if they don’t, I want them deprived of my bequest to them”⁶⁴. Similarly determined, Giovanni da Mula, whose appointment of his wife as his majority executor was noted above, left her *donna e madonna* with lifetime usufruct of all his goods, including their five sons’ inheritance, “and I do this so that my sons have reason to treat her well”.

⁶⁰ “ut amodo in antea pro meoque nomine plenam virtutem et potestatem habeatis maritandi Eufemiam filiam nostram, cui tibi melius videbitur et apparebit et eidem per dotem et nomine dotis quicquid tibi videbitur promittere ac coredos [sic],” ASVe, Cancelleria Inferiore, Notai, busta 36, Giovanni Campion, protocollo II, fol. 2v, n.d. September 1364.

⁶¹ Data from ASVe, various registers of Giudici del Proprio and Avogadori di Comun. These sources will be described in detail in another study. On dowry-restitution procedures, see Bellavitis, 55-72; Chojnacki, 2000b.

⁶² “& sit domina in domo”. *Volumen Statutorum*, lib. 4, cap. 15, 66v. In Florence, about one-third of testating fathers designated that status for their wives: Chabot, 1999, 138.

⁶³ “che la sia dona e madona al governo de suo fiuoli e fie domentre la viverà. E se la volesse pagar dela sua dota volio la sia privata de quanto lasso, zoè de la parte i tocherà de questa heredità secondo la lasso emgual con suo fiuoli e fie. Ma volio che labia vito e vestito domentre la viverà, stando al governo de suo fiuoli e fie”. NT 1129, Paolo Benedetto, no. 7, 28 July 1463.

⁶⁴ “Voio che mie fioli trata so mare per dona e madona e si no farà cusi voio li sia privadi de tuto quello laso”. Cancelleria Inferiore, Notai, b. 57, Benedetto dalle Croci, parchment no. 20, 8 February 1382/83.

To this economic leverage he added a moral injunction: "in order to have my blessing they must be obedient to their mother and not stray from her advice and orders"⁶⁵.

Other husbands delegated to their wives substantive authority without the formal *donna e madonna* designation. The experience of marital partnership had instilled in these men confidence in the women's commitment to their children and the family's fortunes and their ability to administer both, taking over the husband's patronage responsibilities as head of the family. Leonardo Priuli wanted his widow to be considered a father ("ut patre amisso") to their children⁶⁶. Some husbands were forthright about their wives' management skills. In addition to giving his wife, Isabella, majority authority among his executors, who also included a married sister and her husband, a widowed sister, three maternal uncles, and two other nobles, Piero da Molin appointed "my wife to be guardian [*gubernatrix*] of my children, both male and female, and to keep them with her; and no one, whether on the basis of kinship or any other claim, is to take them out of my wife's hands and guardianship"⁶⁷. For good measure he ordered that his daughter Cornelia was to be married "depending on the quantity and quality of my estate, at the discretion and prudence of my wife, in whom I have complete confidence"⁶⁸. Francesco Valier ordered that his two daughters "remain under the authority of and be obedient to the wise and respectable madona Isabella, their mother and my beloved wife". He made Isabella and the daughters his residuary heirs, on condition that Isabella not reclaim her dowry but leave it in Francesco's estate "for her benefit and that of my daughters. And regarding her remarrying or remaining a widow I add nothing, since I know her to be wise and prudent in all her dealings and am certain that she will choose what is best for herself and her honor and for the little girls"⁶⁹.

These and other men entrusted their wives with all or part of the responsibilities associated with family headship. Noteworthy in themselves,

⁶⁵ "e questo faço azò che mie fioli habia chason de portarse ben desa [de essa] . . . E per la mia benedicion i sia hobodiente a sua mare, e non se parte de i consei e chomandamenti de quela". NT 1157, Croci, Prot II, fol. 56v, 15 September 1451.

⁶⁶ "ut patre amisso et matris et patris loco". NT 1239, Tomei, no. 413, 15 March 1477.

⁶⁷ "ipsa uxor mea sit gubernatrix filiorum meorum tam masculi quam femine et penes se eos retineat, et nullus possit tam ratione parentele quam aliter extrahere eos de manibus et gubernatione dicte uxoris mee". NT 1228, Cristoforo Rizzo, no. 328, 1 June 1494.

⁶⁸ "[V]olo maritari debere Corneliam filiam meam secundum qualitatem et quantitatem dicti mei residui ad discretionem et prudentiam uxoris mee, de qua plenum confido". Ibid.

⁶⁹ "Item voglio che da poi la morte mia mie fie Marieta e Archanzoleta rimagna in governo e hobodientia dela savia e honesta madona Ixabella sua madre e mia dileta consorte . . . Con questa condicion che la dita madona Ixabella non se possi trar dela dita mia comessaria la sua dota che me fo promesso duchati mille ma che la rimagna in la dita mia comessaria a suo beneficio e de le dite mie fie ut dictum est. Non dirò altro del suo maridar e vedoar, cognosandola savia e prudentissima in tute sue opere, siando certo lei elezerà el meglio per lei el plui so honor e per le fiolete". NT 1186, Domenico Groppi, no. 48, 2 November 1492.

such departures from the overarching principle of male authority also put widows, and sometimes wives, in the position of forging or reinforcing social and economic relationships. An example is Cateruzza Vitturi, whose nomination in 1448 by her husband, Moisè Venier, as his sole executor was mentioned earlier, as was Moisè's comment in the will that he was involved in a lawsuit against his brothers⁷⁰. In the 1460s Cateruzza registered her and Moisè's sons for the Barbarella, or Balla d'Oro, the annual lottery for eighteen-year-old nobles that entitled winners to take their hereditary place in the Great Council at the early age of twenty. Recognizing that the young men's fortunes depended on family support, in 1463 she recruited her own Vitturi brother to stand surety that her son Girolamo was eighteen and legitimately born; three years later, when she registered her youngest son, Moisè Jr, she persuaded her sons' paternal uncles to stand surety⁷¹. These uncles were the estranged brothers that fifteen years earlier her husband had identified in his will as adversaries in a lawsuit. Cateruzza thus effected a reconciliation between her brothers-in-law and her sons, who would benefit from good relations with uncles from their Venier lineage at the same time that their mother cultivated their ties to her family of birth⁷².

Assigning executor authority over children and property was a decision by husbands that gave wives opportunities for exercising economic and social patronage themselves. But another aspect of husbands' wills fostered the wives' patronage role as brokers of collaboration between their families of birth and of marriage. Above, we noted a few cases of men who bypassed their natal families and lineages, instead favoring their wives in their *commissaria* choices. That may seem anomalous, since membership in the lineage and mutual support with family members were keys to prospering in the hereditary patriciate. That was the reason that Cateruzza Vitturi reknit ties between her sons and their father's estranged brothers, who might be their nephews' patrons in their economic and political adulthoods. It also explains why a solid majority of the seventy-seven married male testators, 59.7 percent, included natal kin among their executors. And yet, it cannot be ignored that the other 40.3 percent left their agnates out of their *commissarie*, forgoing lineage support for children and property. Moreover, in the context of patrilineal identity and interest even more noteworthy are the thirty-four of the seventy-seven husbands, 44.2 percent, who chose affines; nineteen of these thirty-four were wives' kin, the others were spouses of the men's siblings or children. Many of these men coupled their in-laws with their wives and/or natal kinsmen, electing to recruit a bilateral or even multilateral range of support for their

⁷⁰ Above, note 53.

⁷¹ ASVe, Avogadori di Comun, Balla d'Oro, reg. 164, fol. 326rv. On the Barbarella, or Balla d'Oro, see Chojnacki, 2000c.

⁷² Besides Cateruzza's brother, also standing surety at Girolamo's registration was her cousin, a son of her father's sister. For other examples of mothers recruiting natal and affinal kin for their sons' registrations, see Chojnacki, 2000c, 215-218.

intentions for their children and estates. The fact remains, though, that two-fifths, thirty-one, of the seventy-seven husbands in the sample named no agnate executors. Nine of these appointed their wives alongside affines, usually the wives' kin, and seventeen chose the wives alone or with their children. (The *commissari* in the remaining five wills included wives together with officials or with apparently unrelated persons.) In any case, the sovereign fact is that sixty-one of the husbands in the sample, four out of five, entrusted their interests wholly, primarily, or at least partially to wives who themselves, as we have seen, relied heavily – indeed, considerably more heavily than did their husbands – on executors from their natal families.

In parsing these catholic choices of married men ostensibly anchored in their lineages it is good to bear in mind that a marriage between patrician families was designed to expand the contracting parties' range of social, political, and economic resources. A man's productive relations with his wife's father or brothers could work to the benefit of his natal family, and likewise to hers. Soon after his wedding Moisè Venier joined his wife's father and brother in a grain importing business, while at the same time managing the economic affairs of his own father, brothers, and other natal kinsmen⁷³. In his will of 1427, Bulgaro Vitturi worried that his two sons might be trying to cheat each other (“*usurpare bona alterius*”); to bring about a reconciliation between the two brothers he commissioned his wife's brother⁷⁴. A business dispute litigated before the civil court of Petizion involved a partnership between Giovanni Gradenigo, his mother's brother, Marco Morosini, and his own brother-in-law, Francesco Barbaro⁷⁵. A frequent role of in-laws was participating in the Barbarella registrations of their young affines. The registrations in 1449 of a couple of young Morosini men, both named Alvisè, illustrate the durability of such cross-marriage collaboration. At the registration of Alvisè di Nicolò Morosini, the young man's sponsor was his father's brother Jacopo, and the guarantors of his eligibility were a brother of Uncle Jacopo's first wife and a brother of his current wife. One month later, an even more tortuous connection, linking three different marriages, operated at the registration of the other Alvisè, son of a different Jacopo Morosini, now deceased: one of the guarantors was the son-in-law of Alvisè's mother, married to her daughter by her second husband, whereas Alvisè was the son of her first, the late Jacopo Morosini⁷⁶.

The presence at these Barbarella registrations of in-laws, often collaborating with the young registrants' lineage mates, once more focuses

⁷³ ASVe, Procuratori di San Marco, Commissarie miste, b. 3A, Moisè Venier, red leather account book.

⁷⁴ NT 1157, Benedetto dalle Croci, protocollo, fol. 67v.

⁷⁵ Procuratori di San Marco, commissarie miste, b. 78a, Carte Morosini, parchment 29 September 1427. Morosini had already received a business commission (*procura*) from another of his sister's kin 21 years earlier. Cancelleria Inferiore, notai, b. 170, protocollo 2, 10 December 1406.

⁷⁶ Avogadori di Comun, Balla d'Oro, reg. 163, fol. 309r, 10 October and 6 November 1449. For further discussion of this practice, with additional examples, see Chojnacki, 2000c, esp. 215-24.

attention on perhaps the most vital aspect of married women's patronage, promoting interfamilial relations. Earlier we observed men authorizing their wives, once widowed, to see to the vocations of their daughters. The counterpart of that is on display in mothers' Barbarella activity: with no evident encouragement in husbands' wills, they fostered collaboration between their families of birth and of marriage in the introduction of their sons into patrician adulthood. A law of 1414, which gave the Barbarella its definitive structure, identified fathers as the preferred sponsors of the young candidates⁷⁷. This was the surest way to determine the candidates' legitimate patrician status, but fathers deceased or away from Venice had to be replaced and, not surprisingly, in their absence brothers and other lineage kin were the most frequent replacements. Yet nearly two-fifths of these father-substitutes were the candidates' mothers, and the guarantors they recruited display their interfamilial mediation⁷⁸. In 755 Quattrocento registrations sponsored by either the candidate's mother or his father, nearly two-thirds, 65 percent, of the guarantors belonged to neither parent's natal lineage. Though a majority of these seemingly unrelated guarantors were probably connected by marriage to members of one or the other parent's lineage, their selection was no doubt a tactic calculated to advertise widespread familiarity with the young man's patrician credentials among nobles outside the family⁷⁹.

When they did look to their lineage connections for guarantors, however, sponsoring fathers as well as sponsoring mothers called on both maternal and paternal kin, with fathers recruiting their own kinsmen 70 percent of the time, their wives' kin the other 30 percent; mothers favored their natal kinsmen slightly more frequently, 36 percent to 64 percent for their husbands' kin⁸⁰. But the slight difference is less significant than the consensus of mothers and fathers in selecting Barbarella guarantors as it was in appointing testamentary executors. The dominant principle for both parents was, as in the example of Cateruzza Vitturi noted earlier, solidifying their sons' place in the patrilineage, which in the end was the matrix of membership in the ruling class with all its associations and benefits, while also cultivating the young men's ties to uncles and other kinsmen on their mother's side. Examples abound. In 1468, Agnesina Vitturi, widow of Nicolò Loredan, sponsored her son Andrea's Barbarella registration with, as guarantors, her own brother Domenico and her late husband's brother, Andrea's "patruus," Marco Loredan. Agnesina cast

⁷⁷ There were minor changes to the institution later in the Quattrocento, but in essentials the law of 1414 was definitive. See Chojnacki, 2000c.

⁷⁸ Of identifiable sponsors in 418 registrations with fathers absent, just over half, 52.1 percent, belonged to the candidate's patrilineage. Mothers accounted for 37.8 percent and maternal kin another 10 percent. *Ibid.*, table 14, p. 211.

⁷⁹ The 755 registrations are for sixteen patrician clans: Avogadori di Comun, Balla d'Oro, reg. 162, 163, and 164. See Chojnacki, 2000a, 208 and 321, notes 10, 12; also 216, table 15.

⁸⁰ The exact figures: fathers engaged 143 (69.2%) of their own kinsmen, 108 (30.8%) wives' kin; mothers recruited 75 (63.6%) husbands' kinsmen and 43 (36.4%) of their own kin.

her kinship net still wider when three years later she registered another son, Giambattista: one of the guarantors was Giambattista's cousin, Girolamo Venier, the son of Agnesina's widowed sister, Cateruzza, who as we saw above had sponsored this Girolamo's own registration eight years earlier⁸¹. Other widows followed the same pattern as the Vitturi sisters. Registering her son Piero, Elena Tron, widow of Benedetto Morosini, recruited as guarantors Piero's brother and her own natal kinsman Andrea Tron. Elisabetta Loredan, wife of the absent Marco Mudazzo, registered her son Marino with, as guarantors, her husband's brother Nicolò Mudazzo and her own brother, Alvise Loredan. Likewise Chiara Zusto, widow of Jacopo da Mula, recruited Jacopo's brother Alvise da Mula together with Alvise Zusto as guarantors when she registered her son Francesco⁸².

Both in choosing testamentary executors and in assembling guarantors for their sons' Barbarella registrations, married patrician women used the patronage possibilities of their dowry wealth and their husbands' reliance on them to further the stake they shared with their husbands in the adult prospects of their children, male and female. Like their husbands they nourished their relations with their families and lineages of birth, but their children's interests encouraged their cultivation of productive relationships with their spouses' families as well. The outcome of this bilateral loyalty and its benefits was a new family orientation, a new family structure, the conjugal family, with offsetting, complementary ties to the families that after all had contracted the marriage, but with a primary focus on the fortunes of the new family, of which patrician wives were willing patronesses.

⁸¹ Avogadori di Comun, Balla d'Oro, reg. 164, fols. 203v (Andrea), 204r (Giambattista).

⁸² *Ibid.*, fols. 217r (Piero Morosini), 273r (Marino Mudazzo), 274v (Francesco da Mula).

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Abstract

This essay is inspired by Ben Kohl's 2001 article on Fina Buzzaccarini da Carrara as wife, mother, and art patron in fourteenth-century Padua. Ben examined Fina's collaboration with her husband, Francesco il Vecchio da Carrara, her bequests to her children and other persons, and her expenditures for the construction of a tomb for herself and her husband in Padua's Baptistery. He showed the many ways in which a woman of substance, in this case the wife of the lord of Padua, could use her wealth to give expression to her loyalty to family, church, and city. Shifting the focus from signorial Padua to republican Venice, this essay will survey the benefactions of a sample of patrician women from the late fourteenth to the early sixteenth century. While all such bequests can be gathered under the umbrella of patronage, the different kinds of benefactions and the different categories of legatees were expressions of different motivations: piety, family loyalty, personal disposition. As with Fina da Carrara, drawing up a testament confronted women, as it did men, with the need to sort out their hierarchies of affection, loyalty, responsibility, and encouragement. They thus provide a measure of shifting loyalties as women moved from natal to marital family; in the cases of women who wrote wills at different stages of their married and widowed lives, they also display the evolution of the women's social and religious preferences over time. The argument is that, as Ben Kohl showed, patronage was protean and selective. In the case of Venetian patrician women writing their wills, it also reflected the effects of time, changing social environments, and personal choice.

Keywords

Middle Ages; 14th-16th century; Venice; patricians; kinship; female wills; society; patronage

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