WOMEN WHO MADE HISTORY

The first path deals with depictions of women in the collections who actively influenced European history

As in almost all large collections of European art, numerous portrayals of female historical personages are also found in the Bode Museum. Their personal histories are an important part of the history of European civilisation. The overwhelming majority of these women belonged to a privileged social class. The reason behind this is simple and also applies to men: art museums mainly contain objects that were commissioned by economic and social elites and/or were produced for them. Such women, however, owed their prominent position in the thoroughly patriarchal, i.e. male-dominated, European social structure primarily to their societal position as daughters, wives, or mothers of famous men. That – and not, for example, their individual accomplishments – was generally the reason they ended up being depicted by artists. As a consequence, women's contributions to European history remained mostly unseen in art. Meanwhile, portrayals of women entered museums and were largely robbed of their social-historical contexts, and as a result nowadays they are primarily appreciated for their art historical and aesthetic values.

One enlightening example of how important contributions of women are covered up in art museums is the edifice of the Bode Museum itself, which was inaugurated in 1904 by Emperor Wilhelm II (1859–1941) under the name Kaiser Friedrich Museum. According to the established narrative, Wilhelm wanted to thereby honour the role of his father Friedrich III (1831–1888) as patron and supporter of Museum Island. However, the building also served as an homage to the Hohenzollern dynasty, which for centuries had ruled a steadily growing territory from its home in Berlin. As a consequence, the entrance hall of the museum, known as the Great Dome Hall, is decorated not only with a medallion of Friedrich III but also with even larger portrait medallions of the »Great Elector« of Brandenburg, Friedrich Wilhelm (1620–1688), the Prussian kings Friedrich II »the Great« (1712–1786) and Friedrich Wilhelm IV (1795–1861) as well as the benefactor Emperor Wilhelm II (fig. 1-1).

The only women that we catch sight of at this politically most important place in the museum are naked. They are representations of the Muses – protective goddesses of the arts who hark back to stories from ancient Greece. They are fashioned as fully three-dimensional sculptures of ideal beauty, whose only purpose seems to consist of inspiring the men portrayed in the medallions. Since the museum's opening, the visual program of the Dome Hall conveys a clear message: the male members of the Hohenzollern dynasty were relevant for the genesis of the Berlin collections, and women were assigned at best a passive role in this undertaking. Even a quick look at the background of the Bode Museum, however, is sufficient to recognise that this message was manipulated. At least one other member of the House of Hohenzollern should have been immortalised with a portrait: namely, Victoria, Princess Royal of Great Britain and Ireland (1840–1901), who was married to Crown Prince Friedrich Wilhelm, later Emperor Friedrich III, since 1858.

As the first-born child of Queen Victoria (1819–1901) and her German husband Prince Albert of Saxony-Coburg and Gotha (1819–1861), Princess Victoria had picked up extensive knowledge of the practical as well as theoretical aspects of the arts. She was also conversant about issues of patronage, having experienced at close hand her parents' extraordinary engagement for establishing art museums with a public educational mandate, among them the South Kensington Museum, opened in 1857 and since 1899 bearing the name Victoria & Albert Museum. Even after her marriage, Victoria used her numerous trips to London to keep an eye on the development of the British museums.

With the establishment of the German Empire in 1871, her husband was elevated to the title of Crown Prince. Although he had achieved some military renown during the Franco-Prussian War, his liberal attitudes kept him far away from political posts. As a consequence, the royal couple sought out other ways to raise their profile. Victoria's great interest in art and museums certainly had no small influence on her husband's taking on the position of a »protector« of the Royal Museums (the predecessor of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin). Wilhelm von Bode (1845–1929), who had been working at the Royal Museums since 1872 and became their director general in 1905, explicitly mentioned in his memoirs Victoria's important role, especially for the founding of today's Bode Museum. His original project of a »Renaissance

Published in: López-Fanjul y Díez del Corral (ed.), Second Glance: Women, Heidelberg:arthistoricum.net 2021, https://doi.org/10.11588/arthistoricum.957

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Bode Museum
Great Dome Hall
© Wolfgang Gülcker

Museum« was fully supported by Victoria; she even donated works from her own collection and was able to convince her initially reluctant son, Wilhelm II, to memorialise his father by naming the museum after him.

However, for the museum's visitors, Victoria's importance remains hidden. Furthermore, she is not even familiar to the wide public by her actual name; if she is known at all, it is mostly as »Empress Friedrich«. Victoria took this peculiar-sounding name after the death of her terminally ill husband, who occupied the throne for just three months. By giving up her own identity, she gave weight to her aspiration to continue to have an important place in a patriarchally structured dynasty. Despite her royal ancestry and notwithstanding her important contribution to the cultural development of Prussia, Victoria's social position as a widow ultimately depended on the constant reminder of her one-time marriage to the emperor.

The memory of the often overlooked »99-Day Emperor« was more recently revived when the question of whether the Bode Museum should take back its original name as »Kaiser Friedrich Museum« was discussed in the press on a number of occasions. Whether Wilhelm von Bode or Friedrich III made the more worthy contributions to the museum is not of relevance in our context. What is meaningful here, though, is that – to our knowledge – the name of Victoria has never been seriously considered in these discussions.

Victoria and the Bode Museum are not an isolated incident. On the contrary, this episode is representative of the situation of women in the museum landscape. For example, while galleries in countless museums contain representations of women who made substantial contributions to the development of Western culture, the museum-going public only rarely is provided with information about these women. All too easily, the boundary is blurred between historically identifiable personalities and the idealised and, almost without exception, male projections of femininity. Ultimately, these museum presentations that lack commentary lead to important contributions by women being ignored, relativised, denigrated, or decontextualised.

They also support the prevailing impression that it is only in the last decades that women have been influencing the great guiding principles of social development.

In the following examples, we shall see how this process was reinforced throughout history: by the indoctrination of gender roles, denial of education, discrediting of female sexuality, use of physical violence, discrimination in access to economic resources and political power, granting privileges to women who conform, or even withholding from women the knowledge about the historical role of their own gender. This is the essence of what is known as the patriarchy, a societal form that is probably only a few thousand years old, in which the social authority is reserved exclusively for men and the invisibility of women is made to serve the creation of male success stories. Its indispensable basis was and is the patriarchally organised family, which at the same time expresses and creates in the first place the standards for this model of coexistence. As seen in the case of Victoria, such families not only reflect the established order but also execute and strengthen it at the same time.

The collections of sculptures and Byzantine art united in the Bode Museum reflect the artistic production of a broad swath of Europe from the 4th to the 18th century. This allows us to examine the history of European women as well as to appraise their particular roles within a time span of at least one and a half millennia. A very long period, which at the same time represents only a fraction of the history of *Homo sapiens* in Europe and thus of the women on our continent. One should keep this in mind when reading the remarks that follow, since they could raise the impression that human cultures in Europe had been permeated by patriarchy from the very beginning. In fact, however, the periods without patriarchy were most likely much more extended than those with it. In the literature references on page 94 are cited some works that assemble numerous pieces of evidence for such a hypothesis. If the Bode Museum's collections included objects from earlier times, the message to the public might be a much different one.

The patriarchal perspective of European art, and thus also of European museums, is due, not least, to the role of ancient Rome, which functioned as a critical catalyst and disseminator for pivotal cultural elements that we understand today as »European«. However, it was only in the 19th century – precisely in the era when the modern museum was established and the role of middle-class women was almost exclusively restricted to hearth and home – that quite a few of these elements were broadly interpreted and deeply anchored in European societies.

The ancient Roman Republic (ca. 500–27 BC) was based on a patriarchy, in the literal sense of the word. The family, which consisted of women, children, and enslaved persons, was subject to the authority of the »first among the fathers«, which is the direct translation of the word Patriarch. As a result, women were under the charge of their own father, their husband, or – for example in the case of widowhood – some other leading male family member. Among the few women who were able to escape from this system, if at least for a time, were the vestal virgins. Each member of this group, which comprised two to six women, was freed for thirty years from her father's paternalism, in turn forfeiting her youth to the religion. Only when their term ended were the vestal virgins required to marry. The main vows of these ancient Roman priestesses were obedience and chastity. Their main duty can be gathered from a bronze sculpture by Claude Michel (1738–1814) (fig. 1-2), which is associated with a hearth: they kept the holy flame of Vesta's temple burning. The cult of this goddess of hearth and home paid homage to the unity of the family, while the virginity of the vestal virgins was supposed to symbolise the inviolability of the city of Rome and at the same time guarantee it. If a vestal virgin lost her virginity, she consequently was considered not only a sinner, but also a traitor of the highest order, and she was declared a *Strega* (witch) who was made responsible for all the evils that befell society.

Even after the dissolution of the republic by the empire in 27 BC, the conditions of Roman women did not see much fundamental change at first. With the advance of the Christian religion in the Imperium Romanum, however, new definitions of private and public life gradually came about, since Christianity allowed women more active roles in religious practice. When the newly arisen religion increasingly established itself in the Roman Empire in the 4th century, however, Christianity was progressively re-structured under the premises of the patriarchy. In particular, the relation between political and religious authority continued to remain the domain of men. At the same time, though, women were definitely able to rise to the level of important change agents in Mediterranean societies during the years of transition: women, who not only fought for autonomy, but also perpetuated it and whose social networks were so stable that they were able to open similar paths for other women.

Helena (ca. 250–ca. 330) and Theodora (ca. 500–548) are two pivotal examples of these kinds of bold women. Both created novel role models and had important influence on the expansion of the Church as well as the political history of their times. Their portrayals in ivory plaque reliefs can be found in the collections of the Bode Museum (figs. 1-3 and 1-4). Frequently, several

1-2
Claude Michel, called Clodion
(1738–1814)
Vestal, ca. 1765
Bronze, 86,3 × 36,2 × 33 cm
Inv. Nr. 2751 © Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin / Jürgen Liepe

1-3

Constantinople

Small folding altar with the crucifixion of Christ and saints, 11th c.

Ivory, 23,4 × 26,5 × 1 cm

Inv. Nr. 1578 © Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin / Jürgen Liepe

of these plaques made up a single object and could be folded up like a book. Two matching panels are called a diptych, three a triptych, and more a polyptych. These types of objects were popular gifts and as portable altars were often used for private devotion.

Helena is portrayed in the lower part of the right-hand plaque of a triptych from the 11th century (fig. 1-3). That her fame survived for seven centuries already gives an idea of what importance Helena's activities must have had during her time. Indeed, only a few men had a similarly profound influence on the development of Christianity – and thus on Western history. On the ivory plaque next to Helena we also see her son, Emperor Constantine »the Great« (ca. 270/288–337). During his reign, the Roman Empire officially tolerated the Christian religion for the first time with the Edict of Milan (313), and at the First Council of Nicaea (324), central tenets regarding the practice of Christian faith were agreed upon. Furthermore, at Constantine's command, the first monumental churches, such as Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome or the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, were built. As a result, he is generally considered the creator of the Christian foundation of European culture.

That Constantine supposedly only converted to Christianity on his deathbed – if at all – was happily overlooked in this traditional narrative. The same goes for the substantial influence of his mother Helena, who converted much earlier, on what is called the »Constantinian shift«, which initiated the rise of Christianity from a long-persecuted religion to a central institution of European

1-4

Constantinople

Consular diptych of Iustinus, ca. 540

Ivory, 33,5 × 26 cm

Inv. Nr. 6367 © Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin / Antje Voigt.

history. Helena's role as an active benefactor of new churches and as a protector of sacred sites facilitated the development of a close-knit network of Christian pilgrimage routes, which in turn stimulated the expansion of the Christian religion in the empire. Without question, Helena has been assigned some level of importance, and she is revered as a saint by both the Western and Orthodox churches. As in the triptych in the Bode Museum, her images are usually associated with a cross; this refers to Helena supposedly having discovered in Jerusalem the »true cross« upon which Jesus Christ died. A plethora of legends are traditionally associated with her. Much less fuss was made, however, about a fact that especially singles out her life's work: Helena gave birth to Constantine while she was the wife or lover of a Roman officer who later left her for the emperor's stepdaughter, since only then could he himself become Emperor Constantius I. This means that the arguably crucial force behind the founding and expansion of the Christian religion in the Roman Empire, and therefore a historical personage of great importance for the development of European culture, was a single mother.

Just like Helena, Theodora also defied the Roman patriarchal structures. These also shaped the Eastern Roman or Byzantine Empire, which in the 4th century gradually emerged from the eastern part of the Roman Empire and survived until 1453. Theodora was the wife of Emperor Justinian I, whom historians have also called »the Great«. She took care of needy women in conspicuous ways. For example, she apparently wanted to put an end to forced prostitution in the capital Constantinople, today Istanbul. Together with Justinian, in 528 she arranged for the closure of all bordellos. In order to get to the root of the problem, she reimbursed the pimps the money they had spent to buy the daughters of poor farmers. The women, on the other hand, were guaranteed financial security and accommodation at a convent. In addition, laws were enacted to protect actresses, who in those days were often also prostitutes.

While we cannot give Theodora all the credit for these achievements, her energetic involvement in getting them fulfilled is just as obvious as her participation in all possible issues of the empire's governance, which was only made possible with Justinian's determined support. Because Theodora's past as an actress rendered a marriage with Justinian impossible, he simply eliminated the problem by summarily implementing his own law. Later, Justinian enacted another law that even raised Theodora to the status of an official co-regent.

In the upper portions of the two practically mirror-symmetric ivory plaques of a work in the Bode Museum known as a consular diptych, portraits of Justinian and Theodora are placed in their own medallions. Each portrait pair is supplemented by a medallion, containing a portrayal of Christ, placed between them. In the centre of both plaques are larger medallions with the image of the consul Justin, who commissioned this diptych in 540 on the occasion of his promotion to his new position. In this work, the empire's highest-ranking officeholder honoured not only the emperor but also the ruling couple Justinian and Theodora, whose reign brought the Byzantine Empire to a glorious zenith.

At the time (and to some extent even to the present day), Theodora's excessive power brought on the scene some critics who did not want to attribute her influence on Justinian to her social or intellectual capabilities. Rather, sexually connotated arts of seduction, which Theodora would have picked up in her younger years, were seen to be at work. Irrespective of the substance of these implications, there is much to suggest that Theodora's courage and foresight were of great importance for Justinian. For example, she is even supposed to have kept the emperor on the throne during the Nika Revolt in 532 because she urged him not to flee but instead to forcefully confront the mutineers. She is revered in the Orthodox Church as a saint.

In the first centuries of the Middle Ages, women provide some particularly important and long-lasting contributions to European culture. Besides Christianity, decentralised economic and political systems made possible a world that was not as strongly dominated by one gender as it was in the previous era or would also be in the Modern Age to follow. For most women, however, marriage and motherhood remained the determining factors, although these did not necessarily have to stand in the way of their taking on other professional activities. A few women escaped the patriarchal constraints by joining one of the rich and powerful convents that were run by women. For all women, financial solvency and independent access to those funds were fundamental conditions for attaining a higher degree of freedom – a status that more women achieved than is generally assumed today.

Despite many setbacks, the requirements for such an economic independence improved incrementally up to the 11th century. An important role in these changes was played by the mutual influences of local clan traditions and Roman culture as well as legislation. At the end of this process, women in a large part of Europe had the same inheritance rights as their brothers and kept their personal possessions even if they were married. This fact opened up viable options for women to attain power not only within the family but also outside of it, for example by renting out farmlands. While it was expected that wives would hand over the task of asset management to their husbands, a great deal of women were able to maintain sole control of their own possessions. However, when it came to defending them, women were pretty much left out. Violence was considered a masculine domain – and yet some women even thoroughly acquitted themselves in the sphere of the art of warfare, which was seen as the quintessence of manliness.

One of these unusual women is the Marchioness Mathilda of Canossa (ca. 1046–1115). Even centuries after the death of this strident and aristocratic papal loyalist, Pope Urban VIII (1568–1644) commissioned the Italian artist Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598–1680) for a large marble tomb that can still be found in St. Peter's Basilica today. In parallel to its execution, several small bronze statuettes of the central figure of Mathilda were created, one of which is now part of the Sculpture Collection of the Bode Museum (fig. 1-5).

Mathilda supports a tiara in the crook of her left arm while her left hand holds several large keys. The latter objects symbolise one of the most important of Christ's disciples, Saint Peter, who in the Catholic Church is considered the founder of the papacy. Starting in the Middle Ages, his successors demonstrated their secular power through a specific crown, the tiara. Mathilda is thus holding the most important symbol of the papacy, which to the present day is reserved for men only. In addition, a baton, known as a command staff, in her right hand represents military leadership, and her posture expresses energy and decisiveness. Mathilda's overall appearance represents the faithful soldier of the Holy See that the papacy of her time searched for among the men – in vain.

Mathilda was not even ten years old when she lost her father, who was apparently murdered. As a result, she became the last representative of the direct lineage of a powerful European noble family. The House of Canossa had familial ties to popes and kings and reigned over large parts of central Italy and Lorraine. In 1069, Mathilda was married off to the Duke of Lower Lorraine, Gottfried »the Hunchback« (ca. 1040–1076). Soon after, she bore a daughter who died shortly after birth. When she was reproached for not giving birth to a living male heir, she abruptly returned to her Italian homeland. From there, she at first governed her territories together with her mother, and then alone after the latter's early death. Shortly thereafter she became a central military actor in a conflict between church and empire, most notably carried out between Pope Gregory VII (ca. 1020–1085) and Emperor Henry IV (1050–1106), which is known as the Investiture Controversy.

Starting after his election in 1073, Gregory VII declared his opposition, with increasing vehemence, to the practice of anyone other than the pope himself filling key positions in the church hierarchy. Specifically, it had long been customary that bishops – frequently in return for favours – were named by emperors and kings. This mixing of religious and civil authority shifted power from the pope to the secular rulers as well as to the bishops themselves. Because Henry IV did not want to give up this prerogative, he went to war against the pope and also arranged for the installation of Clemens III (ca. 1029–1100) as antipope. As a result, Gregory VII excommunicated Henry IV (that is, he expelled him from the community of the faithful and thus forbade him to take part in Christian rites, such as mass) and took refuge with the troops of the most important military leader in Italy at the time, who was nobody else but Mathilda of Canossa and thus a woman.

The sources from that time refer to the military strategy abilities of the marchioness, who personally coordinated defensive and offensive measures. Even if she apparently did not participate in the actual battles, her participation in military leadership was utterly assailed by her opponents as an inappropriate assumption of male authority. However, people who supported Mathilda characterised her with references to strong women in the Bible, like Deborah and Judith, who were chosen

to carry out God's will. The marchioness' troops withstood those of the emperor, and the desired church reforms were later able to be implemented, which is why Mathilda was accepted into the company of Christian heroes and heroines. Half a millennium after her death, Pope Urban VIII exploited Mathilda to consolidate his own position by emphasising his Tuscan roots to associate himself with her and having her portrayed in monumental form as a soldier of Christ.

Bit by bit during the 12th century, most European women lost their economic independence. The reasons for this are diverse and not least resulted from the change in the political landscape. Sovereign power distinguished itself in new, multi-faceted structures and became more independent of the power base of the ruling couple and their kin. While aristocratic men found themselves part of the new political order and adopted the new duties, the possibilities for women's political influence, previously readily available through family ties, now were almost completely shifted behind the walls of their homes. Alongside the loss of control over dowry and inheritance after marriage, the option of having influence over economic matters also disappeared.

1-5
Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598–1680)
Marchioness Mathilda of Canossa, 1633/1634
Bronze, 39,7 × 23,7 × 12,3 cm
Inv. Nr. 16/75 © Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin / Antje Voigt

1-6
Paris
Queen Joan of Navarre as a donor, ca. 1305
Limestone, 82 × 25 × 18 cm
Inv. Nr. M 296, Property of the Kaiser Friedrich Museumsverein

It was precisely this fate that threatened Joan (1273–1305), who at the tender age of just one year was named Queen of Navarre and Duchess of Champagne-Brie, because her father Henry I (1249–1274) had unexpectedly died quite young (fig. 1-6). Under these circumstances, her mother, Blanche d'Artois (1250–1302), sought out the protection of her French family and agreed to marry Joan off to her cousin, later King Phillip IV of France (1268–1314), when she was eleven years old. Until the wedding, Joan's future father-in-law, Phillip III of France (1245–1285), carried out the duties of governing in Navarre, nowadays part of Spain. After her marriage in 1284, she assumed responsibility, as Joan I, for the Kingdom of Navarre and the Duchy of Champagne-Brie. Just one year later, Phillip III died, and thus she also became Queen of France. At this point, Joan was only 12 years old, her husband Phillip just 17.

Unfortunately, we can derive only a bit of information about Joan's personality from written sources. It should be added that as a historical figure, she – quite unlike her husband – has been insufficiently researched. At the least we know that she was regularly present in Champagne and also acted there autonomously as a ruler. In 97 Joan even placed herself personally at the front of her troops, in order to apprehend Henry III, Count of Bar, who had invaded Champagne, and take him prisoner. She only resided in Navarre during her earliest childhood. However, she seamlessly inserted herself into the remarkable series of female rulers in various kingdoms on the Iberian peninsula who, legitimately inheriting their thrones, possessed governmental power »by their own right«.

In addition, Joan was also concerned with social and cultural issues, as a limestone sculpture in the Sculpture Collection of the Bode Museum attests. It shows a female figure, idealised according to the notions of the time around 1300, who can be recognised as a queen by her massive crown. In combination with her clothing style as well as the model of a building in her hands, she was identified as Joan I of Navarre. The model makes reference to the queen's most prominent social project, whose realisation she did not live to see. Joan died at the age of 32, possibly as the result of childbirth. In her will, she mandated that a large portion of her personal fortune be used for the founding and operation of the Collège de Navarre. The college, opened in 1315, was open for all citizens of France and Navarre, without restrictions regarding social status or financial means, who wanted to study grammar, logic, or theology. It quickly developed into one of the pivotal components of the University of Paris and became an important nucleus of European culture.

The examples of Mathilda and Joan are impressive demonstrations of the possibilities that were sometimes open to women, at least those from higher social strata, even in the High Middle Ages. However, they should not be overvalued. The reforms pushed by Gregory VII also led to the introduction of obligatory celibacy for the priesthood. Female partners and children of bishops and priests now lost their status as recognised family members and fell into socially and economically precarious circumstances. Moreover, sexuality and everything related to it were considered impure. In the end, a mindset was created in which many European thinkers, drawing on theories of the Greek philosopher Aristotle (388–322 BC), even went so far as to question the role of women as mothers, defining them as mere carriers of foetuses – foetuses that had been created by men.

Aristotle's way of thinking shaped scholasticism, that leading philosophical current of the Middle Ages that particularly addressed questions of the Christian religion by referencing ancient patterns of argumentation. As explained in more detail on page 34, Aristotle saw a woman as an uncompleted and flawed man, irrational and fickle. As a result, in the Late Middle Ages men were increasingly considered the perfect humans, created in God's image. Women, on the other hand, were described as weak and all too susceptible to the devil's temptations and were accused of wanting to lead men into sin.

The supposed polarity between the concepts of female and male has anchored itself in the European world of ideas to the present day. This becomes especially clear in the Modern Era, which begins in the 15th century and is the third great epoch of Western history, after antiquity and the Middle Ages. At its beginning, the Renaissance (French for re-birth) re-awakened a great interest in the culture of antiquity. The Christian religion, and with it God, now had to share its place in artistic creation and philosophical reflection with other themes, since humanism placed the person at the centre. However, here »person« meant first and foremost »man«, and consequently the stereotypical ideas about women were not questioned. This was particularly true for the two great Christian reform movements that were set in motion at that time: neither the Protestant Reformation, driven above all by Martin Luther (1483–1546) and resulting in the subsequent division of Western Christianity into different confessions, nor the Counterreformation, which was started in reaction to the Reformation by a Catholicism that stayed true to the pope, cared to rock the boat with respect to the prevailing prejudices against women.

During the Renaissance, the recollection of antiquity was accompanied by a revival of artistic engagement with the historical and mythological themes of that earlier epoch. People in this context, unlike Christian subjects, were frequently portrayed as scantily clad or not clad at all. Upon closer inspection, motifs that were popular among artists in the Renaissance, such as rape or the suicide of Lucretia, reveal that they were meant less to inspire contemplation of the tragic story and more to serve the voyeuristic needs of a male audience.

This attitude is vividly demonstrated in a bronze relief by Hans Schwarz (ca. 1492–after 1521) from the Bode Museum, which shows Lucretia at the moment of her suicide (fig. 1-7). While she plunges a dagger into her exposed breast with her right hand, her pain-filled face is distorted in a grimace, and a final sigh seems to be escaping her mouth. With her other hand she has pulled her dress down over her left shoulder – a gesture that is completely unnecessary for carrying out her deed but which imbues the brutal scene with eroticism.

The story of Lucretia is one of the central legends surrounding the founding of the Roman Republic in the 6th century BC. In his monumental work about the history of Rome, *Ab urbe condita* (From the Founding of the City), the chronicler Titus Livius (59 BC–ca. 17 AD) tells of the rape of Lucretia by Sextus Tarquinius, the son of the last king of Rome. He had threatened her that if she were to resist, he would summarily kill one of her slaves and blame him for the act. In a patriarchal society like Rome, this would have made the violation of honour for Lucretia's husband even worse. No matter what she did, Lucretia could not prevent her abuse. In order to protect her husband, she therefore consented to the rape and then killed herself.

In the eyes of society at that time, Lucretia had acted downright heroically. Numerous Roman writers spread her story, among them the poet Ovid (43 BC–17 AD), whose writings became the most important source of mythological tales for the artists of the Renaissance. However, in Ovid's work *Fasti*, dedicated to the Roman festival calendar, wailing and hysteria are part of Lucretia's path to suicide. That kind of action signals passivity, helplessness or a lack of self-control – behavioural weaknesses that in the patriarchal society of ancient Rome as well as that of the Renaissance were ascribed to women. Male heroes, on the other hand, invariably showed a pugnacious and decisive bearing. By comparison, Lucretia's heroic sacrifice for the supposed greater good was thus subtly devalued by Ovid.

It is striking how many works of art were produced from the 15th to the 17th century in which representations of women were supposed to, above all, be a balm to the male eye. In contrast to the religious themes that dominated in the Middle Ages, antiquity as a source of artistic inspiration opened up manifold possibilities to depict naked female bodies. In the social context, women were by no means downgraded to being merely objects, but remained active members of their communities. However, the framework was being laid for an even more strongly polarised gender system that was based on the belief that women lack competence and are prone to errors, while men, by contrast, have diverse skills and represent perfection. As a result, women's access to positions of responsibility, higher education, or their own resources was impeded even more than before.

1-7
Hans Schwarz (ca. 1492–after 1521)
Lucretia, 1520
Bronze, 17,5 × 13,2 × 0,4 cm
Inv. Nr. 1466 © Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin / Antje Voigt

For aristocratic women in that era, it was especially patronage in the area of art or religion that offered a good opportunity for implementing certain interests. A particularly striking example is the case of Vittoria della Rovere (1622–1694), who through her marriage to Ferdinando II de' Medici (1610–1670) was Grand Duchess of Tuscany from 1637 to 1670 (fig. 1-8).

Vittoria was the legitimate heiress of the Duchy of Urbino, which, however, was annexed to the Papal States. Her mother safeguarded Vittoria's position by arranging her engagement to her cousin Ferdinando when she was only one year old. She was prepared for her future duties as grand duchess at the Tuscan court. When Vittoria was eleven years old, the marriage took place. For most of her life, she lived separate from her husband. Even so, she bore four children, of whom only two survived. In 1670, the older of the two took over the grand duchy under the name Cosimo III (1642–1723). Vittoria was entrusted by her son with the management of the grand duchy and as a member of his closest circle of advisors, the *Consulta*, exerted direct political power until her death.

Thanks to the financial independence provided her by the wealth of della Rovere family, even before these appointments Vittoria was able to establish her position at the Tuscan court and then expand and solidify it. In addition, Vittoria's financial resources made possible the generous funding of private and public works of art, through which she significantly influenced the artistic taste of the duchy and as result shaped the social and cultural conditions of that era. And last but not least, she was able to continue the tradition of female leadership in the grand duchy that her grandmother Christine of Lorraine (1565–1636) and her

1-8

Italy

Grand Duchess Vittoria della Rovere as Saint Mary Magdalene, 1651–75

Wax on glass, 13,3 × 11 × 3 cm

Inv. Nr. 7214 © Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin / Antje Voigt

mother-in-law Maria Maddalena of Austria (1587–1631) had begun as regents for the minor Ferdinando. Vittoria also cultivated this unusual legacy through the cultural, ethical, religious, and scientific instruction of her ladies-in-waiting and through the financial support of the girls' schools of Eleonora Ramírez de Montalvo (1602–1659), into which even children from less fortunate social groups were accepted.

In the 17th century, as in our current age, control over one's own image was an essential component of the exercise of power. Like many of her contemporaries, Vittoria exchanged and collected portraits, not only for private but also for political purposes. More than 80 portraits of her are known. These were continually produced through the course of her life with the goal of emphasising various strategic aspects of her public image. Some of them present Vittoria in the role of a female saint, such as Saint Margaret (Inv. Nr. 64054, Palazzo Martelli, Florence), Saint Catharine (Inv. Nr. 4517, Schloss Ambras, Innsbruck), or Saint Helena (Inv. Nr. 12 00864601, Palazzo Corsini, Rome). In the Bode Museum there is a wax relief, decorated with pearls and gemstones, in which Vittoria is portrayed as Saint Mary Magdalene. Like the other works in the afore-mentioned group, it was aimed at consolidating Vittoria's image as a benevolent leader by linking her to important female protagonists of early Christianity.

The 18th century in Europe was marked by a cultural, philosophical, and intellectual movement that entered the history books as the »Enlightenment«. Fundamentally, it was about applying reason and science to gradually create a better and more just world. The dissemination of this ideology also changed social expectations and eventually led to the Declaration of Independence of the United States (1776) and the French Revolution (1789). Another offspring of this zeitgeist was the Industrial Revolution; emanating from Great Britain, in the 19th century it eventually seized the entire European continent. While the Renaissance of the 15th and 16th centuries began to move the individual person closer to centre stage, in the 18th century individuals and their rights became the gravitational centre of European social constructs.

Equal rights for all people was an idealistic fundamental requirement of the Enlightenment. At closer inspection, however, it almost never actually applied to all people. Besides the example of slavery, this is also especially the case for the question of gender equality. Only a few

pioneers, like the Prussian writer and politician Theodor Gottlieb von Hippel (1741–1796), demanded the complete equality of men and women. Instead, the position of his famous teacher and friend, the philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), remained the dominant one. Due to the supposed inferior nature of women, he wanted to keep them under the authority of men. Even in France and the United States of America, women were kept away from societal achievements or even political activity, although they participated in the social revolutions there. This exclusion, however, could not prevent the gradual development of a feeling of community among women. This became, for example, the nucleus of the suffragette movement that started in the 19th century and fought for women's right to vote.

In the 18th century, middle-class women still defined themselves, almost without exception, according to their role as wife, which was their dominant and socially acceptable outlook on life. Before marriage, they were idolised as mostly unattainable objects of men's erotic desires. Once married, their most important duty was motherhood. However, in no way did all women modestly sit tight behind the four walls of their homes. As the daughters and wives of craftsmen or merchants working in the family business, and also as nuns, they continued to take part in the long tradition of occupations carried out in public. In addition, even aristocratic women in the 18th century often played quite important public roles when they represented the interests of their families and husbands through cultural or economic activities. At times, they even acted as intellectual moderators in salons and other gatherings for the development of progressive ideas. Interesting examples of women acting under such contradictory conditions are Dorothea von Rodde-Schlözer (1770–1825) and Juliette Récamier (1777–1849).

In 1806, the French sculptor Jean-Antoine Houdon (1741–1828) created a marble bust of Dorothea von Schlözer (married name: von Rodde-Schlözer), aged 36 (fig. 1-9). There we see a mature, not at all idealised woman with a confident and determined expression. Scarcely two decades before, at age 17, she had already mastered ten languages and was the first woman in Germany to be awarded a Doctor of Philosophy. However, she had not been allowed to attend courses at the University of Göttingen, and she earned her doctorate through a specially arranged examination, without submitting a dissertation.

Dorothea von Rodde-Schlözer's role as wife lay behind this remarkable special treatment. Her father, August Ludwig von Schlözer (1735–1809), himself professor at the University of Göttingen, believed in the comparable intelligence of men and women, and his daughter served as a test of his thesis. Besides studying languages, mathematics, logic, philosophy, literature, metaphysics, architecture, and geography, she also had to master those skills that were expected of upper-class women: embroidery, knitting, and housekeeping. In the final analysis, Dorothea's extraordinary academic success was not due to her own ambitions (at least not directly) but was the result of a paternal experiment.

At the age of 22, Dorothea married the Lübeck merchant Mattheus Rodde (1754–1825). Once again she was a pioneer, since she was probably the first German woman to combine her own family name with that of her husband, thus originating the option, so often chosen by women in present-day Germany, of a double last name. Although Rodde-Schlözer gave up her academic career, her home remained a meeting place for intellectuals. Furthermore, the pair lived for almost twenty years in a barely concealed ménage à trois with the French author Charles Villers (1765–1815).

Around 1800, almost at the same time the portrait of Dorothea von Rodde-Schlözers came to be, another French sculptor, Joseph Chinard (1756–1813), sculpted a completely different terracotta bust of Juliette Bernard (married name: Récamier) (fig. 1-10). The young woman, married to the wealthy banker Jacques-Rose Récamier (1751–1830), was considered at the time one of the most beautiful women in Paris. With her head slightly tilted sideways and a pensive expression, Madame Récamier seems to want to shyly avoid eye contact with the observer. Her dress appears as if it were made of very delicate fabric and clearly allows the contours of her body to show through. In combination with her hair style and her pose, which leaves her left breast uncovered, it unmistakeably harks back to ancient representations of Venus, the goddess of beauty. It is obviously an idealised image, created in the spirit of Classicism – that artistic movement of the Enlightenment that was characterised by references to supposedly classical ideals.

1-9
Jean-Antoine Houdon (1741–1828)
Dr. Dorothea von Rodde-Schlözer, ca. 1806
Marble, 54 × 50 × 30 cm
Inv. Nr. M 230, Property of the Kaiser Friedrich Museumsverein

Today, Juliette Récamier is considered the embodiment of what is known as a *Salonnière* in post-revolutionary France. She represents the female ideal of French society from the years called the Consulate (1799–1804) through the Napoleonic Empire (1804–1815) up to the end of the later liberal monarchy, which was overthrown in 1848. This idolised lady became a veritable star and fashionable example for the bourgeoisie whose social standing rose after the collapse of the monarchy and the old aristocracy. In a paradigmatic way, her contradictory character, in which the art of seduction was combined with innocence and frivolity, reflects the unusual historical times in which she lived. Her male contemporaries succumbed to her aura by the dozens and described her as innocent and pure, but also secretive. In addition, they attested to both her iconic beauty and her disinterest in intellectual conversation: in short, she was the paragon of what at the time was the perfect woman.

Madame Récamier was not an accidental product of that era's society; rather, she acted as the creator of her own image, as the ruler of her own fate. She engaged the most famous French artists of the time to portray her, among them Jacques-Louis David (1748–1825) and François Gerard (1770–1837), whose portrait paintings of Juliette Récamier are today found in Paris in the Louvre (Inv. No. 3708) and the Musée Carnavalet (Inv. Nr. P1581), respectively. She herself gained the reputation as an extremely tasteful decorator of her home, which was presented in several magazines. She likewise stage-managed herself through her fashion style, mostly white, ethereal dresses that underlined her innocent image. Although she was the focal point of Paris society, she maintained an aura of chastity as well as the reputation of a virgin; nobody seemed to be bothered that at the age of fifteen, she had already married a man three decades older, that during her marriage she was briefly engaged to Prince Augustus of Prussia (1779–1843), and that she cultivated a salon in her home at which there was a constant coming and going of admirers. Her role as trendsetter reach far beyond France; such was the fame that preceded her that the newspapers in London heralded her arrival there during her travels as a special event.

Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821) even offered Juliette Récamier a position as lady-in-waiting, probably in order to control any potential political repercussions from her salon. Her refusal of this office awakened his resentment and ended in her exile. Nevertheless, Juliette still remained politically active, at first in Switzerland, then in Naples, and finally after her return once again in Paris, which is where, after her withdrawal from society life, she subsequently died. To the end of her days she preserved her mysteriousness and, according to the chronicles, her beauty as well. A refined beauty that she was therefore able to deploy as a powerful tool because it was perfectly aligned with the societal notions held by the men of that era.

According to the *Gender Social Norms Index* (hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hd_perspectives_gsni.pdf) for the year 2020, which is published by the United Nations Development Programme, to date there is no country in the world, whether rich or poor, where gender equality has actually been achieved. In the context of this project, we can only deal with that small fraction of the histories of women and social orders that allows us to facilitate more comprehensive insights into the collections of sculpture and Byzantine art in the Bode Museum. We encourage our readers to keep looking at history with a critical eye, to inform themselves, and especially to re-tell women's stories. The historical achievements of women need to become a completely natural component of our dealings with history so that girls today and tomorrow are emboldened to surpass themselves and to participate in the history of the future. And perhaps one day the question can also be answered: Why did women allow such a broad array of rights and possibilities to be denied them for such a long period of time?

1-10
Attributed to Joseph Chinard (1756–1813)
Juliette Récamier, ca. 1802/03
Terracotta, 55 × 33,5 × 23 cm
Inv. Nr. M 216, Property of the Kaiser Friedrich Museumsverein