The author, Susan E. James, a historian educated at Cambridge University, delves into wills and inventories from the Tudor Era and finds that more so than in any other time, women were quite active in acquiring and commissioning art and patronizing artists. The eventual ascendency to the throne by Mary, Queen of Scots, followed by the long reign of Elizabeth I, further empowered women to be active in the commerce and trade of art.

Overall emphasis was on portraiture. This monograph underlines that this was by no means exclusive to royalty and aristocracy. Through in-depth examination of wills and inventories, James discovers that portraits were frequently requested by the middle classes who later bequeathed these works to their heirs. The portraits commissioned were embellished with different attributes. Significance was placed in showing the sitter posturing feelings of piety, learnedness, status, or wealth while depicted with jewelry, clocks, watches, or a book in hand, often bejeweled or encased in gold. Miniatures, such as cameos, were commissioned as mementos or records of the individual’s visage for both personal and political reasons.

Painting as propaganda was used not only for public consumption but also for peer self-determination. Various portraits of Henry VIII’s queens were copied or not as the fate of each differed. Kateryn Parr (author’s spelling), whose marriage to Henry lasted the longest, was instrumental in commissioning portraits of herself and her family which set a trend in motion for others to follow.

Elizabeth I as queen was predisposed to miniatures and acquired a sizeable personal collection. Additionally, her portraits changed the longer she stayed in power. For example, initially portrayed as a woman and as a queen, subsequent portraits of Elizabeth emphasized not only her power as a sovereign, but also as head of the Church of England. The presentation of the image was strongly controlled by the queen and depended on the political atmosphere of the time.

The author also explores two women artists, Susanna Horenboult and Lievine Teerlinc. Horenboult’s talent secured her a position as an artist in royal court for several decades. Teerlinc was first engaged by Kateryn Parr and later by Elizabeth I whose fondness for miniatures may have been nurtured by her work.

The discussion in these chapters is not limited to simply portraiture, but also includes choices of subject matter that many women chose to commission for more private enjoyment. Several popular subjects were images of Esther from the Old Testament and Judith, in contrast to men who favored images of Lucrece and Susanna.

This title reaches across several disciplines, not only art history but also women’s studies, social studies, and history and is well-suited for academic libraries.

Natalia J. Lonchyna, Librarian, Art Reference Library, North Carolina Museum of Art, nlonchyna@ncmamail.dcr.state.nc.us