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Beyond the Dutiful Daughter: An Examination of the Role and Representation of Daughters in the Renaissance

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Beyond the Dutiful Daughter:

An Examination of the Role and Representation of Daughters in the Renaissance

by

Lisa Emmeluth Hanes

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Liberal Arts
Department of Humanities and American Studies
College of Arts and Sciences
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Dedication

I wish to thank my family and friends for their encouragement and undying support throughout this endeavor. In particular, I must first extend my heartfelt love and gratitude to my children, Garrett and Lindsay, for all of their understanding and support during my graduate studies. Words can never express how important you are to me, or how lucky I am to be your mother. Thank you for letting me follow my dream. To my parents Doris and Robert Gould, and Donald and Nancy Emmeluth, thank you for all of your unwavering support, understanding, assistance, and motivation during my long academic journey. To John A. Janzen, who started me on this crazy journey called Graduate School, many thanks for the start in the right direction. To David E. Giddens, who pushed me across the finish line now known as Finished Thesis, thank you for your unique brand of motivation, late night pep talks, and for the ever-present Voice of Reason. Lastly, my sincere eternal gratitude to Jackie Brecklin, my dearest friend and personal cheerleader, for all of our conversations and laughter over the years. You have (single-handedly at times) been my conscience and my support system, and I am truly blessed to have your friendship. I don't know where I would be without your calming voice on the other end of the phone on all those stressful late nights. I could not (and would not) have made it without you.

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Table of Contents

List of Figures	ii
Abstract	iii
Introduction Cultural Expectations and Roles of Renaissance Daughters	1
Chapter One Sofonisba Anguissola as an Exceptional Daughter	18
Chapter Two Analysis of Visual Documentation	40
Conclusion	71
Bibliography	73
Primary	73
Secondary	74
Appendices	89
Appendix A Timeline	90

List of Figures

Figure 1.	Boy Bitten by a Crayfish , 1559	45
Figure 2.	The Chess Game , 1555	47
Figure 3.	Portrait of the Artist's Sisters and Brother, 1555	51
Figure 4.	Amilcare Anguissola with his Children Minerva and Asdrubale, 1557-58	54
Figure 5.	Bernardino Campi Painting Sofonisba Anguissola, 1557	62
Figure 6.	Self Portrait, 1556	66
Figure 7.	Self Portrait, 1554	69

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ABSTRACT

Women have long been termed “the weaker sex” in regards to physical ability, intellectual capacity, or moral character. Although this designation has since been proven to be false on every level, this categorization of females as lesser creatures than males is a stigma borne by women throughout history. This thesis has a narrow focus on the role and representation of aristocratic Early Modern daughters before they become wives and mothers, and on Sofonisba Anguissola, a female Renaissance painter, as a daughter in particular. An examination of Sofonisba primarily as a daughter, and only secondarily as a female artist, will help to clarify the traditional role of Renaissance daughters, while emphasizing the unique bond between Sofonisba and her father.

While daughters of the nobility seem to disappear into the domestic realm presided over by the mother, they were, in fact, actively included in the family dynamics, and were included in the concerns of the father as well as the mother. It was commonplace to train daughters in the domestic arts with only rudimentary academic instruction, although some forward-thinking fathers bestowed upon their daughters an education similar to or equal to the education received by their sons. Sofonisba Anguissola was an exception to the rule, and was able to maintain her chaste, demure,

and obedient reputation as Amilcare's daughter, while embarking on a lifelong career as a painter, and as an innovator in the genre of domestic painting.

This thesis focuses on the father-daughter relationship specifically between Amilcare and Sofonisba. The social acceptance of the entrance into the traditionally male-dominated public sphere of art by this extraordinary woman, with the encouragement and support of her father, will be discussed in detail. The impact of the encouragement of Amilcare, and how this promotion of Sofonisba's abilities allowed her to achieve not only public accomplishments and distinction for her family, but for herself as an individual as well has traditionally been marginalized in discussions of the role of women in Renaissance society.

Introduction

Cultural Expectations and Roles of Renaissance Daughters

Wedding guests of today are treated to the time-honored tradition of the father-daughter dance at the reception, often performed to the tune *Daddy's Little Girl*. The bride looks radiant, the father proud, and the guests gaze admiringly at the couple. The song title and lyrics offer an image of a perfectly attuned relationship between father and daughter, but this is illusion perpetuated by the viewers' own hopes or wishes. Indeed, even in the best of modern father-daughter relationships, there lies a history of contrast and conflict, if only due to teenage rebellion and hormonal outbursts.

Joan Kelly-Gadol's seminal essay from 1977, "Did Women have a Renaissance", has offered material for scholars to argue against and in favor of her argument that women did not experience a Renaissance, at least not during the time frame known as the Renaissance. Kelly-Gadol's essay acts as a response to historian Jacob Burckhardt's assertion that Renaissance women stood in perfect equality with men, and her response contradicts that. Since then, scholarship has been conducted to expand upon her essay, and the essay has been cited in other numerous articles and texts regarding the marginalization of women in the Renaissance, gender bias against women or many other topics that have expanded feminist scholarship regarding the "woman issue," or more specifically the status and role of aristocratic women. Kelly-Gadol examines the role and nature of women as discussed in Baldassar Castiglione's *The Courtier* of 1528, but her

argument poses questions regarding noble or aristocratic women, and not on the overall nature of women in general.

The ongoing debate over the importance of women, and on the role, if any, that they played within the family and within Renaissance society still leaves room for additional examination. This thesis has a narrow focus on the role and representation of aristocratic Early Modern daughters before they become wives and mothers, and on Sofonisba Anguissola, a female Renaissance painter, as a daughter in particular. An examination of Sofonisba primarily as a daughter, and only secondarily as a female artist, will help to clarify the traditional role of Renaissance daughters, while emphasizing the unique bond between Sofonisba and her father. Women have long been termed “the weaker sex” in regards to physical ability, intellectual capacity, or moral character. Although this designation has since been proven to be false on every level, this categorization of females as lesser creatures than males is a stigma borne by women throughout history. Women have earned Olympic Gold Medals, have become Nobel Prize winners in the sciences (Marie Curie), and have been globally acknowledged as moral exemplars (Mother Teresa), disproving the subordinate or inferior status of women.

While daughters of the nobility seem to disappear into the domestic realm presided over by the mother in regards to lessons of behavior, household management and other “female duties,” they were, in fact, actively included in the family dynamics, and were included in the concerns of the father as well as the mother. It was commonplace to train daughters in the domestic arts with only rudimentary academic instruction, although some forward-thinking fathers bestowed upon their daughters an

education similar to or equal to the education received by their sons. Sofonisba Anguissola was an exception to the rule, and was able to maintain her chaste, demure, and obedient reputation as Amilcare's daughter, while embarking on a lifelong career as a painter, and as an innovator in the genre of domestic painting.

Scholars have mostly ignored the relationships between aristocratic fathers and daughters, although a close examination of these relationships will reveal how daughters, with the support of their fathers, shaped a professional reputation beyond the domestic realm, while maintaining a chaste reputation. In particular, by examining Sofonisba Anguissola's relationship with her father Amilcare, it can be seen that the conscious choice by Amilcare to educate Sofonisba and her sisters benefited not only the daughters, but the entire family as well, both financially and in social status, as discussed in Chapter One. Sofonisba Anguissola, through her domestic genre paintings, not only created a visual representation of family nobility, but also redefined the family through glorifying everyday activities, as discussed in Chapter Two.

Womankind has been forced to explain and defend itself for centuries, and although many individuals have been publically celebrated for personal accomplishments or abilities, many of these same women acknowledge that they would not have achieved such success or acclaim without help or encouragement, often from family members, and specifically from their fathers.¹ It may prove challenging to a twenty-first century scholar to set aside modern attitudes of female entitlement and equality, in order to more

¹ Although her discussion deals primarily with consumerism and the father's role in the daughter's spending habits, Rachel Devlin argues that the opinion of the father was important to the daughter, in regards to both her material and emotional choices. This was a socially acceptable manner in which the father became an active participant in the relationship. Rachel Devlin, *Relative Intimacy: Fathers, Adolescent Daughters, and Postwar American Culture*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005) 84.

objectively examine the role and representation of Early Modern women, and specifically daughters, as objects to be passed from one man to another, within a legal and religious framework. Most (American) daughters of today grow up secure in the knowledge of their rights to an education, to vote, to make decisions regarding their own fate. The complete lack of choice, accepted by young women of the Renaissance, seems foreign and distasteful to feminist scholars, yet this understanding of Early Modern culture must become the first step taken by anyone who reads this study.

This thesis focuses on the father-daughter relationship between Amilcare Anguissola and his daughters, and specifically between Amilcare and Sofonisba. The social acceptance of the entrance into the traditionally male-dominated public sphere of art by this extraordinary woman, with the encouragement and support of her father, will be discussed in detail. The impact of the encouragement of Amilcare, and how this promotion of Sofonisba's abilities allowed her to achieve not only public accomplishments and distinction for her family, but for herself as an individual as well has traditionally been marginalized in discussions of the role of women in Renaissance society. In addition, this thesis will explore the precedents set by her, and the effect that the accomplishments of this woman had on later generations of female artists, musicians, writers, and patrons of the arts.

This introduction will examine the traditional role of Early Modern daughters, as well as the customary relationship between aristocratic fathers and daughters. In order to understand the later discussion concerning the unique relationship between Sofonisba Anguissola and her father, as well as her chaste but familiar affiliations with Michelangelo, her painting tutor Bernardino Campi, and with King Philip of Spain, a full

understanding of social and cultural expectations of women in general and of daughters in particular must be first undertaken.

Chapter One discusses female artist Sofonisba Anguissola and her relationship with her father, which was an unusual bond for its time. Not only did Amilcare Anguissola allow his daughters to be educated and to train with the artist Bernardino Campi, but he also acted as an artistic agent for Sofonisba, by ensuring introductions to wealthy and influential members of society, and by securing commissions from patrons from all over Italy. Unmarried until almost age forty, which was practically unheard of in the Renaissance, Sofonisba worked actively as a painter and traveled throughout Italy, until she became a Lady-in-Waiting and court painter for Queen Isabel of Spain.

Chapter One also examines the unique relationships Sofonisba had with the great artist Michelangelo, with her first painting tutor Bernardino Campi, and with King Philip of Spain. All three of these men served as surrogate father figures in different ways, although Sofonisba's biological father was still alive, and actually helped to foster these additional relationships. Michelangelo served as an artistic paternal figure, helping to guide Sofonisba's artistic ability, as did Bernardino Campi. King Philip treated Sofonisba almost as a daughter, creating a safe and honorable environment for her at his court, and even paying her dowry, in effect usurping Amilcare's own financial paternity.

Chapter Two examines several of Sofonisba's paintings, to underscore her unique style of domestic genre painting, and to explore the depiction of the domestic relationships between her sitters. The paintings chosen for discussion also portray Sofonisba's relationship with her subject, or the influence that Michelangelo and Campi had on her artistic and personal life.

Documentation on the subject of daughters - beyond courtesy manuals and treatises, or group family portraits or wedding portraits that depict the daughter as the quintessential chaste and demure bride - is a challenge to locate.² Accordingly, current scholarship examining the years between birth and marriage in the lives of the daughters of the Renaissance is scant. Daughters were often relegated to convents for rudimentary education and safekeeping, or to the domain of the mother and governess, for training in the domestic duties that the daughter would assume once she married and became the mistress of her husband's household.

Renaissance Italy was a patriarchal society, in which women, especially daughters, were considered chattel, or property, and could be "disposed of" in the manner that the father deemed appropriate. Arranged marriages to a man the daughter had never met, or who was several years or even decades older than she was a common practice, as was forced entry into a convent. Even after a married woman had become widowed, she legally reverted back to her father's authority, unless her son was near the age of majority. This subordinate status of women was fairly universal in Early Modern Italy, but Joan Kelly-Gadol's essay inspired further Renaissance scholarship to become more specific.

No longer is the global concept of "Renaissance women" the principal issue in feminist academic scholarship, but now a focus on a comparison and examination of the

² Some courtesy manuals and texts to review include, Alberti's *The Albertis of Florence: Leon Battista Alberti's Della Famiglia* and *The Family in Renaissance Florence*, Francesco Barbaro's "On Wifely Duties.", Castiglione's *The Courtier*, Giovanni della Casa's *A Renaissance Courtesy-Book. Galateo: of Manners and Behaviors*, Erasmus on Women, Firenzuola's *On the Beauty of Women*, Ignatius Loyola's *Letters to Women*, and Plutarch's *Advice to the Bride and Groom and a Consolation to His Wife*. For images of idealized beauty or chaste women, please view da Vinci's *Ginevra Benci*, any of Botticelli's portraits of Simonetta Vespucci, Sandro Botticelli's c. 1480/85 *Young Woman (Simonetta Vespucci?) in Mythological Guise*, Raphael's 1505 *Lady with a Unicorn*, and Raphael's 1506 *Portrait of Maddalena Doni*.

lives of women in specific geographical areas, or of certain occupations, or of a particular social class is of more interest. This more recent specifically geographical and occupational focus opens the path for new discourse on not only the general role and responsibilities of women, but on the variety of positions filled by women at all levels of society from peasant to princess, and in all locations in Europe, encompassing Germany, Spain, and diverse cultural locations in Italy such as Venice and Florence.³

Wives of famous or powerful men have been studied, when at all, almost exclusively as an extension or appendage of the husband.⁴ What current scholarship has seemed to ignore up until now is the role and representation of the daughters, within both the larger sociocultural realm, and within the smaller domestic, familial arena. The mother-daughter relationship, or the overall issue of Renaissance women has been the focus of many studies, which examine the marginalization and exploitation of women, as well as the domestic expectations and duties of a young woman, predominantly aimed at the goal of marrying an appropriate man and becoming a good wife and mother. There is no lack of evidence that the mother-daughter relationship was a more primary bond than

³ See Sally's Mckee's "Women under Venetian Colonial Rule in the Early Renaissance: Observations on Their Economic Activities", Pamela Benson's *The Invention of the Renaissance Woman: The Challenge of Female Independence in the Literature and Thought of Italy and England*, Patricia Fortini Brown's *Art and Life in Renaissance Venice* and *Private Lives in Renaissance Venice: Art, Architecture and the Family*, Stanley Chojnacki's numerous articles concerning Venetian women, Emlyn Eisenach's *Husbands, Wives, and Concubines: Marriage, Family, and Social Order in Sixteenth-Century Verona*, Joanne Ferrero's *Marriage Wars in Late Renaissance Venice. Studies in the History of Sexuality and Family and Public Life in Brescia, 1580-1650: The Foundations of Power in the Venetian State*, Christiane Klapish-Zuber's *Tuscans and their Families: A Study of the Florentine Catasto of 1427* and *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy*, F.W. Kent's *Household and Lineage in Renaissance Florence*, Katherine McIver's *Women, Art, and Architecture in Northern Italy, 1520-1580: Negotiating Power*, and Anthony Mohlo's "Deception and Marriage Strategy in Renaissance Florence: The Case of Women's Ages."

⁴ See Julia Cartwright's *Beatrice d'Este, Duchess of Milan, 1475-1497* and *Isabella d'Este, Marchioness of Mantua, 1474-1539: A Study of the Renaissance*, Catherine King's *Renaissance Women Patrons: Wives and Widows in Italy c. 1300-c.1550*, Edith Meyer's *First Lady of the Renaissance: A Biography of Isabella d'Este*, Sheryl Reiss and David Wilkins' *Beyond Isabella: Secular Women Patrons of Art in Renaissance Italy*, Katherine McIver's "Matrons as Patrons: Power and Influence in the Courts of Northern Italy in the Renaissance.", or Gabrielle Langdon's *Medici Women: Portraits of Power, Love, and Betrayal in the Court of Duke Cosimo I.*

that of father and daughter, but there was indeed, a connection between father and daughter in many cases.

Much of the scholarship that is available which concerns Renaissance women focuses on the role that women played within the family, the visual representation of the ideal female of the time, or on the marginalization of women in general during the Renaissance. Less research has been done on the father-daughter relationship, or on the impact of daughters within the core domestic sphere, before she becomes mistress of her own domain as wife and mother. This thesis focuses on the traditional relationship between the fathers and daughters of the Renaissance, and then specifically on the unique father-daughter relationship between Sofonisba Anguissola and her father, as well as the men who also served as father figures to her, such as Michelangelo, Bernardino Campi and King Philip of Spain.

At first glance, the absence of a multitude of visual and literary references infers a “shadow child” type of relationship; a daughter born into a family who then disappears into the depths of the family manse, only to re-appear when she reaches a marriageable age, dusted off and weighed, to be “sold off” to the highest bidder in the quest for a husband. The existing documentation, including texts and visual images, does, in fact, depict the daughter as an integral part of the family during her childhood and early teen years.

In order to examine the importance of Sofonisba Anguissola as an extraordinary daughter, and to understand the unusual circumstances surrounding her career and her father’s role in creating her professional reputation, it is important to discuss the expectations regarding marriage and childbearing. Women in the Renaissance were

considered by gender to be inherently inferior to men with little or no regard taken into account for social class, wealth, or education, and women, therefore, were subject to a man's authority in almost all matters, including dress, behavior, and marital choices.⁵ Marriages were of such primary importance in maintaining social stability in Renaissance Italy, especially in Venice and Florence, that much thought, effort, and financial expense were devoted to create an appropriate match between two families.⁶

Accordingly, parents chose potential spouses for their children, frequently for financial benefit or security, or for social status, with only passing thought, if any, for the notion of a love marriage between the future husband and wife. The bride, often forced into a lifelong commitment to a husband not necessarily of her choice, was forced to live up to familial and social expectations of her, in actions, thoughts, and deeds. Her behavior affected not only her own personal reputation, but that of her husband and birth family as well.⁷ Despite the obvious importance of her situation, little is written about the actual lives of the daughters, outside of her status as “daughter of...” or later as “wife of...”.

⁵ Margaret King states that the education of daughter's was far more limited than that of sons, and that the primary motive for education was to maintain obedience and subservience and to develop character traits most suited to patriarchal marriage, through training centered around domestic activities. Reading was encouraged but tightly moderated. Margaret King, *Women in the Renaissance*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990) 164-165.

⁶ Both Leon Battista Alberti and Francesco Barbero discuss wifely duties and obligations to family and community. See Books I and II of Alberti's *della Famiglia* and Kohl's *The Earthly Republic: Francesco Barbero on Wifely Duties*.

⁷ Georgianna Ziegler, “Penelope and the Politics of Woman's Place in the Renaissance.” *Gloriana's Face: Women, Public and Private, in the English Renaissance*. Ed. S.P. Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davis. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992) 31. In her discussion of Robert Greene's 1587 tract entitled ‘Penelope's Web’, Ziegler Penelope as the archetypal ideal chaste and faithful Renaissance wife. Her examination of the visual representations of Penelope establish that the paintings “morally uplifting exemplar for their females audiences”, although this is a construct, and not the reality of the situation.

Leon Battista Alberti, noted Italian humanist and author of *I Libri della famiglia*, a text focusing on education, marriage, household management, and finances, discusses the ideal characteristics of a wife:

“They say that in choosing a wife one looks for beauty, parentage, and riches.... Among the most essential criteria of beauty in a woman is an honorable manner. Even a wild, prodigal, greasy, drunken woman may be beautiful of feature, but no one would call her a beautiful wife. A woman worthy of praise must show first of all in her conduct, modesty, and purity... There is nothing more disgusting than a coarse and dirty woman. Who is stupid enough not to see clearly that a woman who does not care for neatness and cleanliness in her appearance, not only in her dress and body but in all her behavior and language, is by no means well mannered? How can it be anything but obvious that a bad-mannered woman is also rarely virtuous? We shall consider elsewhere the harm that comes to a family from women who lack virtue, for I myself do not know which is the worse fate for a family, total celibacy or a single dishonored woman. In a bride, therefore, a man must first seek beauty of mind, that is, good conduct and virtue.

In her body he must seek not only loveliness, grace, and charm but must also choose a woman who is well made for bearing children, with the kind of constitution that promises to make them strong and big. There's an old proverb, "When you pick your wife, you choose your children." All her virtues will in fact shine brighter still in beautiful children. It is a well-known saying among poets: "Beautiful character dwells in a beautiful body."... They say that a woman should have a joyful nature, fresh and lively in her blood and her whole being... They always have a preference for youth, based on a number of arguments which I need not expound here, but particularly on the point that a young girl has a more adaptable mind. Young girls are pure by virtue of their age and have not developed any spitefulness. They are by nature modest and free of vice. They quickly learn to accept affectionately and unresistingly the habits and wishes of their husbands.”⁸

Through a close reading of Alberti's text, the reader gains a deeper understanding of the established expectations of women during the Early Modern period. Virtue, duty, and obedience were prized qualities, and daughters were taught these traits and expected behaviors at an early age. The birth of a daughter to a Renaissance family was a double

⁸ Leon Battista Alberti, *The Family in Renaissance Florence*, trans. Renée Neu Watkins (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1969), 115-116.

burden, or at best a mixed blessing. In patriarchal Italy, sons were the preferred offspring; the sons and heirs, able to carry on the family lineage, as well as to retain the family wealth and property. Daughters were often considered an unwelcome burden, another mouth to feed and another daughter to dower or to send to a convent. The issue of maintaining the chastity of the daughter was also a primary concern, for her virginity was her most prized asset when seeking an acceptable husband. Richard Trexler examines the creation of foundling hospitals in Renaissance Florence and asserts that more girls than boys were placed in these institutions established to care for unwanted children.⁹ If this was indeed the case, as shown by Trexler's documentation, then one must question the circumstances surrounding those daughters who were tolerated or even welcomed into the center of the family sphere.

In wealthy families, daughters were sent to wet-nurses, and then to tutors for basic education in letters and numbers, and in religious matters. It was believed to be healthier for the baby to be removed from the city to a more serene environment, generally in the country, and where there was less risk of plague. Nursing also served to prevent pregnancy (although it was not foolproof); therefore the high infant mortality rate and the dependence of patrilineal succession for the continuation of the family line obligated the wife to produce many children in a relatively short period of time. "The age between two and about seven was the period when the child of either sex must have known most closely the mother's care and developed its emotional bond with her, a bond which might

⁹ Richard Trexler, *The Children of Renaissance Florence: Power and Dependence in Renaissance Florence* (Asheville: Pegasus Press, 1998), 18. Trexler cites a percentage of 61.2% of females in the foundling hospitals between 1404-1413.

be enhanced by the youth of the mother, the age and absences of the father, or the widowhood of the mother.”¹⁰

If the mother did not immediately bond with the baby, it occasionally fell to other family members to help raise and nurture the child, including older siblings.¹¹ More practical training on how to run a household, to manage servants, to care for the expected children, and how to please one’s husband with properly chaste, demure and compliant behavior was given by the mother. The father was often absent, delegating his dominance over the daughter through the mother’s attentions, unless he was required to address an important issue. If the mother died or remarried after the death of the father, the daughter was often sent to a convent for safekeeping, and for a few years, she may have been educated on a basic level.¹²

A deeper understanding of the treatment of daughters can be taken from an examination of marital negotiations and dowries. In the case of marriage negotiations, the daughter was treated as property. She was given to the husband by her father, along with items of clothing, household goods, jewelry, and perhaps land or a title. Her personal wishes were often not considered (nor were the groom’s in many instances), as the primary concern was what was in the best interest of the family or of the community, and not of the bride. Extensive research into the subject of dowries and kinship has been

¹⁰ James Bruce Ross, “The Middle-Class Child in Urban Italy, Fourteenth to Early Sixteenth Century.” *The History of Childhood: The Evolution of Parent-Child Relationships as a Factor in History*. Ed. Lloyd de Mause (London: Souvenir Press, 1976, 183-228), 202.

¹¹ Ross, 197. For a full discussion of a child’s life from infancy to adolescence, including wet-nursing, upbringing, and education, see Ross’s “The Middle Class”, 183-212. For a discussion on wet-nurses, see Beatrice Gottlieb, *The Family in the Western World from the Black Death to the Industrial Age*. Christiane Klapisch-Zuber also discusses the *balia* in *Women*, 135, 154, and 326.

¹² Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy* trans. Lydia Cochrane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985) 109.

conducted by Stanley Chojnacki, who asserts that mothers exhibited interest in matrimonial decisions regarding their daughters, but how much influence the mother exerted is difficult to quantify.¹³

Fathers establish the family lineage, mothers help to create and nurture what the father has founded, and sons continue the family line. Daughters are brought into the family; they take without giving (in terms of sustenance, nurturing and material possessions) and then leave the family to help propagate the lineage of another man. Despite this seemingly negative impact on the natal family, married women often remained close to their birth families, perhaps in part due to dowry complications, or based on an emotional bond or loyalty.

This temporary status of the daughter within the family, coupled with the patrilineal desire for sons and heirs, may help to explain the reluctance of many typical Renaissance fathers to invest family resources into the education of a daughter who would remove assets from the family upon her marriage or the taking of religious vows. It therefore presents those fathers who deliberately chose to empower their daughters with education and training as enlightened, by challenging the social constraints of female education and empowerment. In the specific case of Amilcare Anguissola, this enlightenment was the result of a number of things, including exposure to several Humanist thinkers such as Gerolamo Vida,¹⁴ who had taken a young girl under his care

¹³ Stanley Chojnacki, "Dowries and Kinsmen in Early Renaissance Venice." (*Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 5.4 (1975):571-600), 589. Documentation is inconclusive as to whether or not increased maternal contribution led to increased maternal influence regarding the marriage of a daughter.

¹⁴ Maria Kuche, "Sofonisba Anguissola: Her Life and Work." *Sofonisba Anguissola: A Renaissance Woman*, ed. Sylvia Ferino-Pagden and Maria Kuche (Washington, DC: The National Museum of Women in the Arts, 1995), 11 and 27. Vida was from Cremona, and a friend of Amilcare's. Discussions of raising children, and of daughters in particular since Amilcare had six, would have been one of many topics of discussion between them.

and given her an extraordinary education, as well as the realization that an educated daughter became a more valuable asset and would require a smaller dowry. As selfish or cold-hearted as that may initially seem, Amilcare was very practical and deliberate in his choices for his daughters.

In addition, since cultural tradition dictated that noble sons were to be educated as befitting their social status, and to enjoy the privileges of their rank,¹⁵ those daughters who were afforded an education may have appreciated the opportunity more than their brothers did, and they may have made a concerted effort to demonstrate their intellectual and artistic abilities in order to prove to their fathers that they were worthy of this chance.¹⁶ Daughters such as the Anguissola sisters, Isabella d'Este, Catherine de' Medici, Mary and Elizabeth Tudor, Christine de Pizan, and Vittoria Colonna all received excellent educations, and are studied for their influence on twenty-first century feminist scholarship. This opportunity for education, coupled with natural sibling rivalry, and cultural favoritism of sons over daughters, could have led to resentment on the part of the brothers of these educated girls. After the death of their fathers, daughters would be subject to the decisions of their brothers, who may or may not consider the happiness and wishes of the sister.

¹⁵ Ross discusses home-schooling of boys and the influence of the mothers in their education in his text "The Middle Class", 228.

¹⁶ Philippe Aries examines the schooling of children within the larger social context. His primary issue was that children seemed almost invisible as children, and were seen as small adults who required socialization into the life of an adult. Aries argued that there was no concept of childhood until the eighteenth century, and that in most circumstances, parents tended to adopt an indifferent attitude toward children. Philippe Aries, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, trans. Robert Baldick (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962), 25-30.

As mentioned previously, a daughter was subject to her father's absolute authority, and then to the man who succeeded the father as head of the household after his death, until she married, when she became part of her husband's family. Because of this, kinship orientation for a Renaissance woman was a complicated matter. She was temporarily a part of her natal family for the early part of her life, and then tenuously incorporated into her husband's family until his death, providing she produced an heir. Her insecure position, based on circumstances beyond her control, posed a constant concern for young women. Although the prestige of establishing her own lineage was a source of pride for a new bride, a primary component of what enabled her to marry into the family (her dowry) was provided by her natal family, thus creating the potential for emotional or financial conflict.

The daughter's temporary and almost parasitic relationship with her natal family was complicated by the importance of her virtue and reputation, which impacted not only her reputation, but that of her family as well. Lynda Boose, in her 1989 collection of essays which concern the father-daughter relationship, asserts that the issue is a conflict of desire and sanction, as the daughter is a sexual property owned by the father and bartered to the husband, creating a personal loss of bloodline and assets by the father, only to be gained by the husband.¹⁷ Expected to become the matriarch of her husband's dynasty, her own lineage, chastity and impeccable reputation were of the utmost

¹⁷ Lynda E. Boose, "The Father's House and the Daughter in it: The Structure of Western Culture's Daughter-Father Relationship". *Daughters and Fathers*, ed. Lynda E Boose and Betty S. Flowers. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 46. Although she is mainly an English renaissance scholar, this collection of essays edited by Boose addresses the father-daughter relationship, but mainly through a theme of daughterly victimization or exploitation by the father which was a common enough event in the Renaissance. In her essay, she specifically addresses literary daughters, but the ideology transfers over to daughters in the more general sense as well, when examining the bloodline issue as it concerns daughters.

importance. Her children would carry the surname of her husband, but her own family lineage would also help to establish rights and titles for her children.

This temporary family inclusion and bloodline issue became a factor for the father when determining her fate and value, for a daughter who was educated and well cared for necessitated an initial outlay of resources that may or may not have been recovered through a marriage contract, while an uneducated and poorly trained daughter would likely require a larger dowry but would have need of less family resources up until her marriage. The fathers weighed the two choices and decided early on which option would prove most beneficial to the family. In the case of Amilcare Anguissola, he chose education and training, in order to better serve the future needs of his family.

Since women were considered inferior in matters of intellect, morals, and talent, those daughters who were educated become prominent not only for their academic skills but also for the esteem shown to them by their fathers. Amilcare Anguissola for example, fathered six daughters before his long-awaited son was born, but Amilcare understood the advantage that an educated daughter might present in regards to his own political or financial dealings, in addition to the considerations of the dowry required for each of his daughters. His daughters responded by studying intently, and by proving themselves worthy of their father's unique attentions.

Not only was Sofonisba able to communicate directly with Michelangelo concerning her sketches and artistic studies, but her manners and behavior at the court of King Philip of Spain charmed those who met her, and all correspondence which references her is full of praise for both her talent and her demeanor. Her education and training positioned her to be uniquely qualified to assimilate at the foreign court.

Sofonisba Anguissola's distinctive dual position as both dutiful daughter and as celebrated artist bridged the traditional socio-cultural expectations of both males and females. She maintained her chaste, demure, and obedient status as Amilcare's daughter, as will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter, and she successfully entered the realm of exceptional artist, which was traditionally a male dominated field. Her artistic abilities as discussed in Chapter Two, included her ability to depict the domestic genre which was a new style in painting, while preserving her virtuous reputation as an unmarried female.

Chapter One

Sofonisba Anguissola as an Exceptional Daughter

Much of the limited existing scholarship regarding Sofonisba Anguissola has been framed as a consideration of her role as an exceptional female artist, or as a successful woman in the male dominated realm of art. Her extraordinary role as a daughter and sibling has been largely ignored, and is the lens through which I will examine Sofonisba Anguissola

Amilcare Anguissola was born in Cremona in about 1494, as the illegitimate son of Annibale Anguissola and Bianca Crivella.¹⁸ Shortly thereafter, the Anguissola family was given their patent of nobility, and they became counts and displayed a coat of arms, as was their right. Although their nobility was newly acquired, the family had an ancient lineage, and quickly made important connections, which enabled upward social mobility for its members.¹⁹ As was common for the time, Amilcare was sent to another nobleman's palace for education and military training, and he entered the service of the Marchese Galeazzo Pallavinci in 1509. Usually sons were sent away at around the age of ten, but Amilcare was about fifteen when he left home.²⁰ He apparently performed to his father's satisfaction, and was legitimized by Annibale in 1511. Legitimization was a

¹⁸ Ilya Sandra Perlingieri, *Sofonisba Anguissola: The First Great Woman Artist of the Renaissance* (New York: Rizzoli, 1992), 24.

¹⁹ Perlingieri, 24.

²⁰ Perlingieri, 24. According to Perlingieri, the Pallavinci family origins dated back to the twelfth century in Lombardy.

frequent practice among the nobility, as illegitimacy did not carry the stigma it was to acquire in later centuries. Many noble families had illegitimate children in their ranks, and when a child, either male or female, had proven to be worthy, it was commonplace to legitimize the offspring.²¹

The Pallavinci family was also pleased with Amilcare, and a marriage was arranged for Amilcare with the marchese's daughter Bianca. The marriage lasted until 1530, but there were no children born to the marriage, nor records to indicate the fate of Bianca; she may have died, or the marriage may have been annulled for lack of heirs.²² One year later, Amilcare married Bianca Ponzone, daughter of a count whose family nobility dated back to the early 1400's.²³

Amilcare was a businessman, who invested family money into new ventures, including along with his father-in-law, a silent partnership with a local bookseller. Amilcare purchased land, lent money to other local Cremonese businessmen, and by 1546, his investments produced installment payments to him, enabling the purchase of additional land.²⁴ During this time, Amilcare and Bianca Ponzone had several children. The birth years are not documented, but can be deduced by dated family portraits. Sofonisba was born in approximately 1532, Elena c. 1535, Lucia c. 1536-38, Minerva c.

²¹ Perlingieri, 24. Even many of the popes had illegitimate children.

²² Perlingieri, 25. As producing an heir was the primary purpose for a marriage, it was not uncommon for marriages to be annulled if the wife was barren,

²³ Perlingieri, 25. The Ponzone family was awarded their patent of nobility by the Duke of Milan in 1416, and reconfirmed in 1455, 1470, 1482, and 1500.

²⁴ Perlingieri, 25. Cremona, Archivio di Stato. Archivio Notarile.

1539-41, Europa c. 1542-44, and Anna Maria c. 1545-46. The much-awaited son and heir Asdrubale, was born to the family in about 1551.²⁵

Generally, the education of a daughter was undertaken by her mother, to ensure the former's chastity, obedience, and a working knowledge of what would be required to run her husband's home to his approval. Humanist thinkers of the time supported more equality in the education of both daughters and sons of the nobility, but girls usually received their schooling at home, and the focus was on Christian values and moral teachings, whereas boys entered a more focused training, in order to better prepare them for their expected participation in community affairs.²⁶

Amilcare not only ensured that the domestic arts were taught, but that his daughters received an education similar or equal to that of aristocratic males. As the eldest of six daughters (and one son born when Sofonisba was approximately eighteen years old) from a noble family of Cremona, Sofonisba's professional accomplishments must be viewed against the broader sociocultural norms of the time in regards to the education and roles and expectations of noble women. For women such as Sofonisba and her sisters, this meant instruction in subjects such as Latin, classical literature, philosophy, history, as well as music, writing, and even drawing, and painting.

The education of the young males of the Italian nobility incorporated reading, writing, Latin grammar and vocabulary, and etiquette.²⁷ Education was taught as an

²⁵ Perlingieri, 29.

²⁶ Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art and Society* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990), 72. Chadwick asserts that although humanists supported certain equality in education for both boys and girls of wealthy families, by the fifteenth century, the practice of sending girls to public schools had essentially been discontinued.

²⁷ Aries, 108.

apprenticeship beginning at around age five, whether a boy was to learn a trade or the manners of a knight, or to acquire an education.²⁸ Boys could study in the *scuola di grammatica* until around age fifteen, at which time they could learn the art of business, or trade.²⁹ Young men were also trained in law and politics, in order to better fulfill their civic obligations, or to prepare them for further studies at a University for a professional career in medicine, law or politics.³⁰ Schools, especially secular academies, were established for the education of boys much more commonly than for girls, as the fathers wanted a less religion-based education for their sons who would later join them or replace them in the civic arena.³¹

Women were taught the character traits most suited to achieving marriage, and they were trained in the domestic skills required to run a household. Reading was acceptable, but severely limited to specific books such as devotional texts and works by authors such as Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio.³² In some cities such as Venice and Florence, the aristocratic young ladies were taught Latin and basic arithmetic, and the reading of Psalms, as well as the more commonplace spinning and needlework.³³ Many fathers did not approve of an educated daughter or wife, as it threatened the perceived

²⁸ Aries, 366.

²⁹ Klapisch-Zuber, *Women*, 109.

³⁰ Merry Wiesner, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 145. Upper and middle class boys were prepared to take an active public life, while boys from the lower classes were taught a trade.

³¹ Klapisch-Zuber, *Women*, 109

³² King, *Women*, 164.

³³ King, *Women*, 168-169. King examines schools in Venice, Turin, Verona, French Lyon, London, and several German cities.

natural order of the household, and by extension, of the patrilineal society.³⁴ Wives and mothers did rule during the absence of their husbands, or until their sons reached maturity, and their success often was directly linked to their education and training, According to Merry Wiesner, the few schools created for the education of women were more of a boarding school or finishing school, concentrating on skills appropriate to the class of the girl, and to the goal of becoming more marriageable such as needlework, some drawing and painting, calligraphy, dancing, and moral instruction.³⁵ Advanced education for women, besides risking household disorder, was impractical in the eyes of some fathers and of society in general. Since a woman was not allowed to enter the University, or to hold office, Latin studies and philosophical concepts would only distract a woman from her obligation to husband, children, and extended family.³⁶

One noticeable absence from an examination of Sofonisba's childhood and earlier womanhood, is any reference to her mother. Bianca Ponzone Anguissola is rarely mentioned in scholarship regarding Sofonisba, perhaps due in part to Bianca's frequent pregnancies and presumed attention to her numerous children. Sofonisba, Europa and Lucia all painted Bianca in several paintings, although the locations of these works are no longer extant. Bianca participated in the decisions made concerning her daughters, and

³⁴ King, *Women*, 185-186. Scholars such as the French Calvinist Agrippa d'Aubigne, his compatriot Fenelon, and saint and scholar Thomas More believed in higher education for women, but only to a certain degree.

³⁵ Wiesner, 159. Wiesner clarifies that in French, English and German cities, the boarding schools that were established offered an education, but did focus on subjects to make the students more marriageable partners.

³⁶ Wiesner, 145. Many fathers were hesitant to risk disrupting the traditional roles of women.

she possessed a strong personality and opinions, which Amilcare respected.³⁷ A long letter written to Amilcare from Marco Gerolamo Vida, cautioned him against allowing her too much influence over Amilcare and decisions better made by him alone.³⁸ Beyond this influence by Bianca over Amilcare, another way that traditional relationships are played with can be found in the role that Sofonisba fulfilled as surrogate mother in the absence of her mother, and as painting teacher of her sisters.

It was the responsibility of the mother to nurture the children from infancy into adulthood, to ensure proper domestic and moral training, and to ensure appropriate education according to their station. A wife managed her husband's household, was obedient and subservient, and was his companion as he saw fit. Sons were prepared to follow in the footsteps of their fathers, while daughters were trained to become good wives and mothers. Bianca's apparent behind-the-scenes influence on Amilcare, coupled with her acceptance or even approval of the novel education Amilcare afforded their daughters, directly contrasted with the social expectations of women of the period.

Ilya Perlingieri asserts that one of the motivations for Amilcare to educate his daughters was due to the gaps in his own education.³⁹ In addition, he may have been following the humanist trend of allowing women a more prominent role in society, within certain boundaries. Humanists referred to the *studia humanitatis* as the "liberal arts",

³⁷ Kuche, 33. The absence of scholarship concerning the interaction between Bianca and her daughters draws attention to this unusual relationship between Amilcare and the daughters. She must have been aware, and in support of the choices made for her daughters, but little to no mention is made of her involvement at all.

³⁸ Kuche, 33. Bianca was as much an influence on the household as Amilcare, according to Kuche. Sofonisba, Lucia and Europa all painted her, but Europa's painting is no longer known.

³⁹ Perlingieri, 33. According to Perlingieri, Amilcare's spelling and grammar were poor, as seen in his letters to Michelangelo.

which consisted of the *trivium* (grammar, rhetoric, and logic) and the *quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music).⁴⁰ The early humanists believed that the *studia humanitatis* provided moral and educational standards that formed the foundation for appropriate behavior of a young adult.⁴¹

Noted scholar Marco Gerolamo Vida, a friend of Amilcare's, had educated a young girl, perhaps giving Amilcare an example to follow with his own daughters. The opportunities for education, often in contrast to the social demands on young women, were a topic of conversation among Amilcare's intellectual friends, influencing his actions and opinions.⁴² Amilcare's education and advancement of his daughters' abilities shows a combination of practicality and forethought. With several daughters to dower, it would prove advantageous for Amilcare to have the talents of his daughters to use to his financial benefit, while ensuring the honor and reputations remained intact.

What makes the Anguissola daughters' education unique is that Amilcare arranged for Sofonisba and her sister Elena to spend three years of private instruction with Bernardino Campi, where his wife could function as chaperone to the two girls while they studied painting with their first master, similar to the manner in which boys underwent an apprenticeship.⁴³ Both girls were approximately age ten, the same age at which boys generally began apprenticeships. Male apprentices completed between five

⁴⁰ Margaret L. King, *The Renaissance in Europe*. (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2005) 72.

⁴¹ King, *Renaissance*, 73. Humanist thinkers were in great demand by merchants and princes alike, to teach their sons, so that they would be better equipped to follow in the footsteps of their fathers.

⁴² Kuche, 27. Kuche references Marco Gerolamo Vida's *Cremonensium Orationes III adversus Papienses in controversia Principatus* of 1550.

⁴³ Perlingieri, 42. Perlingieri quotes Peter Burke's *Culture and Society in Renaissance Italy: 1420-1540*, page 45.

and seven years of training in the studio with a “master”, and lived with the family of the master, forming a sort of extended family.⁴⁴ Among the subjects taught to apprentices were how to prepare the canvas or panel for painting, as well as how to mix the pigments into the oil or water bases used to create the paints. Each master had his workshop tricks or secrets, which he shared with his apprentices. The Anguissola sisters, separated from the rest of the workshop, were given more individual training, which served Sofonisba well in her career.⁴⁵

The initial drawing lessons were expanded to become regular instruction at Campi’s home, where his studio was located. In deference to their status, the girls were given lessons in the Campi’s private quarters, and not in the rougher, more casual atmosphere of the workshop. Due to the vast difference in rank between the two families, it is unlikely that the girls lived in the Campi household, and that after their painting lessons, they would have returned home to receive their other lessons and to spend each night in the safety and proper environment of their family home.⁴⁶ In Alessandro Lamo’s treatise on art, written in 1585, he wrote about the training received by the Anguissola daughters, which was clearly innovative and noteworthy:

In the year 1546, Bernardino Campi instructed the sisters Sofonisba and Elena Anguissola in the art of drawing... When both made good progress and both wished to pursue the instruction in art more deeply, and the father wished to oblige this noble pursuit, he found accommodations for them at the house of Bernardino, with the intention that the nobility and worth of his two children should make the profession of the painter noble

⁴⁴ Perlingieri, 42. As females, and as aristocrats, the girls would not have lived in such close quarters with apprentices.

⁴⁵ Perlingieri, 43. No mention has been located of Sofonisba having apprentices, so it can be deduced that she prepared her canvases and mixed her paints herself, or possibly by her sisters when she trained them.

⁴⁶ Kuche, 34. Kuche speculates that due to the difference in social class, actually living with the family would have been unacceptable.

*and respected in this city. Bernardino, who introduced them to art with patience and a gentle manner, who critiqued them without causing fear and praised without spoiling, grew so dear to them that they spent three years in his house, where they felt as happy surrounded by the kindness of Bernardino's wife as they did about the excellent instruction that they received.*⁴⁷

According to Maria Kuche, decisions were made, presumably by Campi and Amilcare, regarding the artistic fields in which Sofonisba would be trained, based on her gender, education and intellectual background, while maintaining the qualities expected of a woman of her status: virtue, chastity and humility.⁴⁸ These subjects were themes from nature, and from her family environment. Sofonisba became well known for her portraits, including her self-portraits, and paintings of her family members.⁴⁹

Portraiture was one of Campi's specialties, as well as one of the more appropriate subjects for young ladies to paint, and this could also be practiced in the family home as well, thus protecting the reputation of the girls.⁵⁰ Amilcare dictated that his daughters could paint as professionals, but that they should work at home. Their gender and status eliminated the possibility of accepting public commissions, or studying in the studio with other male artists.

Around 1556, the family fortunes suffered, while the family itself had increased in number, and Amilcare needed to capitalize on his daughter's talent. Sofonisba's

⁴⁷ Kuche, 33. From Alessandro Lamo, *Discorso...intorno alla scoltura e pittura...*(1584).

⁴⁸ Kuche, 19. Bernardino Campi was an excellent portraitist, but not as adept in dramatic design or complex compositions. This may have been a contributing factor to the subjects of study for the girls.

⁴⁹ See Ruth Kelso's *Doctrine for the Lady*. Portraits and religious themes were appropriate subjects for ladies, according to the leading humanists such as Alberti, Barbaro, and Castiglione.

⁵⁰ Kuche, 34. Maintaining the chaste reputation of his daughters was of primary importance to Amilcare, while still allowing the girls to pursue their artistic studies.

reputation had grown, and her portraits were in great demand even outside of Cremona.⁵¹ It is unknown whether Sofonisba's works were given as gifts in exchange for potential future commissions, or if there was financial remuneration. If Amilcare was counting on the advancement of Sofonisba's career by gifting influential nobles with her paintings, the expenses for supplies must have seemed a small price to pay given the potential return.

During this time, Amilcare took pains to use his position to introduce Sofonisba to many influential people, including the visiting Prince Philip of Spain in 1548. This early contact would prove valuable later when Sofonisba was invited to join Philip's court later in 1559.⁵² Sofonisba's careful behavior helped to maintain her private reputation, while she was gaining public recognition for her talent. Amilcare did what he could to establish contact with the great painters and thinkers of the time, while confidently asserting both Sofonisba's talent and her pure character. He provided a safe environment in which she could study and pursue her painting, while not compromising her status as a virtuous and respectful daughter. His continued efforts on her behalf paid off for both he and Sofonisba, as she continued to receive requests for her work, and traveled regularly to nearby cities when commissioned to do a portrait. This unique living and working arrangement must also have benefitted her sisters Anna Maria and Lucia, who also were skilled at painting. Lucia had no need of a separate painting tutor, since Sofonisba had surpassed her masters Campi and Gatti, and she helped to refine Lucia's abilities at home.

⁵¹ Kuche, 41. Amilcare attempted to establish contact with Ercole d'Este, duke of Ferrera by sending one of Sofonisba's self portraits, and later that year she was received at the court of Mantua.

⁵² Perlingieri, 48. Bernardino Campi was engaged to paint pictures Philips's army and Sofonisba, as his pupil, would possible have assisted. In addition, as one of the aristocratic girls of Cremona, she would have been involved in some of the social activities surrounding the Prince's visit.

After their studies ended with Campi in 1549, Elena entered a convent as was common for a second daughter, and Sofonisba continued her painting training with another Cremonese painter named Bernardino Gatti. She also taught her sisters some of the skills she had acquired, and two other sisters, Anna Maria and Lucia earned some fame for their skills with the brush. With Amilcare's blessing, and letters written by him to Michelangelo, Sofonisba went to Rome, to continue her artistic studies.⁵³

One such letter, written from Amilcare to Michelangelo, requests sketches from him for Sofonisba to color and return to him:

*My Most Honorable Sir,
Your most excellent, virtuous, and good natured soul (all that is given by God) made me keep that memory of you which duly has to be given to such an important and extraordinary gentleman. And what makes me and my whole family obliged to you is having understood the honorable and thoughtful affection that you have shown to Sofonisba, my daughter, to whom you introduced to practice the most honorable art of painting .I assure you that I am more grateful for the favor I receive for your most honorable affection [towards my daughter] than all the riches that any Prince could give, because I find myself very obliged for the virtuous and liberal actions that you granted me and Antonio Anselmi, above all the dignity and gifts which could be given in this world. Therefore, I am asking you, as in the past you were kind enough by your gracious courtesy, to talk to her and encourage my daughter, once again in the future to share your divine thoughts with her. I promise you, when she knows the honorable favor you are bestowing on her, she will direct her mind with great devotion in such a way that I would hope for the best results. We could not receive that with more honor and happiness. This would be all the more if you would be kind enough to send her a sketch so that she can paint it in oil, obliging her to send it back duly finished by her own hand. If you would do this, to compensate my obligation to you, I would dedicate my daughter, Sofonisba, the dearest thing that I have in this world, as your servant. From Cremona, 7 May [17]57.⁵⁴*

⁵³ Perlingieri, 65.

⁵⁴ As cited in Perlingieri, 67. Translation assistance for Perlingieri by Dr. Gino Corti.

This wish must have been granted, because a year later, Amilcare writes to Michelangelo again:

*Most Magnificent and Honorable Michelangelo,
Your friendly letters are much dearer to me than those which I could receive from our king [Philip II]. Assuring you that among the many obligations I have to God, that such a great and talented gentleman – beyond any other man – such as you, was kind enough to examine, judge, and praise the paintings done by my daughter, Sofonisba. I hope that God's divine majesty permits her, who is so virtuous in painting, to live along with my other daughters and son, so that we could all see each other and later enjoy heaven, in which I put all my hope. And with this faith, first for me and then my family, I salute you and send you our greetings. From Cremona, 15 May [15]58.*

*Your most affectionate friend and servant,
Amilcare Anguissola⁵⁵*

Amilcare's tone is respectful in his messages to Michelangelo, but he must have felt confident enough in both his own ability to promote his daughter, and in Sofonisba's talent, to ask favors of such an exalted artist.

Amilcare was very careful in his promotion of his daughter, acting more as her artistic agent than her father, by finding her appropriate tutors, by corresponding with influential people to promote her work, and above all, by maintaining her respectability as a noble woman. He sent one of Sofonisba's self-portraits to the Duke of Ferrara, and later that year Sofonisba was very favorably received at the court in Mantua. Amilcare perhaps had hoped that she would then travel from Mantua to Ferrara⁵⁶. She traveled to Parma as well, which spawned a great demand for Sofonisba's work. Amilcare also attempted to promote her to the court of Urbino, which seems to have been successful, as

⁵⁵ As cited in Perlingieri, 67-68. Translation assistance for Perlingieri by Dr. Gino Corti.

⁵⁶ Kuche, 41. In a letter to the duchess of Mantua, Amilcare thanks her for the kindness shown to his daughters.

the envoy of the Duke of Urbino in Spain took an interest in Sofonisba, mentioning her often to the Duke.⁵⁷ Amilcare placed great faith in his daughter's talent and abilities, and he was never given cause to regret that devotion by any misbehavior or unchaste actions on her part. She was carefully chaperoned, and as will be discussed later, in several of her paintings, she portrays herself as chaste, demure, and virginal.

Her painting choices, to be examined later in Chapter Two, also reinforced her modesty, as she chose the more acceptable portraiture as her focus, since anatomy studies were off limits to her as a noble woman. A study of anatomy for artist apprentices, included nude male models, which an unmarried, chaste, aristocratic young woman should not view under any circumstances. Her immediate family provided many opportunities for life studies, including her beloved little brother. Many paintings of her siblings are still extant, including Elena as a nun, and relationships between her siblings.

The education of Sofonisba can be construed as the practical actions of a father facing dowries for many daughters, and an acknowledgment that an educated daughter was more valued. Noble daughters, later to become wives and often regents on behalf of their underage sons, who had more than rudimentary education could be considered by some to be an asset to their husbands. Running a business or managing her husband's assets in his absence required both intelligence and skill in managing staff and dispensing justice in his name. This assistance proved invaluable to many nobles, some of whom were *condottiere*, or mercenaries for hire, and gone for long periods of time. In a more positive light, her education was an enlightened vision of a father gifting his daughters

⁵⁷ Kuche, 46. This is a bit unusual, as there is no record of Anguissola ever visiting Urbino.

with a lifetime of learning and knowledge, which he himself did not receive.⁵⁸ She was able to correspond with Michelangelo and with her family while she was away, without relying on others to communicate for her. Amilcare's contact with Michelangelo did enable her to study with the great master for a short while, but it was she herself who also wrote to him and they sent sketches and notes back and forth.

Amilcare's affection for his daughters and for Sofonisba in particular, is evidenced by the extant communication between himself and King Philip of Spain, concerning her position in the Spanish court. After discussing the matter with Sofonisba, Amilcare wrote directly to King Philip:

The Duke of Sessa and Count Broccardo have asked me on your behalf to allow Sofonisba, my eldest child, to enter the services of her Serene Highness the Queen, your wife. As your devoted and obedient servant, I willingly have obeyed. However, at the same time, it was a great sorrow to me and my family, because of her virtues and dear behavior, to see this my beloved daughter go so far away. Yet when I think of giving her to the most powerful Catholic and Christian King in the world, whose house is famed as a religious monastery, I am much consoled. I thank God to have allowed me the opportunity to serve you. I regret that my old age and the responsibility of my other daughters are preventing me from coming with my daughter to pay you homage, as a good subject would wish to do. Wishing not to be tedious to Your Majesty, I end this, kissing Your Majesty's feet and hands, praying together with my family to God for the growing happiness of your kingdom. From Milan, 6 September 1559.

*Your humble, faithful servant and vassal,
Amilcare Anguissola⁵⁹*

This offer must have been of great comfort to Amilcare, both as a financial benefit by removing Sofonisba from his financial responsibility, and as validation of the time and

⁵⁸ Perlingieri, 33. According to Perlingieri, Amilcare's spelling and grammar were poor, as seen in his letters to Michelangelo.

⁵⁹ As cited in Perlingieri, 112-3. Perlingieri's translation, from Archivo General de Simancas.

effort he had invested in Sofonisba's education and training. Philip responded to Amilcare, although this letter has been lost, and Amilcare wrote again to the King:

*Sacred Royal Catholic Majesty,
A few days ago, the duke of Sessa and Count Broccardo told me of Your Majesty's wishes to have Sofonisba, my dearest daughter, serve her Most Serene Highness, our Queen. My paternal sorrow still is great because she is going so far away from me and my other daughters. Until now, in my old age, I have been enjoying her rare virtues and company, which she acquired through her own efforts and study, as well as my religious diligence. Nevertheless, as a faithful servant, which I am, of both the late emperor and Your Majesty, I willingly give her with much affection to enter the Queen's service, being certain that she could not be placed in better service, than that of the well-known fame of Your Serene Highness which surpasses any other Christian prince or king. Owing to your outstanding qualities, I am greatly consoled so that this, in part, diminishes the sorrow which my family and I feel due to the departure of my dearest daughter. By this time, I would think that she should not be too far from Your Majesty who will know from her virtuous works the talent she has been given by God. I humbly supplicate Your Majesty to forgive my boldness in writing this letter and the other one, which will be delivered devotedly by Sofonisba to Your Royal Majesty. With humility, I kiss your honorable feet and virtuous hands, praying to God to give you a long and happy life.*

*From Cremona, 17 November 1559
Your faithful subject and humble vassal,
Amilcare Anguissola⁶⁰*

Unmarried at twenty-seven, still under her father's domain, Sofonisba was yet again placed in a unique position of duality - that of duty and of independence. Her duty to her family, to remain faithful to the expectations of a noble woman, to maintain her chastity, to give her family no cause for dishonor, did not contradict her independent status as court painter to Queen Isabel. She continued to paint as an aristocratic woman in a male-dominated realm, while preserving her reputation as an honorable and respectable daughter and sibling.

⁶⁰ As cited in Perlingieri, 113. Perlingieri's translation, from Archivo General de Simancas.

As a consequence of Amilcare's promotion of Sofonisba, it was to his financial benefit that her dual reputation as talented painter and chaste daughter continue. With Sofonisba still unmarried, she did not require a dowry like her sisters did; in fact, Sofonisba was paid while at court, and the King later gave her a generous dowry, as well as a pension. This financial display of recognition by the Spanish court accomplished two things for Amilcare – a relief from the financial burden of Sofonisba's upkeep, and the added prestige of his daughter as Lady-in-Waiting and court painter to the Spanish Queen. As lofty as her court position may initially seem, it was ultimately still an exchange of a woman for financial gain benefiting her father.

What makes the dowry and pension paid to Sofonisba significant in the larger sociocultural realm is the manner in which the funds were paid, and the inherent implication for future financial distribution for women. Interestingly, her dowry was paid in her name, and not that of her father or brother, again a sign of her value at court and of her independence. This also placed her as an equal to other (male) artists, which both enhanced her status and placed her in an unusual social position. As explained by Diane Owens Hughes, a woman's dowry was the single most important exchange of assets, and much legislation was passed to protect a woman's dowry from misuse or misappropriation. A husband might have gained the daughter's wealth but the wife was still clearly regarded as her father's daughter in many ways.⁶¹

Matrimonial contracts included surrender of the daughter and her dowry, which consisted of cash, clothing, domestic items such as dishware and linens, while the

⁶¹ Diane Owens-Hughes, 148-149. "Sumptuary Law and Social Relations in Renaissance Italy." *The Italian Renaissance*. Ed. Paula Findlen. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002, 124-150) 148-149.

husband's family was responsible for her upkeep.⁶² A large dowry for one daughter could signal the inability of other daughters to marry, and could severely restrict the inheritance of the sons. Unlike the Roman dowry practice, which was established to help the groom bear the burden of matrimony, the Italian dowry also was considered the daughter's share of the father's patrimony.⁶³ A woman generally could not invest or use her dowry without permission by her husband, and although he could use the funds, there were laws and safeguards that were established to protect the dowry from misuse or maladministration.⁶⁴

A son was usually forced to wait until the death of his father before he could receive his inheritance, while a daughter received hers upon marriage or entering a convent.⁶⁵ The worth of a young noble woman was in large part, created by the size of her dowry. A woman with a small dowry could not hope to attract a potential husband of the same status as could a woman with a much larger dowry.⁶⁶ In short, the larger the dowry, the more attractive the bride, and the better her marriage prospects were. Property and titles were also attractive incentives for the potential groom, while a large dowry granted honor and status to the bride. Dowries were the daughter's share of her father's patrimony, but were in no way equal to the inheritance received by her brother, the father's son and heir.

⁶² King, *Women*, 26. The bridal dowry became the norm after the shift away from the male bridal gift in the twelfth century.

⁶³ Chojnacki, "Dowries", 575.

⁶⁴ Stanley Chojnacki, "Patrician Women in Early Renaissance Venice." (*Studies in the Renaissance* 21 (1974): 176-203) 191.

⁶⁵ Donald E. Queller and Thomas F. Madden. "Father of the Bride: Fathers, Daughters, and Dowries in Late Medieval and Early Renaissance Venice." (*Renaissance Quarterly* 46.4 (1993): 685-711) 690.

⁶⁶ Queller, 698.

A woman's ability to dispose of her dowry or wealth was limited, and the circumstances regarding Sofonisba's dowry made her financially independent, and her husband relinquished all claims of a dowry from her parents.⁶⁷ Dowry inflation was an issue for many noble families, and if the bride's dowry from her father was not large enough, the mother of the bride would be forced to add to the funds from her own dowry.⁶⁸ Since a woman's place in her family was based on her relationship to either her father or her husband, the circumstances under which her dowry was to be given or released came into question when she married, when her husband died and she was widowed, or in the event of her death.⁶⁹

The dowry paid by King Philip created, in effect, an almost paternal relationship, replacing Amilcare with the King as financial supporter or figurative father, and elevating Sofonisba's status even further. As evidenced by the earlier letters from Amilcare to King Philip, it is clear that Amilcare was comfortable with the environment in which Sofonisba lived at Philip's court. He established a pension and a salary for her, as well as a position of unique status and prestige. The size of her dowry, coupled with the prestige that it was given by the King, created the circumstances that caused her husband to accept that sum and not seek additional monies from her parents. Philip ensured that his wishes regarding her dowry were clear in one of the dowry documents:

*Whereas we hold in high esteem the fine manner in which you,
Sofonisba Anguissola, served the most serene Queen Dona Isabel, my very*

⁶⁷ Kuche, 72-73. The king presented Sofonisba with a lifelong yearly pension of 1,000 ducats, making her financial independent and raising her social status, both of which were a benefit to her husband.

⁶⁸ Chojnacki, *Dowries*, 577.

⁶⁹ King, *Renaissance*, 156. As explained by King, in some cases, men left specific instructions in their wills that invited the widow to remain in the household, thus remaining with the children and at which time she could control her own dowry funds while remaining in the home.

dear and beloved wife (may she rest in glory), and were a lady of her private service, and in satisfaction and reward of her residence, cares of your office, and such related matters which you held on the staff of her household and for which she bequeathed for you in her will and for whatever responsibility and obligation in which the forementioned most serene Queen and we may be to you. For this cause, we have had and now do have consideration to grant you with this document 3,000 ducados which are worth 125,000 maravedis, as capital benefice to your dowry and marriage, which comes to, above and beyond others, a sum of 250,000 maravedis which we have ordered in your name through our account to Melchoir de Heirera, our general treasurer, on the date of this document, in fulfillment of the two sums of 375,000 maravedis. Therefore, by this document we promise and assure you, the aforementioned Sofonisba Anguissola, that once it had been made clear to us by faith and sufficient testimony that you have married and taken all vows according to Holy Mother Church, and for whose effect are promised to the aforementioned 3,000 ducados, we will have them delivered to you so that the payment may be made to openly and in due form. I desire from you still another favor: residence in any of our royal estates in Castile or in some place equivalent. Should I die before your marriage or taking of vows, which in any of these cases may cause stoppage of payment, so that you may be certain and assured of all stipulated above, I order you to present this document, signed by our hand and countersigned by our secretary below. Dated in Madrid, 6 August 1569.

*The King*⁷⁰

After her marriage in 1570, and upon the death of her first husband Don Fabrizio de Moncada in 1579, her dowry reverted back to Sofonisba, and she was able to choose her second husband, Orazio Lomellino, against her brother's wishes. As the head of the household after the death of Amilcare, Asdrubale was not happy with Sofonisba's choice, or with the lack of attention that she paid to his wishes.⁷¹ Sofonisba's pension and dowry would have been paid to Asdrubale as the head of the household had she not remarried, and that income would have been a welcome relief to Asdrubale's financial concerns.

⁷⁰ Perlingieri, 152. Translated by Dr. Thomas Case. From Madrid. Archivo Historico Nacional. Perlingieri explains that Philip did not sign his name, as was common, but instead signed it *El Rey* (The King).

⁷¹ Claudio Strinati and Jordana Pomeroy, ed. *Italian Women Artists from Renaissance to Baroque* (Geneve: Skira, 2007) 26.

Sofonisba wanted to return to Cremona after the death of Don Fabrizio, and wrote to Grand Duke Francesco regarding customs duties that were normally paid by travelers between independent states:

To His Serene Highness and Patron The Grand Duke of Tuscany

It has been a few days since I left Sicily, in order to go to my home in Cremona. Because I was troubled by the sea journey, and this long trip, I decided to lodge myself at the monastery of Santo Mazzeo. I disembarked at Livorno where I took the land road to Pisa. I had a few of my personal things sent to me here.

I am asking your Highness, if it could be ordered that I do not have to pay customs duty on these said things, as they have been in my possession, and I have made use of them. Having been in your Highness's service for a long time, I do not have any doubts that you will oblige me in this, and I will forever be obliged to your Highness.

With this, I pray to our Lord that he bless and keep your Highness well for many happy years to come. From Pisa, 18 December 1579.

*In affectionate service,
Sofonisba de Moncada et Anguissola⁷²*

The Grand Duke answered, and Sofonisba responded to him:

To the Grand Duke of Tuscany

I received a letter from your Serene Highness with which I felt great consolation in these my times of troubles. I appreciate with what kindness your Serene Highness favors me with his remembrance of me for which I am so much obliged. I assure your Highness that even without the consideration that your wishes come first, not only in matters about which I had not been properly informed, of whom I am a faithful servant, been known to me, I would have submitted all my actions to my wishes of your Highness. But in so far as marriages are made first in heaven and then on earth, the letter from your Serene Highness arrived late, so that I was not able to show my most affectionate service to your Highness, whom I beg to pardon. From now on, I pray you would favor me by keeping me as one of your subjects. From Pisa, 27 December 1579.

*Your obligated servant,
Sofonisba Anguissola⁷³*

⁷² Perlingieri, 170. Florence. Archivio Mediceo. Translated by Dr. Gino Corti.

⁷³ Perlingieri, 170-71. Florence. Archivio Mediceo. Translation by Perlingieri.

Her relationship with Orazio Lomellino had already begun, s her reference to marriage foreshadowed what was to follow for her. A more formal letter to the King, possibly for official customs records, followed a few days after the December 27 letter:

To Your Serene Highness

Sofonisba Anguissola in the service of your Serene Highness, being in Pisa, arrived from Sicily with the galley of the Republic of Genoa, and brought some of her own silver and clothing, and a few other personal objects which have been inspected at the Customs House, having been compelled to pay the duty. As Lady-in-Waiting to his most Catholic Majesty and the Queen of Spain, I ask most graciously to be exempted from this said customs duty. I will consider this a sign of your great kindness and courtesy. I pray God to give your Serene Highness every happiness.

*Your servant,
Sofonisba Anguissola⁷⁴*

Shortly after this note, Sofonisba and her second husband Orazio were married, and she sent another note to Francesco:

To His Serene Highness Grand Duke of Tuscany

My husband, Orazio, is coming to pay homage to your Serene Highness and to offer himself as one of your servants, as we are obliged to do. I beg your Serene Highness that among other favors I have received from you, that you will accept and favor him. I am most confident in your Serene Highness's benevolence, being your most affectionate servant. I remain praying God that your Serene Highness will have many long and happy years. From Pisa, 14 January 1580.

Your servant, Sofonisba Lomel[l]ina et Anguissola⁷⁵

Good manners dictated that a new spouse of someone in the employ of a ruler paid his or her respects to the employer, which explains the haste with which Orazio

⁷⁴ Perlingieri, 171. Florence. Archivio Mediceo. Translation by Perlingieri.

⁷⁵ As cited in Perlingieri, 173. Florence. Archivio Mediceo. Translation by Perlingieri.

visited the Grand Duke. Apparently the visit was successful because a few years later, Sofonisba wrote to Francesco on behalf of Orazio again:

Sacred Catholic Royal Majesty

With Orazio Lomellino, my husband, I wrote to your Majesty, begging you to allow mw the grace of recommending my husband to you who wishes a favor granted. Again, I repeat my request to remind your Majesty to favor him speedily in what he asks. I am confident in the usual benevolence and generosity of your Majesty towards his subjects, among whom I am your most affectionate servant. I hope to receive this favor from your royal hands in which happiness I depend. I shall put this favor among many I have received from your Majesty. With humility and reverence, I kiss your hand, praying God to keep you for a long and happy life. From Genoa, 14 October 1583.

*Your humble and faithful servant,
Sofonisba Lomellina et Anguissola⁷⁶*

Despite Sofonisba's prestige, financial security, and personal freedom, she deliberately portrayed herself as obedient daughter first and artist second, in her communications with Bernardino Campi, with Michelangelo, and with King Philip. All three of these men served as paternal influences, and her representation of herself, in both written documentation as discussed in Chapter One, and visual documentation as analyzed in the following chapter, emphasizes her obedience and subservience to them. This careful self-fashioned deference was, in large part, what enabled Sofonisba to achieve financial remuneration and public acclaim, while retaining her impeccable reputation.

⁷⁶ As cited in Perlingieri, 174. Simancas. Papeles Estado Genova Translation by Perlingieri.

Chapter Two

Analysis of Visual Documentation

Sofonisba Anguissola has been lauded as an exceptional female painter, in a period when female prominence in general, and artistic recognition in particular, was neither expected nor encouraged. Her talent and success can not be disputed, as evidenced by articles and essays written by Linda Nochlin, Mary Garrard, Naomi Yavneh, Ilya Perlingieri and others. What sets apart the present examination of her works is the primary focus on her domestic relationships, and on her relationships with her father, and with the men who became influential father figures in her life (Michelangelo, Bernardino Campi and King Philip as previously mentioned), as depicted by her paintings and by their interpreted significance.

Linda Nochlin's article "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" posited that while efforts had been made to illuminate the formerly ignored female artists of the past, there was no female artist of the caliber of Michelangelo, Rembrandt, Cezanne, Picasso or Warhol.⁷⁷ Nochlin begins her essay by arguing that if one begins with the supposition that art is a personal expression of genius, and if there are no great women artists, the conclusion must be that women are therefore incapable of artistic genius.⁷⁸ This assumption, which has raised debates among scholars since her essay was

⁷⁷ Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" *Women, Art and Power and Other Essays* by Nochlin (New York: Harper Press, 1988 145- 178), 150.

⁷⁸ Nochlin, 147 and 153. Nochlin then discusses that social expectations prohibited women from professionally studying art, limitations on educating women at art academies and workshops, and "the

written, has provoked further study into the circumstances surrounding the ability of artists to create what is termed by others as “great works”, including those pieces by Sofonisba Anguissola in this thesis.

Sofonisba’s talent was known outside of Cremona, as mentioned earlier, and her work was in demand all over Italy. She could not accommodate every request for her paintings, and the Anguissola home was occasionally visited by admirers of her work, such as Giorgio Vasari, and Annibale Caro, secretary to the Duke of Parma. Caro, an acquaintance of Amilcare’s, had perhaps been instrumental in helping to facilitate communication between Amilcare and Michelangelo concerning Sofonisba.⁷⁹ At the end of 1558, Caro made a special trip to see Sofonisba, but she was not in Cremona, and was possibly in Milan. Caro wrote to Amilcare:

(To Amilcare Anguissola in Cremona)

Passing through Cremona, I came solely to visit your house. However, I was not content in this visit alone just for friendship and conversation, but also to see all of its marvels. Consequently, before I leave Lombardy, I shall endeavor, at least once again, to see you and enjoy more leisurely the merits and virtues of your daughters, especially Lady Sofonisba. So far as I am concerned, this would gratify me, because I regard your esteem more than anyone else’s. If you would be so kind and courteous, there is nothing I desire more than a portrait from you [by Sofonisba] so, in the future, I would be able to show two marvelous works together: one by Sofonisba and the other by her teacher [Campi]. And this confirmation is what I hope to receive in your answer. Thanking you again for the kind consideration you have shown me. From Parma, this 23rd December 1558⁸⁰

entire romantic, elitist, individual-glorifying, and monograph-producing substructure upon which the profession of art history is based" have prevented the creation of great women artists.

⁷⁹ Perlingieri, 75. Annibale Caro was a noted writer, secretary to the Duke of Parma, and later to Cardinal Alessandro Farnese. Caro became acquainted with Michelangelo around 1553.

⁸⁰ Perlingieri, 105. Caro knew Amilcare prior to 1558. It would not have been proper to write to Sofonisba directly, and in light of his friendship with Amilcare, Caro’s mention of visiting “more leisurely”, and his reference to “Lady Sofonisba” displays a familiarity with the family. As noted by Perlingieri in Caro’s *Delle Lettere Familiare*, translated by Perlingieri.

Caro was an influential man, and cultivating his good will would have been something that Amilcare desired. Caro's possible future introductions to other powerful men and potential patrons would not have been far from Amilcare's shrewd mind, and that Caro mentions seeing Amilcare "once again", and wanting to visit "more leisurely" implies a previous visit. His reference to "Lady Sofonisba" displays his respect for her talent, and for her personal reputation.

As discussed previously, Sofonisba's father Amilcare not only allowed but also encouraged both her educational studies and her artistic aspirations. He acted more as an artistic agent for her than as a father on many levels, yet there is no written evidence of discord between them, nor any indication that Sofonisba was anything other than pleased with her relationship with Amilcare. In addition to Amilcare and King Philip, two other men also were of great importance to Sofonisba – namely her painting tutor Bernardino Campi, and Michelangelo. Another well-known and influential man, Giorgio Vasari, visited her family home in 1566 and wrote the following about her:

Anguissola has shown greater application and better grace than any other woman of our age in her endeavors at drawing; she has thus succeeded not only in drawing, coloring and painting from nature, and copying excellently from others, but by herself has created rare and very beautiful painting.⁸¹

The fact that Vasari personally visited the Anguissola home, and that he wrote so highly of her talent, reveals his respect for her artistic ability. He does mention her

⁸¹ Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists*. Trans. Julia Conaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 343. Vasari's praise was rare for a woman. Properzia de Rossi is the only woman listed, but within her biography, Vasari mentions Sofonisba and writes a lengthier and more glowing biography of Sofonisba than of de Rossi.

gender, not as an excuse for substandard work, but rather as praise for her accomplishments in the face of the limitations normally placed on women of her age and social status.

As discussed in Chapter One, Amilcare wrote to Michelangelo on more than one occasion, requesting Michelangelo's guidance and assistance concerning Sofonisba's artistic studies, at a time when Michelangelo was corresponding with almost no one, in part due to his advanced age.⁸² That he bothered to expend the energy and time on his letters to Amilcare, especially regarding a female painter, shows the high regard in which he considered her. Sofonisba undoubtedly understood the great honor bestowed upon her by his communication with her, and with his aid to her.

Painter Francesco Salviati wrote to Bernardino Campi in April 1554, and in the letter, he praised Sofonisba's talents:

*My Magnificent Sir Bernardino,
From the works in front of me which are wonderfully painted by the beautiful Cremonese lady painter, I do understand what a great ability you must have. Moreover, you have acquired renown from your paintings of Milan. From this fame, which we are obliged to confirm, we know that when you were young, you were able to paint your city [Cremona] better than anyone else. Therefore, do not think it surprising that I send you a sketch to show you my affection. With warm regards and remembering you, I let you know that I love you more for your wonderful intellect and your fame than because of our future acquaintance. In the meantime, send my greetings to your brother, and I send my greetings. From Rome, 28 April 1554.*

*Francesco Salviati, painter*⁸³

⁸² Perlingieri, 69. According to Perlingieri, the envelope survived as well, and is addressed to Michelangelo in Rome.

⁸³ Perlingieri, 70. Sofonisba's work was often requested as an accompaniment or as a complement to Campi's work.

The significance of this letter stems from Salviati's own reputation as a painter, and the fact that he was a close friend and companion to Vasari.

Sofonisba's sketch, *Asdrubale Being Bitten by a Crab* (Figure 1), done around 1554, was perhaps one of the works to which Salviati referred. According to Vasari in his *Vite*, Tommaso Cavalieri, a close friend of Michelangelo, "*sent to Duke Cosimo a sketch of Cleopatra from the divine hand of Michelangelo. The other by Sofonisba's hand, in which a young girl is laughing and a little boy is crying because he put his hand, one finger of which was bitten, into a basket of crabs.*"⁸⁴ Apparently, this sketch was in Michelangelo's possession, perhaps one of the assignments he had sent to her as part of her studies. Michelangelo possibly sent Sofonisba the sketch of Cleopatra in response to Amilcare's request for a sketch, and this was perhaps the same one sent to Duke Cosimo.⁸⁵

In a letter, Cavalieri wrote:

*I have a drawing done by the hand of a noblewoman of Cremona, named Sofonisba Aguoscosa [Anguissola], today a lady of the Spanish court, I send it to you with this one of Michelangelo and I believe that it may stand comparison with many other drawings, for it is not simply beautiful, but also exhibits considerable invention. And this is that of the divine Michelangelo who had seen a drawing done by her hand of a smiling girl, said that he would liked to have seen a weeping boy, as a subject more difficult to draw. After he wrote to her about it, she sent him this drawing which was a portrait of her brother, whom she has intentionally shown as weeping. Now, I send them such as they are, and I beg your excellency to consider me as a servant, which, in truth, I am.*⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Perlingieri, 71. According to Perlingieri, Cavalieri met Michelangelo in 1532, they became fast friends and Cavalieri was devoted to Michelangelo.

⁸⁵ Perlingieri, 71. According to Perlingieri, the sketch was in Michelangelo's possession, probably sent to him as one of Sofonisba's assignments. Two years before Michelangelo's death in 1562, the two sketches were sent to Duke Cosimo I in Florence.

⁸⁶ Perlingieri, 72. From De Tolnay, "Sofonisba Anguissola and her Relations with Michelangelo", *Journal of the Walters Art Gallery* 4 (1941) 117-118.



Figure 1. Sofonisba Anguissola. *Boy Bitten by a Crayfish*, 1559. Sketch.

Source: Flavio Caroli, *Sofonisba Anguissola e le sue Sorelle*, page 275.

That these sketches were sent together, with praise from several influential men, to yet another man of power, only serves to reinforce the unique position of Sofonisba, in society in general, and also within the realm of the artist as well. Sofonisba's direct correspondence with Michelangelo regarding her sketches demonstrates the ability of Sofonisba to communicate effectively with men of importance and power, in addition to the high regard in which Michelangelo held her.

The sketch of Asdrubale, with one of the younger sisters, possibly Minerva, shows an exquisite attention to detail in the facial expressions and body language. Asdrubale appears to have just removed his hand from the basket of crabs after having been bitten, and his face shows a combination of surprise, pain, and anger. Sofonisba's easily recognizable treatment and positioning of the hands of both children, especially Asdrubale's left hand, shows the "square -U" that so often appears in her works. The intimate family relationship, also prevalent in many of her works, shows sensitivity not always apparent in similar family groupings done by male artists. Anguissola's personal familiarity with the sitters, as well as her emotional relationship to them, may be the factor that allows her artistic intimacy to shine through.

A similar family grouping is found in her painting *The Chess Game* (Figure 2), painted in 1555. One could argue that Sofonisba's most significant contribution to the art world is domestic genre painting. Decades before it became popular, she painted scenes of everyday family life, and more specifically her family members in informal scenes, performing everyday activities, and her informal style brought her numerous commissions throughout Italy. Mary Garrard's article, "Here's Looking at Me: Sofonisba Anguissola and the Problem of the Woman Artist" closely examines the painting from a



Figure 2. Sofonisba Anguissola. *The Chess Game*, 1555. Oil on canvas. Museum Navrodwe, Poznan, Poland.

Source: Flavio Caroli, *Sofonisba Anguissola e le sue Sorelle*, page 191.

modern feminist perspective, although her contemporary concepts of active/passive and subject/object in her essay bear little relevance on this particular discussion.

Naomi Yavneh's article, "Playing the Game: Sisterly Relations in Sofonisba Anguissola's *The Chess Game*", addresses the more applicable sisterly relationship between the girls shown in the painting, who are usually identified as Lucia, Minerva and Europa Anguissola, chaperoned by a maid in the background. Anguissola's treatment of informal domestic activity creates a lifelike quality to the scene, which is not always found in similar groupings done by male artists of the period. In her article, Yavneh argues that Anguissola's presentation of the girls is a carefully constructed statement on the role of the female artist and on female creativity, as well as the reciprocity of sisterhood.⁸⁷

Sisterhood and family relationships were of great importance to Sofonisba. As the eldest of seven children, with five sisters and one brother, Sofonisba became both role model and teacher for her sisters. She and her sister Elena studied painting with Bernardino Campi, as discussed previously, and later after returning home, Sofonisba then taught her younger sisters, three of whom, (Lucia, Europa, and Anna Maria) became artists.⁸⁸ Sofonisba was not the only one of Amilcare's daughters to receive an education, and *The Chess Game* becomes a visual reinforcement of the intellectual capacity of the girls. The game of chess had undergone a major change in the rules in the late fifteenth

⁸⁷ Naomi Yavneh, "Playing the Game: Sisterly Relations in Sofonisba Anguissola's *The Chess Game*." *Sibling Relations and Gender in the Early Modern World*, ed. Naomi Miller and Naomi Yavneh. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006, 166-181), 167.

⁸⁸ Mary D. Garrard, "Here's Looking at Me: Sofonisba Anguissola and the Problem of the Woman Artist." (*Renaissance Quarterly* 47 (1994): 556-622) 582. Garrard asserts that Sofonisba established a precedent for her sisters, as only two of them married (Europa and Anna Maria). Lucia also followed Sofonisba's example by signing some of her pieces with the word *virgo*, as Sofonisba did.

century, and in “the new chess”, the Queen became the most powerful piece on the board, even more powerful than the King piece⁸⁹. Anguissola’s inclusion of this position can be interpreted as a commentary on the traditional versus non-traditional roles of daughters, and on her place in that discourse.

Chess requires a sense of patience, of intellectual strategy and of competition, as a rule qualities not appreciated in Renaissance women. Anguissola’s depiction of her sisters transforms these traits normally associated with men, into a casual girl’s past-time game, thus maintaining their chaste and innocent demeanor, while subtly emphasizing their intelligence. Mary Garrard states that chess was considered a highly intellectual pursuit in the Renaissance, and even criticized by Castiglione as requiring too much time and effort for the well-rounded courtier.⁹⁰ The three girls look relaxed and confident, obviously enjoying themselves without concern or strain. Sofonisba, although not visually represented in the painting, incorporates herself as an unseen participant through her physical resemblance to her sisters, as well as by the inscription on the side of the chessboard.⁹¹

Garrard analyzes the gaze sequence of the girls, concluding that Sofonisba completes the chain through her unseen presence just off the canvas.⁹² Another close examination, including Yavneh’s, leads one to view Lucia, Minerva, and Europa as three

⁸⁹ Garrard, 600.

⁹⁰ Garrard, 603. From Castiglione, 127-128.

⁹¹ Yavneh, 173.

⁹² Garrard, 604. Garrard examines the inner dynamic of the piece, following lines of sight, which eventually lead off the canvas to the viewer, or to the artist who is the artist-teacher of her sisters, according to Garrard. As artistic creations by Sofonisba, as she was the creation by Campi, Garrard posits that the sisters become part of her self-image.

of the four sides of a square, with the unseen Sofonisba to complete the fourth side, thus enclosing the girls in the safety of an intellectual yet chaste past time. This intimate family scene is set apart from other family portraits done during the same period, through other means as well. The girls are dressed well, as befits their station, but not extravagantly, as was the norm in single portraits. Yavneh asserts that Anguissola's deliberate attention to the fabric and needlework are a conscious effort to reinforce the femininity of both the artist and her sisters⁹³. Indeed, it is only in depictions of others and not of herself, that the viewer experiences Sofonisba's talent for highlighting the luxurious fabrics and intricate embroidery commonly found in female portraiture, as will be discussed later when analyzing her self-portraits. Sofonisba shuns the traditional bejeweled, idealized female portrait model when depicting herself, opting instead for the more masculine costume of severe black clothing with little to no adornment.

A description of Anguissola's painting and pictorial technique is described by expert Frank Redelius:

[Anguissola used] an umber-tinted transparent prime coat laid over an oil-based ground of white lead. Her choice of a moderately rough woven canvas and the well-scraped-on ground and prime coats lent (by preservation, yet nourishment of the weave) optical advantages to the paints and coloring....Sofonisba's use of contrasting qualities of paint, that is, thick against thin, transparent against opaque, as well as ordinary light and dark, enhanced the spatial effect of the subject within the pictorial atmosphere. This play between paint qualities is readily evidenced by the rather solid rendering of her transparentizing pictorial vehicle allowing, thereby, the umber-tinted transparent coat to show through.⁹⁴

⁹³ Yavneh, 173.

⁹⁴ Perlingieri, 102-3.



Figure 3. Sofonisba Anguissola. *Portrait of the Artist's Sisters and Brother*, c.1555.
Corsham Court, Wilshire, England.

Source: Flavio Caroli, *Sofonisba Anguissola e le sue Sorelle*, page 15.

This umber-tinted transparency can be seen in another example of Anguissola's casual family portraiture, namely her 1555 painting, *Portrait of the Artist's Sisters and Brother* (Figure 3).⁹⁵ The umber tint lends warmth and depth to the painting, while remaining transparent enough to allow a lifelike appearance in the exposed faces and hands of the children. What immediately captures the attention of the viewer is the striking family resemblance between the three children. The eyes of all three children are executed in classic Sofonisba style – slightly almond shaped, with the face of the sitter looking in one direction, while gazing at the audience out of the side of the eye. The girls wear matching headscarves, and Asdrubale's hair is cut short, exposing the ears of all three children, which are also almost identical to each other. The mouths of the girls are also very similar and shown slightly pursed, while Asdrubale's lips are slightly fuller. One could argue that this is a visual representation of the expectations of Renaissance children. Daughters should be chaste, proper, and silent, while sons should be the primary sibling, on whom the family's hopes and future is placed, and the future voice of the family.

Asdrubale is flanked by his two sisters, who both face to the left, while Asdrubale faces to the right. The girls wear similar dresses in earth tones, sitting like well-dressed matching bookends flanking Asdrubale who stands as the central figure in the painting. Asdrubale holds a small dog in his arms, and while he faces to the right, he gazes at the audience with an earnest or serious but not grim look on his face.

⁹⁵ Perlingieri, 101. The male sitter in this painting was originally thought to be Massimiliano Stampa, due to the resemblance of the boy in Figure 3 to the portrait of Massimiliano Stampa from 1557. One quality that helps to identify the sitters is the uncanny family resemblance, as well as the resemblance of the girls to several other paintings by Anguissola and of her sisters.

The centrality of Asdrubale depicts his future place in the family, as Amilcare's son and heir, and as the potential head of the family after Amilcare's death. His sisters, well dressed, chaste, and proper, serve to both visually support him, as well as to underscore his importance. His proper appearance and luxurious clothing also demonstrate his social status, despite his young age. Sofonisba paints the subtle facial expressions of the three figures in a lifelike manner, and the viewer can almost feel the emotions of the children. Asdrubale seems serious or earnest as mentioned earlier, and the girls appear amused or secretly pleased, as can be seen by the smirks and partial smiles on their faces. One additional thing to note is that from a purely personal perspective, the children are all simply adorable, which further exemplifies Sofonisba's talent for portraying intimate domestic scenes.

The relationship between children is also clearly depicted in Sofonisba's painting from 1557-58 entitled *Amilcare Anguissola with His Children Minerva and Asdrubale* (Figure 4). Amilcare is seated in the center of the painting, and looks directly at Sofonisba, as the artist. He appears calm and confident, at ease in this environment contrived by his eldest daughter. Young Asdrubale gazes at his father, while Minerva's gaze is fixed on her brother. Lines of sight guide the viewer's attention from one figure to another, creating action and interest in what, at first glance, appears to be nothing more than a family portrait.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ A line of sight is an imaginary compositional line in a painting, that implies the directional gaze of a figure in a painting. Sight lines are used by artists to direct the viewer's gaze from one object or figure to another, creating action and interest.



Figure 4. Sofonisba Anguissola. *Amilcare Anguissola with His Children Minerva and Asdrubale*, 1557-58. Hage Collection, Nivaagaard.

Source: Flavio Caroli, *Sofonisba Anguissola e le sue Sorelle*, page 215.

The first clue that this is not a simple family portrait is the absence of Bianca Anguissola. As mentioned previously, no portraits of Bianca remain, although Perlingieri writes that Vasari mentioned a portrait of Bianca done by Europa.⁹⁷ Without the presence of Bianca as matriarch, and with the inclusion of only one daughter and not all of Amilcare's children, the painting cannot be considered a "family" portrait, but instead it becomes a depiction of a familial relationship. Mary Garrard also asserts that Bianca has been superseded by the dog in the lower right corner.⁹⁸

The rapport of the two younger children to Amilcare is respectful, but comfortable. None of the figures is depicted as overtly stiff or uncomfortable, and although several assumptions can be made about the sibling dynamic between Minerva and Asdrubale, or about the separate relationships of each child to Amilcare, what is most intriguing is Sofonisba's relationship with her father.

Upon closer inspection, there are several different areas of the painting upon which the viewer can focus. Amilcare, the largest and central figure, is seated as has been mentioned previously, thus balancing the scene by not looming over the children. His black clothing, at first glance deceptively simple, is executed with Sofonisba's usual skill for depicting luxurious fabrics. The folds of the cloth of Amilcare's sleeve, and of his tunic as it drapes across his leg, seem to rustle with lifelike movement. His facial expression, partially hidden by his mustache and beard, seems to convey contentment or

⁹⁷ Perlingieri, 80. Although the painting has since been lost, based on descriptions of the physical similarities of the eyes, nose and ears, and skin and hair coloring, it has been identified as a portrait of Bianca Ponzoe Anguissola.

⁹⁸ Garrard, 608-609. Garrard explains that this coincides with the patriarchal male favoritism that defined all aspects of daily Renaissance life.

amusement. His direct gaze captures the attention of the viewer, and of the artist, his eldest daughter Sofonisba, almost as if sharing a private unspoken message.

Amilcare's left arm and hand rest lightly on the shoulders of his son Asdrubale, who stands next to him, and gazes upward. Amilcare's left hand rests on his thigh, and Asdrubale holds it. Amilcare's arms seem to create a protective enclosure for Asdrubale, who is the future of the family, and ultimately Amilcare's replacement as head of the household. Amilcare's physical contact with Asdrubale could signify his familial pride and promotion of his son, much like the legitimization of Amilcare by his own father signified Annibale's pride in Amilcare's actions and behavior. Asdrubale is dressed in typical Renaissance fashion, in richly embroidered, brightly colored luxurious fabrics, and he appears to be clothed as a miniature man, and not a young boy, including the small sword in the sheath at his side.

The visual placement of the two males indicates the sense of patriarchal structure that is present not only within the painting, but within the family as well. Amilcare is central, the largest and most important person, and family member. Asdrubale, enclosed within the protection of his father's care until he can become the next leader of the family, gazes upward, looking not at his father but at his sister Minerva, who by her very presence, contrasts his position as son and heir. Although Minerva is older, and larger in the painting, Asdrubale is the focus of Amilcare's attention, and the one given Amilcare's physical affection. Minerva, and her sisters by extension, underscores the importance of Asdrubale's birth as the son and heir, the last child and therefore the last chance for the continuation of Amilcare's line. Ironically, Asdrubale never married and never had

children, and the interest in the family has come from his sisters and their talents, and in Sofonisba in particular.

Minerva dressed as a proper and chaste daughter in ornately decorated fabrics, with her hair demurely drawn up, stands slightly behind Amilcare at his elbow, gazing down at Asdrubale. Mary Garrard questions whether Minerva looks at Asdrubale with resentment, or with respect.⁹⁹ Minerva holds a fold of her dress in her right hand, calling attention to its voluminous skirt of luxuriant fabric, while subtly reminding the viewer of Sofonisba's talent for representing the feminine aspects of clothing and detailing.

Interestingly, with Amilcare seated and Minerva standing, the two are presented at the same height, while Asdrubale is considerably shorter, depicting his lesser status as a young child who is not yet the adult and capable heir. Minerva is stationed outside the embrace of Amilcare and Asdrubale, shown as an outsider who is excluded from the physical relationship between father and son. The red drapery in the background that forms a partial frame around Minerva, and to a lesser extent around Amilcare's head and shoulders, is echoed in the red color of Asdrubale's clothing, signifying the protection of Minerva by Asdrubale later in life when he succeeds Amilcare as head of the family.

As mentioned earlier, perhaps most intriguing is the inclusion of Sofonisba's relationship with her father in the painting, without actually placing herself in the scene. Amilcare looks out from the canvas, directly as the viewer, or at the artist, his daughter Sofonisba. As the eldest daughter and at approximately age twenty-two when this was painted, Sofonisba had spent the past twelve years or more training and honing her craft,

⁹⁹ Garrard, 609. Garrard posits that perhaps the sisters are resentful of Asdrubale's preferential treatment by Amilcare, or conversely that they see Asdrubale as the salvation of the family. It is presumed that as the son and heir, the future prestige of the family rests with Asdrubale, while history has proven this to be incorrect. Asdrubale, with no family and no progeny, did not continue the family lineage, and the Anguissola name is known essentially due to Sofonisba's talent and reputation.

often in tangent with Amilcare's efforts to promote her work while reaffirming her noble status and chaste reputation. His gaze draws the attention of the viewer, focusing on his calm and serene facial expression. Amilcare's demeanor denotes a sense of confidence in Sofonisba as the artist, and it projects approval of her artistic talent.

While Minerva stands outside of the embrace of Amilcare, Sofonisba as the artist and eldest daughter becomes the fourth figure in the painting, although not shown on the canvas. She is also positioned directly in front of Amilcare, and his gaze seems to convey a quiet and comfortable unspoken message. Both daughters are slightly removed from the physical contact with Amilcare and Asdrubale, signifying the separation from the males by both location, and by gender. No matter how successful they become, or how well connected they marry, the girls will always remain "only" daughters, and never as important as the son and heir, Asdrubale.

Another man to whom Sofonisba became important, and who remained an influential and respected person in Sofonisba's life, was her first painting teacher, Bernardino Campi. In her 1557 painting, *Bernardino Campi Painting Sofonisba Anguissola*, (Figure 5), Sofonisba incorporates the teacher-student theme, a painting subject rarely portrayed, yet she does it with her usual attention to detail, and with a complimentary depiction of subjects other than herself.

Campi, as Sofonisba's first teacher, and someone with whom she trained and perhaps even resided part time, remained dear to Sofonisba, even years after she ceased to study with him, and had exceeded his talents. Decades after she left his tutelage, her affection for him, and for his family, can be felt in a letter to him in response to a request for a portrait of King Philip:

My Very Magnificent Signore Bernardino.

A few days ago, I had a letter from you which was very dear to let me know about your health and that of your wife, whom I love like a sister. I have written [other letters] to you but have never received any answer, except this one which was given to me by a gentleman of the Secchi family. About the portrait of the king that you requested, I cannot help you as I would like, because I do not have any portrait of His Majesty. At the present time, I am busy doing a portrait of her Serene Highness, the King's sister [Juana], for the Pope. Just a few days ago, I sent him [the Pope] the portrait of our Serene Highness, the Queen. Therefore, my dearest teacher, Signore Bernardino, you see how busy I am painting. The Queen wants a great part of my time in order for me to paint her portrait, and she does not have enough patience for me to paint [others], so that she is not deprived of me working for her. Despite this problem, I would like to mention, as I have on other occasions, that I will not do any less than my ability in this portrait. And with this, I recommend myself to you and kiss your hand and that of your dearest wife, whom I love, and your mother, Signora Barbara, your sister, Signora Francesco, and your father, Signor Pietro.

From Madrid, 21 October 1561¹⁰⁰

A close examination of this letter reveals an interesting undertone with noteworthy implications. Sofonisba mentions “*I have written [other letters] to you but have never received any answer*”, revealing that she had made the effort to contact Campi on previous occasions and reaffirming the affection she bore her former master. She subtly implies that his only response is as a request for a favor from her. He asks for a portrait of the King, but in her response, Sofonisba discusses how busy she is with the Queen and the King's sister. She also mentions her communication with the Pope¹⁰¹,

¹⁰⁰ Perlingieri, 126. The location of the portrait of Juana mentioned in this letter is unknown. There are two other portraits of Queen Isabel done by Anguissola, one in Madrid and one in Vienna.

¹⁰¹ Perlingieri, 122 and 123. Sofonisba's letter to the Pope reads: *(Holy Father,) I have learned from your Nuncio [Alonso Crivello] that you desire a portrait of my royal mistress by my hand. I consider it a singular favor to be allowed to serve your Holiness, and I asked Her Majesty's permission, which was readily granted, seeing the paternal affection which your Holiness displays to her. I have taken the opportunity of sending it by this knight. It will be a great pleasure to me if I have gratified your Holiness's wish, but I must add that, if the brush could represent the beauties of the queen's soul to your eyes, they would be marvelous. However, I have used the utmost diligence to present*

quietly emphasizing her prestige among the most powerful leaders in the Christian world. Her sense of pride in the demand for her work is detectable, but not overtly boastful, as if gently reminding him how important she has become.

Over the course of time, artists have painted self-portraits, and artists have paid homage to those of importance to them, such as patrons, religious leaders, or political figures. Some artists have painted themselves in the act of painting, as an added reinforcement of the viewer's understanding of the talent of the artist, or as a measure of self-esteem.¹⁰² Sofonisba incorporates two separate themes into one meaningful image: a self-portrait and a memorial to Campi, her first Master. Most sixteenth-century portraiture was comprised of elaborately dressed and coiffed individuals, occasionally accompanied by props such as dogs, medallions, or landscape backgrounds signifying their social status and wealth. Women were depicted as the idealized beauty, and as paragons of virtue, pure, chaste, and demure, while portraits of men emphasized their wealth, social position, and masculinity.¹⁰³

what art can show, to tell your Holiness the truth. And so I humbly kiss your most holy feet. Madrid, 16 September 1561.

*Your Holiness's most humble servant,
Sofonisba Anguissola*

And his response to her, which shows his appreciation of her talent:
(Pius Papa IV. Dilecto in Christo filia.), We have received the portrait of our dear daughter, the Queen of Spain, which you have sent. It has given us the utmost satisfaction for both the person represented, whom we love like a father for the piety and good qualities of her mind, and because it is well and diligently executed by your hand. We thank you and assure you that we shall treasure it among our choicest possessions, and commend your marvelous talent which is the least among your numerous qualities. And so we send you our benediction. May God save you. Rome 15 October 1561.

¹⁰² See Diego Velasquez's 1656 *Las Meninas*, Elisabetta Sirani's c. 1660 *Self-Portrait*, Artemesia Gentileschi's 1630 *Self-Portrait as 'La Pittura'*, Judith Leyster's c. 1633 *Self-Portrait*, or Elisabeth Vigee-Lebrun's 1791 *Self-Portrait* as a few examples of artists depicting themselves in the act of painting.

¹⁰³ Some examples of idealized male portraits are Raphael's 1506 *Portrait of Agnolo Doni*, Titian's 1529 *Federico Gonzaga, Duke of Mantua*, and Botticelli's 1474 *Portrait of a Man with a Medal of Cosimo the Elder*, and some examples of idealized female beauty are Sandro Botticelli's c. 1480/85 *Young Woman*

In *Bernardino Campi Painting Sofonisba Anguissola*, she combines several messages into one image. The title lists Campi first, as the artist, with Sofonisba as the object of his talent, although in truth, the situation is reversed, with Sofonisba as the artist and Campi as her subject. She does not paint him in a passive position, but instead she portrays him at work painting a portrait. The portrait sitter is Sofonisba, and in her usual fashion, she depicts Campi in a much more flattering light than she does herself. The two figures emerge from the dark background, glowing with lifelike accuracy, although Campi is portrayed in a more three dimensional manner, while the image of Sofonisba seems flatter by comparison. Campi looks over his shoulder at the viewer, as if seeking an opinion of his work, or of his student/subject.

As will be discussed later, Anguissola's depiction of herself, as found in several of her self-portraits, is often severe, stark, and serious. In the two self-portraits, as well as in the Campi painting, Sofonisba does not appear in the idealized, extravagantly dressed style so often found in female portraiture. Instead, she wears black clothing, with a touch of white at her throat for contrast and to remind the viewer of her purity, and her virginal state. Campi is dressed in a similar fashion, in what appears to be a painter's smock, with a white collar. Artist and subject are dressed similarly, with a view of Campi's back and a frontal view of Sofonisba, as if together, the two of them create one complete person.

(Simonetta Vespucci?) in Mythological Guise, Raphael's 1505 Lady with a Unicorn, and Raphael's 1506 Portrait of Maddalena Doni.



Figure 5. Sofonisba Anguissola. *Bernardino Campi Painting Sofonisba Anguissola*, 1557. Oil on canvas, Pinacoteca Nazionale, Siena.

Source: Flavio Caroli, *Sofonisba Anguissola e le sue Sorelle*, page 217.

Mary Garrard makes an interesting comment on the use of the mahlstick by Campi in the painting. The mahlstick is used by artists to steady the hand, and to prevent the hand from touching wet paint while working on another section of the painting. One reading of his use of this tool makes a connection between it and artistic timidity.¹⁰⁴ This reading, however, seems contradictory to her public opinion of him, and it perhaps should be viewed simply as another artist's tool with which to reaffirm his reputation for portraiture.

Campi acted as a father figure for Sofonisba while she trained with him, and she remained fond of him and of his entire family long after she left his tutelage. As her first Master, his influence on her cannot be underestimated, nor should her respect for him. In the painting, it should be noted that although he is presented as the artist, she is visually larger and higher than he is, and she is positioned centrally on the canvas, emphasizing her importance. Garrard speculates that Anguissola constructs a deception, which involves both Campi and Sofonisba. She probably did not paint him in real life, nor did he paint her as shown. He had already left for Milan before this image was painted, where he spent approximately thirteen years, and when he returned, she had left for Spain.¹⁰⁵

Anguissola plays with the concept of roles within roles, making the complication of artist as subject and of subject as artist is difficult to decipher and analyze fully.

Anguissola paints Campi, thus making him the subject, yet he is shown in the act of painting her, as his object. Further complicating the viewer's understanding, is the gaze

¹⁰⁴ Garrard, 564. Garrard writes that Anguissola depicts herself using the mahlstick in her early self-portraits, but not once she had matured in her craft. Garrard goes on to assert that Sofonisba may have included the mahlstick to imply a lack of creativity on the part of Campi, but I personally disagree. Her portrayal of him is too flattering and respectful to imply such a negative idea about her teacher, a type of surrogate father-figure, and who is always referenced or discussed with respect and fondness by her.

¹⁰⁵ Garrard, 565. Campi's travels through northern Italy have been detailed by his earliest biographer, Alessandro Lamo in his *Discorso*.

of each of the figures. Campi looks at the viewer (or at the artist), and not at his subject, while the image of Sofonisba also looks out from the canvas at the viewer.

This unusual direct gaze of a female portrait sitter may seem contradictory to the carefully constructed chaste and demure image both Amilcare and Sofonisba worked so hard to maintain, however, two different readings of this seemingly improper action help the viewer retain the correct opinion of Sofonisba. First, as the object of the painter's creation, visually he has painted her this way, and thus more acceptable for her to be depicted in this manner. Secondly, since Sofonisba is the unseen actual artist, her gaze is not directed at any male painter, but at herself, thus keeping her reputation safe. She is not smiling, or indulging in any improper behavior in the painting; she is sitting in the position that the artist has placed her.

The unusual direct gaze in her other self portraits, such as her 1556 *Self-Portrait* (Figure 6), and her 1554 *Self-Portrait* (Figure 7), depict Anguissola as demurely confident. In both of these self-portraits, she gazes at the viewer as well, but again, with no lack of modesty or impropriety. In her 1556 self-portrait (Figure 6), she paints herself at the easel, using a mahlstick similar to the one used by Campi in Figure 5. As mentioned earlier, the mahlstick was occasionally associated with a lack of artistic creativity, or with inexperience, neither of which applied to her. Her inclusion of the tool, then, could be read as a visual aid for added interest, in order to call attention to the "tools of the trade" or to give her left hand something to hold, in order to be seen, and not just set on her lap.

As in many of her self portraits, her hair is drawn severely back from her face and parted in the middle. Her distinctive Anguissola almond shaped eyes look out at the

viewer, but in a clear and almost appraising gaze; this is not seductive or improper in any way. Her dress is fairly plain, without ornate embroidery, or excessively large sleeves, and it is only adorned by a white ruffled chemise. Despite the lack of adornment commonly found in female portraiture, as discussed previously, Sofonisba presents herself in a proper and chaste manner.

Her demeanor is serious, and she is not smiling. She looks focused, and as the painting she is working on seems almost complete, the viewer can imagine the artist is looking at her subjects, and not at the audience. Sofonisba's choice of subject matter for her painting on the easel is an appropriate one for a demure daughter. Frances Borzello asserts that Sofonisba was displaying her versatility with her choice of painting, as she was better known for her portraits and self-portraits, although she did paint several religious scenes and figures during her career.¹⁰⁶ Since many opportunities for study and training were off limits to women, such as anatomy studies, as discussed previously, portraiture and religious scenes were considered appropriate subjects for women to paint.¹⁰⁷

The brighter colors of the Virgin and Child painting serve to further contrast against Sofonisba's presentation of herself. The self-fashioned distinction offers the viewer a subtle reminder that the artist, as a woman, is not merely a decorative figure, but an active participant in her own life, as well as on the canvas. She deliberately sets herself apart from the normal social conventions concerning female portraiture, shunning jewels,

¹⁰⁶ Frances Borzello *Seeing Ourselves* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc, 1998) 46. Borzello references the Virgin and Child painting shown in Sofonisba's 1556 Self-Portrait.

¹⁰⁷ Borzello, 46. Portraiture was considered to be acceptable for women, as it did not require knowledge of anatomy, but relied instead on copying an existing image, and complex figure studies were not required.

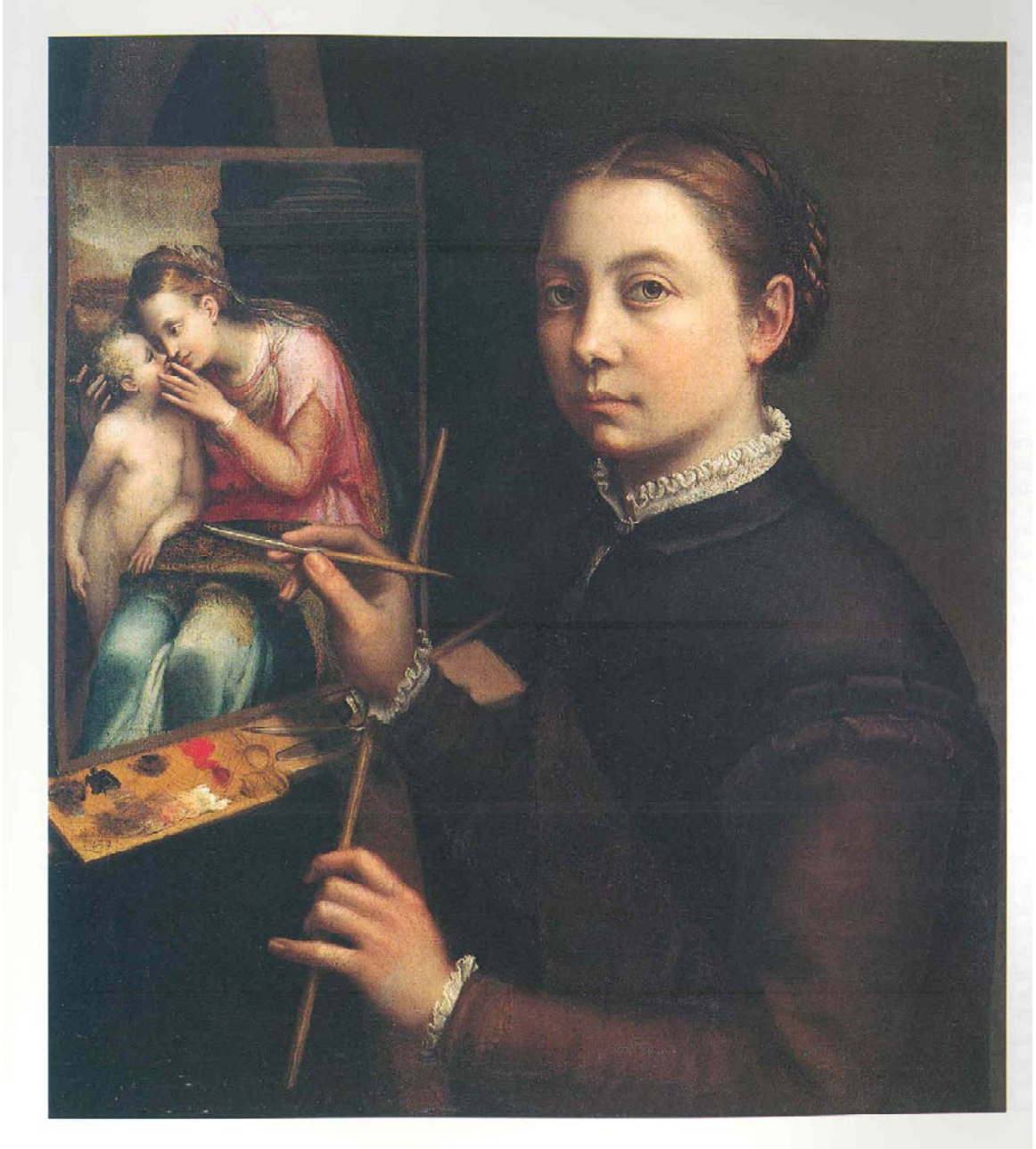


Figure 6. Sofonisba Anguissola. *Self-Portrait*, Oil on canvas 1556. Lancut Museum, Poland.

Source: Flavio Caroli, *Sofonisba Anguissola e le sue Sorelle*, page 199.

bright or luxurious clothing, or gaudy backdrops. Her clothing, as well as the more subdued backdrop, serves to highlight her seriousness, in both her demeanor and in artistic focus. She portrays herself in almost a masculine manner, through her visual connection with her work, and through the lack of frills and domestic or feminine trappings.

An interesting aspect of many of Anguissola's paintings is her treatment of the subject's hands. Her "square-U" positioning of the hands of many of her figures became a trademark in effect, and while this is not as clear as in other paintings by Sofonisba, the depiction of the hands of both herself and of the Madonna shows a grace and softness not necessarily associated with many of the male artists of the time.

The inscription of the painting reads: "I, the maiden Sofonisba, equaled the Muses and Appelles in performing my songs and handling my colors."¹⁰⁸ Anguissola often references herself as maiden or virgin in her inscriptions, reaffirming her chaste reputation, and pure physical state. Although she was long past the normal marriageable age for a noble girl, her self-presentation allows the viewer to be reminded that she was a demure and proper daughter, and an honor to her family. Her virginal state becomes almost as important as her talent, in the constructed identity that Amilcare and Sofonisba had fashioned for her. This identity construct, while not deceptive in any way, allows Sofonisba to paint for commissions as a career, and not as a hobby, as some artistically minded daughters were forced to do. Her "demure, obedient and chaste daughter" status was the very concept that enabled her to continue to paint, to be sought after for her talent by nobles in many countries, and to travel as few other women could.

¹⁰⁸ Borzello, 46.

The final self-portrait to be examined is her 1554 *Self-Portrait* (Figure 7). This deceptively simple portrait shows Sofonisba's upper torso, and one hand, which holds a book with an inscription that reads: *Sofonisba Anguissola, the unmarried maiden, painted this herself in 1554*. Her inscription serves a twofold purpose; it becomes the artist's signature, as well as a visual and written reminder of her pure, honorable state. Her clothing and facial expression mirror this sentiment, as previously stated concerning many of her self-portraits.

Sofonisba's presentation of herself is very comparable to her later 1556 portrait, as she is wearing a similar dress and her hair is parted in the center, braided and drawn back from her face. Her almond shaped eyes gaze directly at the viewer, but with no artifice or attempt at seduction. As stated by Mary Garrard, Sofonisba attempts to avoid feminine signifiers, and instead dresses almost like a man, in severe dark clothing, with no outward trappings of wealth or social status¹⁰⁹ despite the fact that her social status would have allowed her much more luxurious and decorative clothing, while still observing the sumptuary laws of the time.

Sofonisba does not smile, or evoke any apparent emotion, similar to the female portraiture expectation that women should not be pleased to have their portrait painted, but instead it is an activity to be tolerated with grace. Anguissola gives this impression of tolerance or acceptance, but certainly not one of enjoyment or even contentment. She is also positioned rarely stiffly, and thus properly, with straight shoulders, and her head held high.

¹⁰⁹ Garrard, 586. Garrard discusses Castiglione's association with dark clothing in his text *The Courtier*. Castiglione asserted that the courtier should wear clothing that was grave and somber, and preferably black. His advice, she cautions, was for men only, but Sofonisba has adapted it to suit herself, similar to a "dress for success" suit for a woman is the feminine version of a man's business suit.



Figure 7. Sofonisba Anguissola. *Self-Portrait*, 1554. Oil on panel. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Austria.

Source: Flavio Caroli, *Sofonisba Anguissola e le sue Sorelle*, page 189.

As mentioned when discussing the Campi painting, Sofonisba portrays herself in a realistic or critical manner. She does not embellish her image with false beauty or distracting trappings or props. Her portrait is functional, meaningful, and distinctive, all deliberately fashioned to promote her constructed identity as artist and virgin daughter. Her portraits of others, such as Campi, Queen Isabella, the Infantas, or others, are all depicted in a much more flattering style, replete with luxurious fabrics, jewelry, symbolic props, and meaningful backgrounds. The purpose of her presentation of herself in such a manner could be read as overtly modest, or false. Since this is a common practice for her to present herself as serious, dedicated to her craft and not trapped by the more domestic and feminine arena of hearth and home. Her self-fashioning reminds the viewer that she is a serious artist, and not a hobbyist, playing at painting in between children.

Sofonisba's deliberately constructed reputation and demeanor, through her own actions and behavior, as well of those of her father Amilcare, remain constant throughout her life, and as depicted in her works. As mentioned earlier, there is no evidence of discord between Sofonisba and Amilcare, no resentment or dissension between herself and Bernardino Campi, and no conflict during her time at the court of King Philip of Spain. She seems content to remain the dutiful and demure daughter of Amilcare, the devoted pupil of Campi, and the loyal servant to the Spanish royalty. Her character and status are in large part, what enables her to achieve such success with no lack of honor, either for herself or for her family, and she intentionally presents herself in that manner, in both personal action, and visually.

Conclusion

During a time when daughters were expected to aspire to become wives and mothers, when the female qualities of chastity, of obedience, and of silence were prized above all else, and when they were treated as property by their fathers, one exceptional woman stands out from among the masses of dutiful daughters: Sofonisba Anguissola. Her unique position as obedient and dutiful daughter seems that it would contrast with the prestige and fame she achieved by her status as internationally known painter, and as Lady-in-Waiting and court painter to the Queen of Spain. Her father, Amilcare Anguissola, not only allowed, but in fact encouraged her artistic talent, by securing painting tutors and by establishing financial contacts all throughout Italy.

With no evidence of discord between them, this situation directly contrasts with the social norms of the times for women in which fathers made the decisions for their daughters in regards to marriage, or a life in the convent. Amilcare allows Sofonisba to remain unmarried and works to promote her talent and her career in an arena dominated by males. Amilcare's efforts coupled with Sofonisba's talent, and their joint creation and maintenance of her chaste and demure reputation, created an unusual set of circumstances in which Sofonisba flourished.

This relationship between Amilcare and Sofonisba was symbiotic, and neither father nor daughter seemed to be dissatisfied with the outcome. Sofonisba was encouraged to pursue her artistic interests, and Amilcare's financial situation and social

status benefited from Sofonisba's commissions and from her appointment at the Spanish Court. Daughters of artists would follow in her footsteps, but Sofonisba's position was unique, as she was the daughter of a businessman, and not an artist or tradesman. As the oldest daughter of six sisters, it befell to her to teach them not domestic chores, but artistic skills, which was highly unusual. Her choice of portraiture as subject matter, as well as her chaste reputation, and serious and demure self portraits, helped to maintain a constructed, although genuine, identity which enabled her to pursue her painting throughout her life.

Her education, artistic training, and promotion by her father created a precedent for female artists to follow in later years. The prestige in which she was held by humanist thinkers such as Giorgio Vasari, by courtiers who met her, by other artists such as Michelangelo, and by the King of Spain himself, is unmatched by any other woman of her time.

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Appendices

Appendix A Timeline

1494	<i>Birth of Amilcare Anguissola</i> <i>Birth of Bianca Ponzone</i>
1531-33	<i>Marriage of Amilcare and Bianca</i>
1532-35	<i>Birth of Sofonisba</i>
1535	<i>Birth of Elena</i>
1536-38	<i>Birth of Lucia</i>
1539-41	<i>Birth of Minerva</i>
1542-44	<i>Birth of Europa</i>
1545-46	<i>Birth of Anna Maria</i>
1546	<i>Sofonisba and Elena study with Bernardino Campi</i>
1548	<i>Visit by Prince Philip to Cremona</i>
1549	<i>Campi leaves for Milan, Sofonisba and Elena study with Bernardino Gatti</i>
1551	<i>Birth of Asdrubale, Elena enters the convent</i>
1554	<i>Sofonisba leaves for Rome</i>
1554/55	<i>Sofonisba gives self-portrait to Pope Julius III</i>
1557, 58	<i>Letters from Amilcare to Michelangelo</i>
1558	<i>Sofonisba leaves for Milan, meets the Duke of Alba</i>
1559	<i>Letters between Amilcare and King Philip, Sofonisba leaves for Spain</i>
1561	<i>Sofonisba writes to the Pope</i>
1561	<i>Sofonisba writes to Bernardino Campi</i>
1565	<i>Death of Lucia</i>
1566	<i>Death of Queen Isabel</i>
1566	<i>Vasari visits the Anguissola home</i>
1568	<i>Vasari mentions Sofonisba in his Vite</i>
1569-71	<i>Negotiations for Sofonisba's dowry</i>
1570	<i>King Philip marries Queen Anne</i>
1570/71	<i>Sofonisba marries Don Fabrizio de Moncada</i>
1571	<i>Newlywed couple travels to Cremona and Mantua</i>
1573	<i>Death of Amilcare Anguissola</i>

- 1579 *Death of Don Fabrizio, letters from Sofonisba to the Grand Duke
Francesco of Tuscany*
- 1580 *Sofonisba marries Orazio Lomellino*
- 1583 *Letter to King Philip*
- 1589 *Death of Bianca Ponzone Anguissola*
- 1598 *Death of King Philip*
- 1623 *Death of Asdrubale Anguissola*
- 1624 *Van Dyck visits Sofonisba*
- 1625 *Death of Sofonisba*