

NATURALISTS, CONNOISSEURS AND CLASSICISTS:
COLLECTING AND PATRONAGE AS FEMALE PRACTICE IN BRITAIN,
1715-1825

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Dedication

For my family

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis reevaluates the role that women played in the collection and patronage of natural history, fine arts and antiquities in the long eighteenth century. While most scholarship that addresses early modern collecting and patronage operates within an androcentric framework, this project fills a historiographical gap by focusing its analyses on the experiences, activities, contributions, and achievements of female figures.

Primary documentation provides evidence of a highly sophisticated, invested and functional network of enthusiastic and experienced female collectors and patrons who participated in activities that were at once parallel to that of their male peers and yet retained a distinctly feminine character. Influenced by prevailing intellectual movements and aesthetic trends, women throughout the period studied, accumulated, and commissioned items of scientific, artistic, and antiquarian value. Their meaningful engagement with naturalists, explorers, artists, statesmen, and colleagues is at the center of this study which situates female collectors and patrons within a wider socio-cultural context and confirms the broader historical significance of their work. In this way, this thesis may be understood as a restoration of women to their central place in the history of collecting and patronage and as a more complete historicization of the corresponding culture between the years 1715 and 1825.

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