

## Queenship in Motion: Queen Christina of Sweden and the Embodiment of Social Protocol

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At the end of November 1655, the papal legate in Bologna, Cardinal Giovanni Girolamo Lomellino, wrote a letter in which he described the receptions held for the Queen of Sweden on her journey to Rome. Last night, he writes, there were displays of fireworks and then a ball with ladies and gentlemen, however “Her Majesty remained seated the whole time under the baldachin, without dancing.”<sup>1</sup> A few weeks later the apostolic nuncio, Archbishop Annibale Bentivoglio, who was part of the welcome delegation sent out from Rome, records his first impressions of the young Swedish queen. He writes about her that “she is in constant motion.”<sup>2</sup>

These two contemporary observations about Christina, Queen of Sweden (1626-1689),<sup>3</sup> summarise well both a starting point and basic conundrum for my research. In Swedish dance history, Christina holds pride of place as the monarch during whose reign dance began to truly flourish. Whereas the kings who came before and after her were mostly engaged in constant warfare, Christina had vivid cultural interests and ambitions. During her reign the first French dancing master, Antoine de Beaulieu, was employed at the Swedish court along with musicians and artists to design theatrical machinery, sets and costumes.<sup>4</sup> Similar to the practice of other European courts, court ballets were performed throughout Christina’s reign to mark important events and help disperse political policy. For example, ballets were performed in 1645 to mark the beginning of Christina’s sovereign reign (*Le Monde Reioivi*), in 1649 to herald the signing of the peace treaty of Westphalia (*La Naissance de la Paix*), and in 1651 to celebrate Christina’s coronation the

year before (*Le Parnasse Triumphant*).<sup>5</sup> However in 1654, only 28 years old and a mere four years after her coronation, Christina voluntarily abdicated the throne and left Sweden for good. After a period of travel, during which she converted to Catholicism, in 1655 Christina arrived in Rome, where she would eventually settle for life.

Encouraged by our deeply missed Barbara Sparti, I set out to investigate for my doctoral dissertation what I assumed would be Christina’s continued patronage of dance in Rome.<sup>6</sup> Emerging from the archives quite empty handed as far as dance was concerned, however, the observation that Christina did not dance at all during the ball *en route* to Rome appeared to be true for her post-abdication life as such. On the other hand, when the papal nuncio Bentivoglio described Christina as being “in constant motion,” he actually appears to have meant this in a literal sense. Those encountering her consistently comment on the active interest she took in all aspects of her own performance of social and ceremonial protocol. And, although silent on any actual dancing on Christina’s part, the source material concerning her residency in Rome is filled with observations and commentaries about how Christina moved in public space - and what effects her movements had.

Bentivoglio continued his letter by giving his overall impression of Christina: she appears, he writes, “truly royal.”<sup>7</sup> It is significant that this link between movement and persona is made. In this period, appearance and identity were closely interconnected and social status something that needed to be staged in order to be effective. The royal and aristocratic body arguably was always a performed and

performing body; and dance together with social and ceremonial protocol were part of a larger spectrum of embodied performance integral to realizing and negotiating social identity. Thus while Christina may no longer have utilized the medium of staged dancing while in Rome, I suggest that she turned instead to one of dance's "sister arts," the period's wonderfully rich embodied and performative practice of social and ceremonial protocol.

As is spelled out clearly in her abdication agreement, Christina abdicated the Swedish throne but not her royal status and she never intended to continue to live other than as a queen. However, while her title as such was never in question, what the concrete meaning and relevance of her new role as queen without a country would be, had to be worked out. While still a ruling queen, the court ballet as a medium within which the relationships between monarch, courtiers and realm could be articulated had served Christina well; but now her position and her challenges were different. Christina chose to settle in Rome in part so that she would not have to live as the subject of another secular ruler, but only have to pay homage to that sovereign to which all Catholic monarchs bow, the pope. When Christina first arrived in the Eternal City she was only expected to stay a shorter period as a distinguished visitor, but as she decided to settle in Rome, Christina was faced with the task of creating a more permanent position for herself. She chose to insert herself not within the structure of the secular aristocratic courts in the city, but rather as a part of the *Corte di Roma*, the thoroughly ceremonial Roman Court where the pope acted as king with the cardinals as princes.<sup>8</sup> What Christina managed to do was to eventually set herself up as *Regina di Roma*, Queen of Rome, a female role informally, but effectively, complementing that of the pope within this courtly structure and wielding considerable social and cultural capital.<sup>9</sup> This role or function even survived past Christina, to be later filled by other foreign queens living in Rome during the eighteenth century.<sup>10</sup>

Now, Christina arrived in Rome a 29-year old woman from a Protestant country which had

no clout or pre-existing infrastructure in Rome, she lacked the supporting structure of an organized court, and was in possession only of limited economic means. So how did she manage to assume such position? This is naturally a question with more than one answer, but I will venture to say that movement played an integral part. Again, to the early modern mind movement and social identity were closely interconnected and expected to accurately reflect each other, the body's exterior an expression of its interior nature and qualities. Such readiness to collapse appearance with identity meant that what was enacted had the potential to become significantly real. Thus in social interactions, movement acts were carefully enacted and monitored as not just representations of status but performative acts that negotiated the currency and influence of social rank. This close correlation between movement and social identity can be observed in the protocol of the Roman Court, where "power relations played out through bodily interaction," as Sarah R. Cohen has similarly observed regarding the French court.<sup>11</sup>

Talking about the *Corte di Roma*, a contemporary writer observed that "at other courts one wears always the same face, but this is not the case in Rome where the roles change in every moment."<sup>12</sup> While this may have been a slight exaggeration, it was true that the Roman Court was characterised by an unusual degree of social mobility. The social arena of Rome was frequently rearranged with the election of each new pope, the regular promotion of new cardinals, and so on.<sup>13</sup> It would thus be fair to describe Rome as a city also "in constant motion."

The recurrent need for especially new cardinals to set up a court of their own meant that a considerable number of manuals were produced, which were directed at or written by holders of the office of *Maestro di Camera*, responsible for the ceremonial concerning the cardinal's own person.<sup>14</sup> These manuals sometimes run quite long, for as a consequence of the unusually dynamic and shifting social scene in Rome, a very detailed and intricately nuanced repertoire of outwards signs and demonstrations of status developed.

The social malleability of Rome meant that those in power felt the need to constantly reassert their positions through public demonstrations of status, while those on the rise used such demonstrations to bolster social ambitions. Contemporary sources use an active language to describe these demonstrations, for example they do not say that Cardinal so and so was seen driving through Rome, but rather that he made himself be seen, or appear. I think this captures something significant about the way that social status was achieved and negotiated: through strategic acts of movement, that required training and embodied skills.

There is no evidence to suggest that even while performing in court ballets back in Sweden Christina was an excellent dancer *en par* with someone like Louis XIV. However she does appear to have had a keen eye for spatial and corporeal relationships, and a sort of bodily aptitude and ability to improvise. Such kinetic skills could be displayed in and through dance; but also in entering a room, moving through the city, or attending a religious function. Exchanging court ballet as the stage or medium of her royal performances for the protocol of the Roman court, Christina quickly became known as someone who worked this system to its full potential.

The manuals of the *Maestri di Camera* are wonderful sources to work with, and I have in part tried to approach them from a practitioner's point of view. What is interesting to me is to think about what it actually entailed to live - to move - in this universe. I think what is sometimes forgotten in consideration of ceremonies is the level of skill required of participants to navigate through them. Regardless of how well an event may have been planned and even rehearsed, its realisation called on participants to make decisions in real time and to know how to act when faced with different scenarios. Such readiness to adapt to sometimes unpredictable and changing circumstances translates into a demand for participants to be in possession of an extensive and quite refined vocabulary of

movement that they could readily and skilfully employ. In my understanding, rather than a set choreography, the performance of social protocol is better compared to a kind of structured improvisation with certain given parameters or rules that need to be negotiated as you move.

Drawing on these manuals, I will point out some small aspects of what it entailed to move in seventeenth-century Rome for Christina and her contemporaries. Although not organized in that manner, part of the content of the manuals may be put into categories that provide a point of contact with dance and comportment manuals from the same period, addressing for example how to position yourself, how to move through space, and how to stage social interactions.

### **How to position yourself**

A number of prints were produced that depict Christina's first official appearance in Rome, her entrance procession on 23 December, 1655.<sup>15</sup> Procession prints illustrate well that the meaning of a body cannot be gleaned by consideration of that body in isolation, but only by its relationship to other bodies and to space. Looking only at Christina does not reveal her prominent role; but her position within the procession does. Position must be understood as a dynamic concept; as in the procession it is always moving and shifting and being irrevocably tied to other positions, one cannot change without the others also changing. The meaning of the body, thus, is not reduced to its static appearance.

In Christina studies, there is a long tradition of using her portraiture as basis for interpretation and to focus quite narrowly on one aspect of the body's many registers of performance: its external appearance. And because Christina often chose to present herself, for example through how she dressed, in ways that were unusual and unexpected for a woman - let alone a queen - this has greatly influenced how she has been understood. The topic of Christina's "anomalous" body has sometimes overshadowed other aspects of her person, and downplayed her social prominence in Rome.<sup>16</sup> What has been largely

overlooked in Christina studies are the kinetic qualities of the body: the impact of the body as it moves in space and interacts with other bodies. Yet when recording Christina's presence in Rome, what her contemporaries most often chose to convey as meaningful was not the appearance of the individual body, but the corporeal relationships and spatial configurations that bodies enact. The *figuring* of the body, in other words, is given prominence over its *figure*. In both a symbolic and practical sense, it takes considerable skill to assume and maintain one's position within a constantly moving structure. The frequent conflicts over protocol that arose in Rome were likely as often the result of mistakes being made as of premeditated breaks with protocol. It is worth noticing that the power of performance was such that mistakes might necessitate a repeat performance: the negative effects of misperformed acts of movement could not be erased unless "written over" by another performance.<sup>17</sup>

In April of 1669 Christina attended a canonisation ceremony in St Peter's Basilica. Afterwards, the *Avvisi di Roma*, news pamphlets, reported: "Sunday morning [the Queen of Sweden] participated in the canonisation of San Pietro [d'Alcantara] and Santa [Maria] Maddalena [de Pazzi], and during the act of incensation, in imitation of His Holiness she did not want to rise, although the masters of ceremonies requested it [...] it is certainly true that in seeing such improper behaviour, there were those who daringly said: There is the Pope, and there 'la Papessa'."<sup>18</sup> While later reframed as a mistake on Christina's part (to keep it from being repeated), as is clear from eyewitness reports Christina had actually refused to rise as the ceremonial prescribed, but had instead contrived to be incensed seated. This occasion illustrates well how live performance is imbued both with an element of risk - mistakes can be made - but also with an inherent instability in that it enables for improvisation and going off script.<sup>19</sup>

The characterisation of Christina as being "in constant motion" appears also a way of conveying that she often took an unusual degree of freedom and initiative in her

performances; referencing, perhaps, the royal prerogative to direct events. Yet such performances were not always successful. Pierre Rameau wrote that "what is called a position, is no more than a just proportion,"<sup>20</sup> and manuals insist repeatedly on the importance of maintaining an appropriate and well-proportioned relationship between the body, its movements and its roles. Although Christina was allowed to remain seated, the position she staged for herself was *not* considered in "just proportion" to her current standing. As one of the Roman manuals state: "if the difference between personages is great, so is the difference in ceremony".<sup>21</sup> As the *Avvisi* alluded to, the only other person allowed to sit for the incensation was the pope himself and in imitating his position Christina was seen to imply - perhaps - that there was no difference between them.

### How to move in space

Christina appears to actually have been more successful in her performances when she operated *within* the conventions of protocol. As Kellom Tomlinson observes, the shape of the dancing space must be taken into consideration when moving,<sup>22</sup> and in a similar way Christina increasingly over time adapted her performances to the specific space of Rome. In Rome, particularly religious practices functioned as pulls to stimulate and direct movement and in her later years, Christina often took to making the traditional pilgrimage of visiting the four main basilicas<sup>23</sup> which enabled her to move through large parts of the city, often accompanied by a large entourage. In the procession prints, we recognize the serpentine or "S-figure" as a figure that enabled maximum coverage of space as well as the all-important visibility. We also clearly see how processional movement engages meaningful spaces of the city. The enactment of specific trajectories within the city was a privileged way of manifesting your presence (as indeed was the enactment of choreographic trajectories in the ballroom). This period perceived an immediate connection between being seen, and establishing your presence; for example it was only after staging a public entrance that

you were considered officially present in Rome.

Also similar to ballroom practice, urban movement was organised based on rank and precedence. There evolved a particularly complex protocol concerning carriages, that involved rules for who had to stop their carriage for whom, who gave the order to stop and start the carriage, whether you stepped out of the carriage to greet someone or not, who then drove on first, and so on. One manual advises its cardinal reader to attempt in any way possible to “escape” if spotting Christina’s carriage since she consistently refused to stop for anyone, while demanding that everyone else stop for her.<sup>24</sup> Social status spurred and directed movement, recalling the common motif of court ballets where the monarch acted as a generative force that effectively “gave” movement to his courtiers. We see here also the correlation between effort and status: the one with lesser status is always the one who does more work. On arriving in Rome it was remarked that Christina tended to move more than expected for example by walking places instead of driving. When towards the end of her life she took to riding in her carriage more often this likely made her status easier to interpret for her contemporaries.

### **Interactions with others**

Encounters of various kinds, be it between bodies, or bodies and spaces, carried particular symbolic importance. The official visit to someone’s palace took pride of place and tend to receive the most detailed instructions. The proper staging of the reception of visitors necessitated taking into account a great number of variables including where to receive the visitor; how far he or she was to be accompanied and by whom; what chairs were to be used; at what angle the door should be opened; and so on. For each different combination of host and guest small but meaningful details had to be adjusted.<sup>25</sup> Movement instructions for these visits are generally given in the precise number of steps to be taken; or alternately in spatial terms such as to receive someone “slightly beyond

the middle of the room.” This required meticulous timing in order to arrive in the appropriate position without anyone having to stop and wait. There were also elements of theatricality such as the instruction to take one step and then pretend to want to take another. Clearly performance of this protocol required quite sophisticated movement skills. The importance of all these small nuances to be clearly discernible also speaks to the ability of performers to render movement with clarity, and of observers to perceive and interpret movement.

Encounters, as a kind of *dance à deux*, were embodied dialogues where participants could take turn leading or directing the gravitational pull between them. An eyewitness report recalls how Christina, encountering the pope in his sedan chair, had placed her hand on one of the sidebars of the chair, giving the impression that she wanted to help carry it and thereby causing the pope to step out and instead walk with Christina.<sup>26</sup> This is what I mean by her apparent ability to take in the situation at hand and adapt her own performance, culling from an available repertoire of courtesies in order to work situations to her advantage. Social protocol was one of the means most readily available to Christina while in Rome. Lacking funds to manifest her position in the city through for example building projects, she instead carefully crafted her own embodied presence.

In Christina historiography, her residency in Rome has long been described as a period of gradual decline.<sup>27</sup> The assumption has been that because her political influence decreased, she became a less important personage in the city. My research rather show her to have reached her highest degree of social prominence and standing during the last decade of her life; which makes perfect sense when considering social status as an ongoing performance requiring skill and training, the mastery of which evolves over time. The artfulness of Christina’s queenship also received a suitable framing in her Roman palace, the palazzo Riario, where visitors on their way to the audience chamber passed through a gallery of the Muses, flanked by statues of Terpsichore and her sisters.

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## End Notes

1 Archivio Segreto Vaticano (ASV), Segr. Stato Legaz. Bologna 27. All translations from the original Italian are my own.

2 ASV, Segr. Stato Germania 156.

3 Two recent biographies of Christina in Swedish are Peter Englund, *Silvermasken - en kort biografi över drottning Kristina* (Stockholm: Albert Bonniers förlag, 2006) and Marie-Louise Rodén, *Drottning Christina, en biografi* (Stockholm: Prisma, 2008). English biographies of Christina include Georgina Masson, *Queen Christina* (London: Cardinal, 1968), and Sven Stolpe, *Christina of Sweden* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1966).

4 Antoine de Beaulieu was engaged at the Swedish court in 1636 and died in 1663. For a recent article about other artists active in Sweden, see Stefano Fogelberg Rota, "Representations of power: the role of Nicolas Vallari in Queen Christina's Ballets and Processions," *Musique Images Instruments* 15 (2015) 63-89.

5 For literature on court ballet during Christina's reign, see for example Gunilla Dahlberg, "The theatre around Queen Christina," *Renaissance Studies*, XXIII/2 (2009): 161-185; Stefano Fogelberg Rota, "L'introduzione del balletto di corte francese in Svezia," *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome - Italie et Méditerranée modernes et contemporaines*, 125-1 (2013): 2-30; Lars Gustafsson, "Amor et Mars vaincus: Allégorie politique des ballets de cour de l'époque de la Reine Christine," Magnus Von Platen, ed., *Queen Christina of Sweden. Documents and Studies*, Nationalmusei Skriftserie 12, *Analecta Reginensia I* (Stockholm: Nationalmuseum, 1966), 87-99; Stefano Fogelberg Rota and Maria Schildt, "L'Amour constant et Le Ballet de Stockholm: livret et musique pour la représentation d'un ballet de cour durant le règne de la Reine Christine," *Dix-septième siècle* 261 (2013/14): 723-751.

6 Camilla Kandare, *Figuring a Queen: Queen Christina of Sweden and the Embodiment of Sovereignty*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Riverside (2009).

7 ASV, Segr. Stato Germania 156.

8 Christina was for example often included in diplomatic dispatches and other relazioni describing the Roman Court and introducing its key players.

9 See for example Marina Caffiero, "Sovrane nella Roma dei papi. Cerimoniali femminili, ruoli politici e modelli religiosi," *I linguaggi del potere nell'età barocca: donne e sfera pubblica* (Rome: Viella, 2011), 97-123. The title "Regina di Roma" however was not used during Christina's lifetime, but she was usually referred to as "Regina di Svezia" or simply "La Regina".

10 Caffiero's article discusses, among others, Maria Clementina Sobieska (1702-1735) and Maria Clotilde of Savoy (1843-1911).

11 Sarah R. Cohen, *Art, Dance and the Body in French Culture of the Ancien Régime* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000).

12 Gregorio Leti, *Il Livello Politico, o sia La Giusta Bilancia, nella quale si pesano tutte le Massime di Roma & attioni de' Cardinali Viventi*, 1678.

13 See for example Laurie Nussdorfer, *Civic politics in the Rome of Urban VIII* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992).

14 See for example Patricia Waddy, *Seventeenth-Century Roman Palaces: Use and Art of the Plan* (London: The MIT Press, 1990).

15 For a catalogue of these prints, see Per Bjurström, *Feast and Theatre in Queen Christina's Rome*, Nationalmusei Skriftserie 14, *Analecta Reginensia III* (Stockholm: Nationalmuseum, 1966).

16 Examples of scholarship focusing on Christina's body as an anomaly include Elis Essen-Möller, *Drottning Christina: en människostudie ur läkaresynpunkt* (Lund: C.W.K. Gleerups förlag, 1937), and Kjell Lekeby, *Kung Kristina - drottningen som ville byta kön* (Stockholm: Vertigo förlag, 2000). Similar views are repeated in recent biographies including Veronica Buckley, *Christina Queen of Sweden: The Restless Life of a European Eccentric* (London and New York: Fourth Estate, 2004). For a more nuanced view on the topic of Christina's embodied self-presentation, see for example Eva Borgström, "Drottning Kristina och hermafroditens tankefigur," Eva Löfquist ed., *Varför grävde man upp drottning Kristina?* (Göteborg: Institutionen för kvinnovetenskap, 1997), and Kandare 2009.

17 See for example the case of the papal audience given to the prince of Eggenberg in 1638, discussed in Peter Rietbergen, *Power and Religion in Baroque Rome: Barberini Cultural Policies*, Brill's Studies in Intellectual History, vol 135 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2006); and Maria Antonietta Visceglia, *La città rituale: Roma e le sue cerimonie in età moderna* (Rome: Viella, 2002).

18 ASV, Segr. Stato Avvisi 39.

19 For a fuller discussion of this occasion, see Camilla Kandare, "CorpoReality: Queen Christina of Sweden and the Embodiment of Sovereignty," Peter Gillgren and Mårten Snickare, ed., *Performativity and Performance in Baroque Rome* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012) 47-63.

20 In John Weaver's translation into English of Pierre Rameau's 1725 *Le Maître à danser*. *The Dancing Master: or, the Art of Dancing explained* (1728) 6.

21 Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (BAV), Vat. lat 12475.

22 Kellom Tomlinson, *The Art of Dancing* (1735). Chapter IV: "Of the Dancing-Room".

23 San Pietro in Vaticano, San Giovanni in Laterano, Santa Maria Maggiore, and San Paolo fuori le Mura.

24 Archivio di Stato di Roma (ASR), Camerale II-23, b.1, "Memoriale delli Cerimonie di Corte" (1685).

25 For a beautiful illustration of this, see the chart drawn by one Maestro di Camera and reproduced in Martin Olin, "Diplomatic Performances and the Applied Arts in Seventeenth-Century Europe," Peter Gillgren and Mårten Snickare, ed., *Performativity and Performance in Baroque Rome* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012) 32.

26 ASR, Cartari-Febei 77.

27 As for example Marie-Louise Rodén has pointed out, see Rodén 2008.

