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11. The Material Culture of Female Youth in Bologna, 1550–1600

Michele Nicole Robinson

Abstract

Examining the youth of women from both ‘middling sort’ and patrician families living in Bologna between 1550 and 1600, this study considers the role of domestic material culture in the upbringing and education of girls and young women, tracing how their relationships with objects and images developed and shifted over the early stages of life. Bringing together evidence from literary and archival sources as well as artefacts and images in museum collections today, this essay demonstrates that household objects were important and practical teaching tools as well as symbolic of a young woman’s knowledge, age, and social status. Additionally, girls and young women could use these same objects to attempt to alter or determine their own lives and futures.

Keywords: material culture; domestic interior; early modern Bologna; education; housework; youth

In early modern Italy, parents did not see their children as miniature adults, and indeed recognized various stages between childhood and adulthood. Shaped by gender and social status, the future roles that their offspring would play were, however, established early on and appropriate training and social education began from a young age. Some girls, especially from patrician families, were expected to become nuns, though most headed toward marriage. This essay considers young women from ‘middling sort’ and patrician families living in Bologna between 1550 and 1600 who were destined for marriage. Of particular interest are the objects that could be found in these young women’s domestic environments and the ways they were employed to help prepare them for wife- and motherhood. As we will

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see, the same objects that supported learning and were put to practical use within the home could also be symbolic, marking transitions through the life course and announcing social status. Thus, early modern women had deep and multifaceted relationships with domestic material culture that began and developed in childhood and youth.

In early modern Italy, marriage was a pivotal event in a young woman's life. It often marked the point at which she left her family home for that of her husband, and was a key moment for the circulation and ritual exchange of objects. In order to marry, brides of all social backgrounds needed a dowry, which was usually composed of a cash portion as well as a trousseau, or *corredo*. In Bologna, depending on her family's wealth and social status, a bride's trousseau included objects ranging from clothing to books, cooking tools to jewellery, and beds to paintings.¹ These items were intended for a woman's use over the course of her marriage and were considered to be hers under the roof of her marital home. At the same time, however, she was also charged with caring for and preserving the objects in her husband's household.² Consequently, women had complex and significant relationships with domestic objects and spaces, which scholars have begun to explore in recent years.³ Much less attention, however, has been paid to the early phases of the lifecycle during which these relationships began; by attending to the material culture of female youth, this essay begins to fill this gap in our knowledge.⁴

Turning to Bologna, a city where women played unusually prominent and public roles, adds a further dimension to our understanding of early modern female youth. In the sixteenth century, as part of the Papal States, Bologna was a city second in importance only to Rome and a natural stopping point on journeys from the south of the peninsula to the north and beyond. Thus, the city was frequently host to aristocrats and dignitaries, and Bolognese noblewomen often played key and visible parts in the social events that celebrated these visits.⁵ Women also made notable contributions to Bologna's artistic life. For instance, Lavinia Fontana (1552–1614) and Elisabetta Sirani (1638–1665) were both successful professional painters, and Properzia de'

1 On Bolognese dowries and trousseaux see, for instance Carboni, 'Economics of Marriage', 371–87, and Sorbelli, *Il corredo*.

2 Ajmar, 'Toys for Girls', 87–89 and Klapisch-Zuber, *Women, Family and Ritual*, 216–17.

3 A few examples include: Ajmar-Wollheim and Dennis, *At Home*; Campbell, 'Prophets, Saints, and Matriarchs'; Klapisch-Zuber, *Women, Family and Ritual*, 310–29; Musacchio, *Art and Ritual*; and Musacchio, *Art, Marriage, and Family*.

4 Recent studies include: Ajmar, 'Toys for Girls'; Evangelisti, 'Learning from Home'; and Brown, 'Children and Education'.

5 Murphy, *Lavinia Fontana*, 87.

Rossi (c. 1490–1530), a sculptor, was the only woman that Giorgio Vasari discussed at length in his *Lives of the Painters, Sculptors and Architects* (1550). Finally, Bologna was a forerunner in the foundation of specialized institutions that supported orphaned girls and young women. For example, the conservatory of Santa Maria del Baraccano cared for orphans from respectable, and usually artisan, families who had fallen on hard times.⁶

Women thus contributed to Bolognese social, cultural, and commercial life in various ways depending on their social class. What many of them had in common, though, were their roles as wives and mothers for which they learned a range of skills from early in life. Also shared across social classes was the employment of domestic material culture to teach these skills, though the form, material, and value of objects could range vastly between humble and wealthy households. The employment of objects as teaching tools, and the inclusion of many of these same practical but also symbolic objects in bridal trousseaux, highlights the significance of material culture over the female life course. The study of women's youth through the lens of material culture therefore extends our understanding of experiences that are otherwise elusive.

To recover the material culture available to girls and young women, and to imagine how objects served in their domestic education, this essay draws on various primary sources. The analysis of physical objects can, to some extent, reveal how and by whom they were used, though relatively few from the early modern period survive today. Therefore, we turn also to contemporary images that depict domestic spaces and objects for evidence about the material culture of the home and the ways in which inhabitants interacted with it. In addition, notarial records documenting a variety of exchanges and transfers often describe objects and help us place them in domestic settings. Household inventories, for example, were sometimes drawn up after the death of a property owner and can offer detailed lists of domestic goods. There were also inventories of brides' trousseaux, which not only reveal the kinds of objects that young women possessed and brought into their new homes, but can also suggest their education and training prior to marriage.

Besides these primary sources, this essay also draws on sixteenth-century conduct books and household treatises, mostly written by highly educated men to represent and encourage ideal behaviour. Inexpensive and extremely popular, these texts covered many subjects, though most important here are

6 The conservatory, founded in 1528, had rigid criteria for entry. Ciammitti, 'Fanciulle', 461–68; Terpstra, *Abandoned Children*, 66.

those concerning family life and childrearing.⁷ For instance, Silvio Antoniano's *On the Christian Upbringing of Children* (1584) and Giovanni Leonardi's *Institution of a Christian Family* (1591) offered advice on governing a family and raising children.⁸ Others, such as Ludovico Dolce's *Dialogue on the Instruction of Women* (1545), specifically addressed the rearing and educating of girls.⁹ These authors advised parents, including patricians, to have their daughters practise domestic tasks for several reasons: to learn the skills they would need later as wives and mothers; to keep them out of the trouble bred by idleness; and, especially for humbler families, to contribute to the household economy.¹⁰ Writers also offered advice on making learning necessary skills fun (and thus more effective), for instance by using song for the memorization of prayers and providing miniature household tools as playthings.¹¹

Household treatises were prescriptive rather than descriptive of early modern practices. Yet by reading these texts alongside contemporary objects, images, and archival documents we can begin to see some of the ways in which young women were educated for wife- and motherhood. This essay will demonstrate that, as a central component of this preparation, the material culture of the home also assisted with and signalled the transition from childhood to youth to adulthood. As girls grew into young women of marriageable age, their relationships with domestic objects became increasingly complex. Although there was much that young women had to learn before they were married, only a few components of female education can be considered within the scope of this essay. The focus here is on elements of female education most often discussed by pedagogues and moralists of the day alongside objects that were both related to these activities and commonly found within late sixteenth-century Bolognese homes. It must be noted that many of the literary sources used here offer a view of female experience from the perspective of male writers; however, when considered carefully, and alongside other written and physical evidence, instances of female agency can be uncovered, as we will see.

7 Grendler, *Schooling*, 112–18.

8 Antoniano's work was written at the behest of Carlo Borromeo (1538–1584), Archbishop of Milan, and first published in Verona with many reprints. Leonardi was the founder of Lucca's Clerks Regular of the Mother of God, with his treatise published in Rome in 1591 and again in 1673. On these and similar texts, see Logan, 'Counter-Reformation Theories'.

9 Dolce's text, *Dialogo della institutione delle donne* (1545), is a translation and reworking of Juan Luis Vives' *De institutione feminae Christianae* (1524), dedicated to Queen Catherine of Aragon. See Ajmar, 'Women as Exemplars', 187–91.

10 Ajmar-Wollheim, 'Geography', 84.

11 Dolce, *Dialogo*, 10r–11v.

According to the authors of household treatises, the most crucial knowledge that early modern women needed, beginning even from infancy, was religious. Indeed, all children – male and female, rich and poor – needed to learn, understand, and follow the tenets of the Christian faith.¹² Although children might receive a religious education outside of the home, for most girls school was not accessible.¹³ It was therefore generally within domestic space and with female members of the household that they learned to be good Christians, and, for those addressed within the scope of this essay, good Catholics in particular. Objects, and especially images, were central to religious education and practice. Long considered by churchmen and educators as ‘books for everyone’, sacred images offered an easy and even pleasurable way of introducing and explaining key religious figures, stories, and concepts.¹⁴ These same images were also used in domestic devotional practices, and parents were encouraged to have children carefully observe and imitate the ways in which they greeted, prayed before, and treated with reverence representations of holy figures.¹⁵ In addition to imitating adults’ words and actions, children were encouraged to interact with devotional images, for example, offering to them ‘all manner of childish things’ (*alcune cotali cosarelle puerili*), as Antoniano advised (52b).¹⁶ As girls grew into young women and developed more personal relationships with holy figures, the elements of play and imitation in their devotional practices would fade. And, as they built up a foundation of religious knowledge, young women were expected to act as role models and teachers for their younger siblings, helping them learn proper Christian behaviours and actions.¹⁷

This brief summary of the advice from churchmen and moralists cannot be taken to reflect contemporary educational practices with respect to girls and young women. Nevertheless, by the late sixteenth century, inventories show that many Bolognese homes had objects and images to support learning about the Christian faith in the ways prescribed in contemporary treatises. Most notable are the ways in which these objects connect to advice about the importance of the Virgin as an exemplary figure; as Antoniano explains, especially for female children, ‘this highest queen must be proposed as a mirror, and exemplar of humility, and of every virtue’ (*questa altissima regina*

12 Turrini, ‘Riformare al mondo’, 429.

13 Grendler, *Schooling*, 100; Hufton, ‘Istruzione’, 53; and Turrini, ‘Riformare al mondo’, 447.

14 Paleotti, *Discorso*, 106 and 111. Also see Evangelisti, ‘Learning from Home’, 667.

15 Antoniano, *Tre libri*, 52a–b.

16 All translations are my own unless otherwise noted. Grammar and spelling follow the language in the original documents.

17 Antoniano, *Tre libri*, 165a; and *Psalterio per putti principianti*, 14v–15r.

deve esser proposta per specchio, et esemplare di humilità, et d'ogni virtù) (52b). As in other northern Italian cities, the Virgin was the most commonly represented figure in Bolognese households during the sixteenth century.¹⁸ She is noted as the subject of paintings, prints, drawings, sculptures, and reliefs in the inventories considered here, though the artists' names are never given, nor is there much detail about the types of scenes depicted.

These gaps make it impossible to connect entries in inventories with extant images and objects. The frequency with which some early modern image types survive today, however, suggests their original popularity. For example, scenes of the holy family with the sleeping Christ Child were common in northern Italy in this period, and exist in many museum collections today.¹⁹ One of several versions is by the Bolognese painter Lavinia Fontana, and now in the Museum of Fine Arts Boston. The small, trapezoid-shaped painting on panel is set within a richly detailed arc-shaped frame, and shows the Virgin covering the sleeping Christ Child with a blanket.²⁰ An image such as this would have been used to support prayer in the home, but it also has features that would have made it appropriate for teaching young people about the Christian faith, at least according to the advice of moralists. Fontana's painting therefore offers a useful example for unpacking how parents may have put this advice into practice. It features, for instance, the sleeping Christ Child, a sight moralists thought to be pleasing to young viewers, which would draw and hold their interest and attention.²¹ In addition, showing girls images of youthful female saints, as the Virgin is represented in Fontana's painting, was said to inspire them to embrace chastity and other important virtues from early in life.²² Girls were also advised to visit their mother's chamber to watch and listen to the ways in which she engaged with images of the Virgin. By imitating what she heard and saw, a girl would learn not only to pronounce the words to important prayers, but also to interact appropriately with representations of holy figures.²³

As they got older, girls were also encouraged to use devotional images as a path to personal relationships with Christ, the Virgin, and other saints.²⁴ In his *Decor puellarum*, the saintly layman Giovanni di Dio (Juan de Dios) advised

18 On Florence see, for instance, Musacchio, *Art, Marriage, and Family*, 190–228; on Venice, Morse, 'Creating Sacred Space', 154. For examples of images of the Virgin in seventeenth-century Bolognese homes, see Morselli, *Collezionisti e quadre*, 517–20.

19 Murphy, *Lavinia Fontana*, 167–70.

20 The painting is reproduced in full colour and discussed in Murphy, *Lavinia Fontana*, 167–69.

21 Dominici, *Regola*, 34.

22 Dominici, *Regola*, 34.

23 Antoniano, *Tre libri*, 52a–b.

24 Giovanni di Dio, *Decor puellarum*, 44r–v; and Leonardi, *Institutione*, 78.

unmarried young women to decorate domestic altars with embroidery that they had made with their own hands as well as to make clothing and cut work for statues of the Madonna (44r–v). Although Giovanni di Dio wrote in 1471, his suggestions were echoed by post-Tridentine pedagogues. Antoniano, for instance, suggested that floral garlands be offered to the Virgin as a means of inciting devotion and ensuring she remained a ‘special advocate and protector’ (*spetiale avvocata, et protettrice*) for life (52b). While this kind of behaviour would be easier to carry out with a three-dimensional figure, the curved frame around Fontana’s painting could have supported a garland or other similar offerings. At the same time, the image within the frame, where the Virgin prepares to drape a blanket over her son, is comparable to the actions described by Giovanni di Dio, and which a young woman could imitate with textiles from around the house, perhaps using a doll or even a sibling.²⁵

Over time, prayer was to become an increasingly important part of young women’s daily lives. Leonardi, for instance, suggested they ‘occupy themselves in a number of good and virtuous exercises’ (*occupandosi in varii essercitii virtuosi & buoni*) – waking up early in the morning, praying to God, working, taking lessons, and praying yet again (159). Drawing on what they had learned earlier in life through play and observation, young women might use an image like Fontana’s to support their prayer and meditation at home. Thus, an image that was once used to teach a girl about the Virgin and help her develop a relationship with this key figure might over time become a tool for her own prayer and meditation. And, when she was ready for marriage, a young woman might have a devotional image of her own in her trousseau. For example, when Camilla Zucchini, the daughter of a painter, married in 1594, she had in her trousseau ‘two Madonnas: one painted and the other in relief’.²⁶ These images would support devotional practices within her marital home, but could also be employed to teach her future children the fundamentals of the faith.

Alongside devotional images, books were important tools in religious practice and education. Books of hours and psalters were employed not only to help the faithful remember and clearly recite their prayers at the appropriate times of day but also to teach basic reading skills.²⁷ Extant examples of these texts, some of which were intended specifically for use by children, included not only prayers and accompanying images but also the

25 Klapisch-Zuber, *Women, Family and Ritual*, 320–29.

26 ‘I[te]m due Maddone una dipinta l'altra di rilievo’. Archivio di Stato di Bologna (hereafter ASB), *Notarile*, Pietro Zanettini (1555–1605), 1555–1605, 6/2; 15 January 1594, 1r–2v; 2v.

27 Grendler, *Schooling*, 143–46.

letters of the alphabet, common abbreviations, and occasionally numbers. The *Psalterio per putti principianti con la Dottrina aggiunta*, a children's psalter printed in Bologna in 1575, for example, includes on the reverse of the title page the letters of the alphabet and the words of the Sign of the Cross, Our Father, and Hail Mary (iv).²⁸ Using a book like this, a child would first learn their letters, then syllables, words, and phrases from common prayers.²⁹ Consequently, they developed and practised their reading skills while learning their prayers, which was the driving force behind the 'alphabetization' of the masses in the post-Tridentine period.³⁰

Although the Bolognese primer was intended for use in a catechism school, archival documents locate similar texts in contemporary homes.³¹ For example, the post-mortem inventory describing the goods found in the household of Alessandro Vinconti in 1564 includes five 'alphabet books' or primers. Notably, the inventory also provides the names of Vinconti's five minor children: Giulio Cesare, Marc'Antonio, Claudio, Smiralda, and Samaritana.³² Presumably each child, including the two girls, had their own primer, which they used to learn to read and pray.

Girls growing up in this period did not usually attend school, so if they learned to read it was often with their mothers, nurses, or other female figures as teachers.³³ Sixteenth-century treatise writers generally agreed that all girls needed to be able to read, and social class set the level to which they should be educated. For example, in Antoniano's opinion, noble girls should learn to read and write well and have knowledge of basic arithmetic; middle-class girls should be able to read and write a little; and girls from humble families only needed to know how to read prayers (153b).³⁴ In practice, however, female literacy varied greatly both across and within social classes in this period. Many women were illiterate, while others could follow along as printed words were read aloud, often in texts they already knew by heart.³⁵ Some women could read fluently, usually in the vernacular, and a small minority were trained in Latin and other languages.³⁶

28 Discussed and reproduced in Grendler, *Schooling*, 149–51.

29 Grendler, *Schooling*, 142.

30 Evangelisti, 'Learning from Home,' 667; Grendler, *Schooling*, 338–39; and Turrini, 'Riformare al mondo', 425 and 429.

31 Grendler, *Schooling*, 147.

32 ASB, *Notarile*, Giacomo Simoni (1540–1595), filza 7, 1560–1569, 7/18; no. 178, 2 June 1564, 1r–6v; 2v.

33 Grendler, *Schooling*, 96–101 and Niccoli, 'Bambini in preghiera', 276.

34 See also Grendler, *Schooling*, 89.

35 Miglio, 'Leggere e scrivere', 364.

36 See Ajmar, 'Women as Exemplars', 223.

Despite this range of skills, religious books, and particularly books of hours, were often included in Bolognese brides' trousseaux or given as wedding gifts. For instance, when she married Camillo Chiari in 1582, Artemisia Caprara, a Bolognese noblewoman, had in her trousseau a book of hours covered in velvet.³⁷ The costly fabric used to cover this book made it a luxury object available only to the wealthy; however, books of hours, and other religious texts were not limited to those from elite families, as plain, printed versions with few illustrations were relatively affordable.³⁸ This is probably the kind of book that Camilla Guidetti, a household servant, brought to her new husband's home in 1598.³⁹ Although they were of different quality and monetary value, these two texts intimated the brides' piety and indicated their different social statuses. And, as part of their trousseau goods, the books signalled the brides' transition from youth to adulthood. Finally, like devotional images, the texts might later have been used to provide their children with a religious education, of which basic reading skills could be an important part.⁴⁰

As represented in a post-mortem inventory of 1569, the home of Alberto Zanolini, a Bolognese notary, makes an interesting, though unusual example of young women's access to books and learning. At the time of Zanolini's death, two of his daughters, Smiralda and Pantasilea, were unmarried and living at home. The inventory includes 'three books of saints, printed and used', just the type of reading recommended for young women.⁴¹ In addition, Zanolini's daughters may well have been able to read the Latin works in their father's library, which included a dictionary and a copy of the statutes of Bologna. An entry in the list of debts inherited by Zanolini's sons states:

Smiralda and Pantasilea, sisters of Camillo and Bartolomeo and daughters of Signore Alberto, claim to have owed to each of them, as part of their inheritance, dowries as much as was given to Madonna Orsina, their sister, which was 2400 [*lire*] in cash and 800 [*lire*] in trousseau goods, and this they say to be clear in the laws and statutes of Bologna.⁴²

37 ASB, *Archivio Caprara* (Signora Artemisia Caprara); no. 89, 11 February 1582, 1r–3v; 3v.

38 Grendler, 'Form and Function', 467–69.

39 ASB, *Notarile*, Zanettini, 9 January 1598, 1r–2v; 2r.

40 Grendler, 'Form and Function', 467, and Grendler, *Schooling*, 353.

41 'Tre libri de santi tutti stampati e usi'. ASB, *Notarile*, Simoni, no. 35, 12 November 1569, 1r–8v; 5r.

42 ASB, *Notarile*, Simoni, no. 35, 6r: 'Item m^a Smiralda e Pantasilea sorelle deli detti Sr Camillo e Bart^o figliole del detto gia Sr Alberto si pretendeno haver à [illegible] dotate in detta heredita di tanto qua'to è stata la sopta m^a Ursina lor sorella per ciascheduna scriano lire doe milla e

Thus it appears that the Zanolini sisters used their learning and the material resources available to them in the home to try to advance their marriages.

This example demonstrates that young women were not simply passive participants in domestic training, but could use their education and the material culture around them to attempt to shape their own futures. Distrust of female agency was perhaps why moralists and treatise writers urged that young women's literacy be kept to a minimum. As the conservative Antoniano advised, a father 'should be content with his daughter knowing how to recite the Office of the Virgin and reading the lives of the saints and spiritual books' (*però il buon padre di famiglia si contenti che la sua figliuola sappia dir l'offitio della Santissima Vergine, & leggere vite de' Santi, & alcun libro spirituale*), using the rest of her time to attend to household chores (154a).

Attending to domestic tasks was seen as a means not only of teaching young women necessary skills, but also of keeping them busy and out of trouble. Therefore, authors of conduct manuals advised even elite parents to have their daughters participate in housework.⁴³ For instance, Ludovico Dolce advised that girls learn 'how to adorn a chamber, make a bed, ensure that all the family's goods are arranged with order and in their places', as well as 'how to cook and prepare food' (14v). Acknowledging that some noblewomen may 'scoff and mock' at the thought of their daughters working in the kitchen, he argued that this way things would be done with more order, cleanliness, and care, and at the same time less expense (14v–15r).⁴⁴ To encourage participation in this kind of work, Dolce suggested that parents provide their daughters with miniature household tools. He explained that through these objects girls would learn 'with pleasure' the name and purpose of the implements they would later use as young women and adults (10r–11v).

Although Dolce's work is prescriptive, there is evidence that some Bolognese parents provided their daughters with miniature household objects. The 1574 inventory of the goods in the home of the artisan Giovanni Matteo Fendenti, for example, includes among kitchenware 'a very small

quantocento de denar è ottocento lire de apparati et di questo dicono essere chiare nele legi e statui di Bolog^a. On the statutes, see also 5r–v.

43 Ajmar-Wollheim, 'Geography', 84.

44 Dolce: '& vorrei appresso, che non solo questa fanciulla s'addestrasse nelle facende particolari della casa (che molte ne sono) si come adornare una camera, acconciare un letto, far che tutte le masseritie famigliari siano divise con ordine & a luoghi loro, in modo, che paia, che tutta la casa da ogni parte goda, & sia piena d'allegria: ma etiandio della cucina, imparando il modo di cucinare & di ordinar le vivande [...] Ben so io, che alcune delicate Madonne si faranno beffe & mi scherniranno'. See also Ajmar-Wollheim, 'Housework'.

Figure 11.1 Toy Jug made in Pesaro, Italy, c. 1520–1540

children's pot'.⁴⁵ This object may have been similar to tiny jugs and pots found in museum collections today, such as those now in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. The jug in Figure 11.1, for example, is only four centimetres tall and made of quite durable material, which would have made it suitable for small, clumsy hands.⁴⁶ The 'very small children's pot' may have been given to Fendenti's daughter for use in imaginative play or in imitation of the actions she saw other female members of the household performing. As she developed greater skill and was able to take on more demanding tasks, perhaps the tiny pot was replaced with larger, more functional items, such as the 'old, medium-sized pot' also found in the Fendenti household.

When a girl had grown into a young woman and was ready for marriage, she might be given her own tools for cooking and cleaning. Elisabetta Pino, from an artisan family, for example, had in her trousseau a pot, kettle, brazier, pan, bed warmer, and other items needed to help her run a household when she married Pompilio Benamati, a locksmith, in 1598.⁴⁷ These were practical

45 'Una caldarina piccola da putti'. ASB, *Notarile*, Aristotele Sigurani (1551–1599), 1571–1599, 7/20 and 6/1; 23 October 1574, 44v–45r; 45r.

46 This item was recovered from a Jewish cemetery in Damascus, but made in Pesaro c. 1520–40. Ajmar, 'Toys for Girls', 87–89.

47 ASB, *Notarile*, Zanettini, 25 November 1598, 1r–v; 1r.

tools suited to the domestic tasks expected of an artisan's spouse; they also represented the knowledge and skill that Elisabetta had developed and her readiness to apply these as a wife. Just as the replacement of a miniature pot with a full-sized version might be a marker of the transition from childhood to youth, so the trousseau items related to running a household marked the bride's transition from youth to adulthood.

In contrast to young women from artisan and more humble backgrounds, those from wealthy Bolognese families did not usually have tools for cooking or cleaning in their trousseaux. They and their mothers might have 'scoffed' at the idea of working in the kitchen, and instead elite young women learned to oversee and manage this kind of labour, which was often performed by servants and slaves.⁴⁸ Social status also shaped the ways in which young women participated in various forms of domestic textile work, including weaving, spinning, and sewing. Many moralists criticized noblewomen's apparent distaste for these activities. For instance, as Antoniano explained, rather than 'distain for the needle and spindle [...] [young women should] rejoice at dressing with their own hands, their fathers and brothers' (*hanno à sdegnarsi dell'aco, & del fuso [...] rallegriinsi di vestire con le mani loro i padri & i fratelli*) (165a), as did Cassandra Ricasoli, noted in Megan Moran's essay in this volume. Even if they did not rejoice at the prospect, elite young women were certainly witness to, if not working at, these tasks.

The inventories considered here show that many Bolognese households featured tools for working with textiles. Notable were looms and equipment for weaving, even when the heads of these households were not employed as weavers, tailors, or merchants of silk or wool. When practised as a principal craft (and so by men), the production of textiles took place in a workshop rather than within living space. Therefore, the presence of equipment such as looms in kitchens, bedchambers, and other domestic spaces suggests that in these instances weaving was performed by female members of the household.⁴⁹ For example, the residence of Master Simone Tamburini featured both a loom and a warper for silk, with which his daughters, Cassandra and Domicella, may have learned to weave.⁵⁰ Similarly, Alberto Zanolini had in his home not only Latin books but also 'two looms for silk made of poplar' and 'a pair of warpers for canvas, [both] old and made of wood'.⁵¹

48 Sarti, *Europe at Home*, 160.

49 Ajmar-Wollheim, 'Housework', 157 and Brown, 'A Woman's Place'.

50 ASB, *Notarile*, Zanettini, 15 March 1589, 1r–2v; 1v.

51 'Due para de Tellari da seda de fioppa novi' and 'uno par de ordidori da tella de legno vecchii'. ASB, *Notarile*, Simoni, no. 35, 5r.

Zanolini's daughters perhaps oversaw the production of cloth by servants or learned to weave themselves using this equipment, which, notably, was kept next to a cradle. Finally, when Count Filippo Manzoli died in 1560, he had in his *palazzo* 'a loom, a warper [and] two pairs of combs for hemp'.⁵² Manzoli's daughter, whose name is lost today, probably did not weave fabric herself, but may have learned to oversee the production of textiles by other women.⁵³ She and other young women from elite families were more likely to have been taught to work with a needle and thread than a loom.⁵⁴

Social class determined how a young woman might participate in domestic textile production, though it seems to have had little bearing on how the skills necessary for this kind of work were learned. There is evidence of children working to produce textiles, but there do not seem to have been tools for spinning thread, weaving cloth, or sewing made specifically for child-sized hands.⁵⁵ Although inventories list many spindles, looms, lengths of fabric, spools of thread, and sewing baskets, these are seldom described as being specifically for use by girls or young women, unlike the children's psalter or miniature pot discussed above. This suggests that girls learned to spin thread, weave textiles, and embroider silk using the same tools as their mothers, sisters, or other female members of the household. As seems natural, images of women's textile work imply that skills and knowledge were shared from one generation to the next. The title page to Nicolò Zoppino's book of embroidery patterns, *Convivio delle Belle Donne*, dated to 1531, for instance, shows a group of females in a range of ages at work with textiles, one woman with an infant in her arms.⁵⁶

Perhaps, as we have seen with learning to be good Christians, girls started as somewhat passive observers of spinning, weaving, and sewing and, when they were better able to handle tools, moved on to more active, hands-on learning. As a young woman became more proficient in weaving or sewing, she might be given her own equipment, particularly when she married and left her family home for that of her husband.⁵⁷ For example, when Caterina Tomiati, the daughter of a smith, married Master Giovanni Giacomo Brigadelli in 1589, she had in her trousseau a loom and other equipment

52 'Un paro de tellari[,] un ordiduro[,] dui para de pettini da tela'. ASB, *Notarile*, Francesco Nobili (1558–1560), 1558–60, 6/1; no. 144, 3 February 1560, 1r–16v; 12v.

53 Crescenzi, *Corona della nobiltà*, 529.

54 Ajmar-Wollheim, 'Housework', 157–58.

55 See Ciammitti, 'Fanciulle', 475–81; Hufton, 'Istruzione', 66–73; Caracausi, 'Beaten Children', 99–105. For evidence for child-sized tools in later periods, see Beaudry, *Findings*, 111–12.

56 Ajmar, 'Women as Exemplars', 213–14.

57 This was also the case in Florence. See Musacchio, *Art, Marriage, and Family*, 180–89.

for silk weaving.⁵⁸ Caterina likely learned this craft before her marriage, and her output would have been sold to supplement her family's income.⁵⁹

Caterina Tomiati also brought a sewing cushion to her marital home, and items related to sewing were more often included in Bolognese brides' trousseaux than equipment for spinning and weaving.⁶⁰ For example, in addition to her two images of the Madonna, Camilla Zucchini, the painter's daughter, possessed three sewing baskets along with various sorts of thread.⁶¹ Brides from elite families, too, had tools for sewing and needlework, which were often of expensive materials. The noblewoman Artemisia Caprara had three sewing baskets in her trousseau in addition to her richly decorated book of hours. The baskets contained sewing cushions of satin and damask trimmed with gold, a silver thimble, knives, shears, and tools for making cord.⁶² Similarly, the inventory of the trousseau belonging to Margherita de' Serli, who married into a lesser branch of the prominent Gozzadini family in 1587, lists silk and damask sewing cushions, two pairs of shears, a silver thimble, and over 200 *braccia* (128 metres) of fabric for sewing undershirts, handkerchiefs, and other items.⁶³

These examples suggest that although not all young women learned to spin or weave, most would have been proficient with needle and thread by the time they married.⁶⁴ As girls gained skill and knowledge, their tools, whether a loom or a needle, did not necessarily change. Yet the quality of their handiwork surely did, and likewise the purposes of their output. As we have seen, girls might make garlands of flowers, cloths for altars, or clothing for the Madonna with their own hands. As they got older and closer to marriageable age, young women began to make and embellish textiles for their trousseaux.⁶⁵ Artemisia Caprara and Margherita de' Serli, both from wealthy families, had numerous pieces of embroidered clothing and accessories, including undergarments, sleeves, head coverings, and handkerchiefs. Although professional embroiderers likely did much of this work, the sewing tools in their trousseaux suggest that they themselves

58 ASB, *Notarile*, Zanettini, 19 September 1589, 1r–2v; 1r.

59 Brown, 'A Woman's Place', 215.

60 ASB, *Notarile*, Zanettini, 19 September 1589, 1v. This seems to have also been true in Florence. See Musacchio, *Art, Marriage, and Family*, 185.

61 ASB, *Notarile*, Zanettini, 15 January 1594, 2v.

62 ASB, *Archivio Caprara*, no. 89, 11 February 1582, 3r.

63 ASB, *Notarile*, Tommaso Passarotti (1552–1592), vol. 1, 1586–1587, 6/1; 5 May 1587, 224r–228r; 227r–v.

64 Ajmar-Wollheim, 'Housework', 162; Beaudry, *Findings*, 155; and Parker, *Subversive Stitch*, 73.

65 Ajmar-Wollheim, 'Housework', 158 and Parker, *Subversive Stitch*, 87.

Figure 11.2 Saint Nicholas Dowering a Maiden (detail), from Nicolò Zoppino, *Esemplario di lavori*, 1529



were capable with needle and thread.⁶⁶ Brides from more humble families also had textiles featuring needlework, which they were more likely to have produced with their own hands.⁶⁷ For instance, Camilla Zucchini's trousseau had two pairs of embroidered pillowcases, one of which was 'not yet formed'; perhaps she would finish this project after she was married.⁶⁸

The ability of young women to weave, sew, or embroider not only enabled them to make and personalize items for their trousseaux, but could also be a means of earning money for a dowry.⁶⁹ The final illustration in Nicolò Zoppino's embroidery pattern book from 1529, reproduced in Figure 11.2, shows Saint Nicolas handing three balls to a young woman, a reference to his providing dowries to three poor but deserving maidens. Aligning himself with Saint Nicolas dowering young women with gold, Zoppino, through

66 Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence*, 118.

67 Parker, *Subversive Stitch*, 70.

68 'Uno paro d'endime nove tutte di maglia lavorate' and 'uno altro paro d'endime di rensa con la maglia lavorate nove non ancora formite'. ASB, *Notarile*, Zanettini, 15 January 1594, 2v.

69 Ciammitti, 'Fanciulle', 492; Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence*, 43; Ricci, 'Donzelle in pericolo'; Rocco, 'Maniera Devota', 85.

his pattern book, was helping to dower young women with needlework skills. These skills not only made them more attractive as potential wives, but could also be put to use by young women in order to earn money for a dowry.⁷⁰ For instance, orphans between the ages of ten and twelve living in the Bolognese conservatory of Santa Maria del Baraccano were set to work weaving and embroidering textiles.⁷¹ This kept the young women busy and out of trouble, but also enabled them to earn a small amount of money for a dowry so they could eventually marry.⁷²

When considered in relation to visual, literary, and archival sources, material culture can reveal some of the experiences that shaped female youth in the early modern period. Domestic objects are particularly valuable as evidence of these experiences; they were part of everyday life and work and, in addition, helped young women learn and hone the skills they would need to fulfil future roles as wives and mothers. As we have seen, domestic objects were not only needed for household tasks and learning, but were also symbolic. Items such as holy images, books, pots, or sewing baskets that were often included in bridal trousseaux might signify a young woman's social status. They would also indicate the skills and knowledge she was bringing to her marriage, and her readiness to apply them as a wife and mother.

The subjects in which a young woman might be educated, such as religion, reading, cooking, and textile work, were intended to be used in the service of the family and household. Training and education complied with ideal female behaviour set out in conduct literature and household treatises; but young women could also use their skills and knowledge for their own purposes. The Zanolini sisters and the orphans of Santa Maria del Baraccano, for instance, drew upon different skill sets in their efforts to ensure or better their futures. Although these and other young women were operating within a context where decisions about their lives were made by others, they could claim a sense of purpose and control through their relationships and interactions with the material culture they encountered within their domestic environments.

70 On the importance of these skills for orphans, see Ciammitti, 'Fanciulle', 477.

71 Ciammitti, 'Fanciulle', 475–81 and Rocco, 'Maniera Devota', 80. Compare Franco's essay in this volume (Chapter 10).

72 Carmignani, *Tessuti, ricami e merletti*, 166; Ciammitti, 'Fanciulle', 492; and Rocco, 'Maniera Devota', 79.

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