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Ownership of Paintings in Seventeenth-Century Metz**



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TOWARDS THE COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE POPULAR MARKET FOR ART: THE OWNERSHIP OF PAINTINGS IN SEVENTEENTH- CENTURY METZ*

Although art historians have long been interested in the nature of the art market and its influence upon the character of the art produced in different times and places, they have generally contented themselves with unsystematic and imprecise descriptions of the market and its organization. A hoary commonplace, for instance, asserts that a mass market existed for paintings in the seventeenth-century Dutch republic, and that this shaped many of the basic characteristics of Golden Age Dutch art. Until recently, however, statements about how widespread painting ownership actually was in seventeenth-century Holland rested on little more than the observations of a handful of foreign travellers. No attempt was made to quantify the scope of demand and to establish precisely how the structure of the market differed from that prevailing in neighbouring lands.¹

In a similar fashion, while socio-cultural historians, especially in France, have for some time regularly noted the sorts of paintings which inventories after death reveal to have hung in private homes, the visual culture of ordinary Europeans in the early modern period has been explored far less thoroughly than has book ownership and the world of print culture. Large French theses on a town or the members of a specific social group often include pages on the paintings

* This article was written in the stimulating environment of the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton. I would like to thank an exceptionally able undergraduate research assistant, Lisa Gamble, for her help in compiling and analysing the data presented here; Theodore K. Rabb and J. H. Elliott, for valuable comments on early drafts of this essay; and Jeffrey Muller, frequent conversations with whom bolstered the confidence and dispelled some of the ignorance of an interloper in art history.

¹ See, for instance, Arnold Hauser, *The Social History of Art*, 2 vols. (London, 1951), i, pp. 461-73; K. H. D. Haley, *The Dutch in the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1972), pp. 130-2; J. L. Price, *Culture and Society in the Dutch Republic during the 17th Century* (New York, 1974), ch. 6, esp. p. 134; Madlyn Millner Kahr, *Dutch Painting in the Seventeenth Century* (New York, 1978), pp. 9-10.

owned by the people in question, but the analysis is typically cursory.² A few more detailed studies have been devoted exclusively to paintings in private hands, but these show little concern for establishing such basic statistical facts necessary for defining the size of the art market as the percentage of people owning paintings and the number of canvases per household.³ They are meagre things in comparison with the distinguished examinations of *livre et société*.⁴

It is against this historiographic background that the recent work of the Yale economist John Michael Montias assumes its full importance. In his book, *Artists and Artisans in Delft*, and in several subsequent articles, Montias has explored in great detail the wealth, status and training of the members of Delft's painters' guild, the precise extent of painting ownership in the city, and some ways in which collectors' preferences varied according to status and religion.⁵ Reviewers of *Artists and Artisans* have criticized the book for drawing only the narrowest conclusions from the prodigious quantities of

² Maurice Garden, *Lyon et les lyonnais au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris, 1970), p. 471; Pierre Deyon, *Amiens capitale provinciale: étude sur la société urbaine au XVII^e siècle* (Paris and The Hague, 1967), pp. 284-6; Bartolomé Bennassar, *Valladolid au siècle d'or: une ville de Castille et sa campagne au XVI^e siècle* (Paris and The Hague, 1967), pp. 507-9; Roland Mousnier, *Recherches sur la stratification sociale à Paris aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles: l'échantillon de 1634, 1635, 1636* (Paris, 1976), ch. 6; Philippe Rosset, "Les conseillers au Châtelet de Paris à la fin du XVII^e siècle: étude d'histoire sociale", *Mémoires de la fédération des sociétés historiques et archéologiques de Paris et de l'Ile-de-France*, xxxiii-xxiv (1972-3), pp. 187-9.

³ Georges Wildenstein, "Le goût pour la peinture dans le cercle de la bourgeoisie parisienne autour de 1700", *Gazette des beaux-arts*, no. 1052 (1956), pp. 113-94; Georges Wildenstein, *Le goût pour la peinture dans la bourgeoisie parisienne entre 1550 et 1610 d'après les inventaires après décès conservés au minutier central des Archives Nationales* (Paris, 1962); Jean Chatelus, "Thèmes picturaux dans les appartements de marchands et artisans parisiens au XVIII^e siècle", *XVIII^e siècle*, vi (1974), pp. 309-24.

⁴ Henri-Jean Martin, *Livre, pouvoirs et société à Paris au XVII^e siècle, 1598-1701*, 2 vols. (Geneva, 1969); Jean Quéniart, *Culture et société urbaines dans la France de l'ouest au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris, 1978). Quéniart explains in his "L'utilisation des inventaires en histoire socio-culturelle", in Bernard Vogler (ed.), *Les actes notariés, source de l'histoire sociale XVI^e-XIX^e siècles: actes du Colloque de Strasbourg, mars 1978* (Strasbourg, 1979), p. 244, that in western France paintings are merely identified by their proportions, if at all, in probate inventories. For one important recent attempt to use visual materials to explore popular culture, see R. W. Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk: Protestant Propaganda for the German Reformation* (Cambridge, 1981).

⁵ John Michael Montias, *Artists and Artisans in Delft: A Socio-Economic Study of the Seventeenth Century* (Princeton, 1982); John Michael Montias, "Reflections on Historical Materialism, Economic Theory and the History of Art in the Context of Renaissance and 17th Century Painting", *Jl. Cultural Econ.*, v (1981), pp. 19-38; John Michael Montias, "Collectors' Preferences in 17th Century Delft: Evidence from Inventories". I would like to thank J. M. Montias for sending me a copy of this unpublished paper.

archival material which it presents.⁶ Nonetheless, the unquestionable merit of Montias's work is that it moves the discussion of both the structure of the art market and the nature of collectors' preferences in early modern Europe to a new level of precision and empirical detail. As another reviewer has observed, the full implications of Montias's data will only emerge when comparable information about other countries and other time periods becomes available.⁷

The goal of this article is to provide such information on the ownership of paintings in a provincial city in seventeenth-century France and, in so doing, to suggest a few of the possible uses and implications of such information for both the social history of art and socio-cultural history more broadly. The town of Metz might initially appear a peculiar choice for such an investigation. Although the duchy of Lorraine is justly celebrated for its distinguished school of painting in the seventeenth century, all of the great Lorraine artists from Bellange to de La Tour worked in Nancy or Lunéville, in the shadow of the ducal court. So devoid of noteworthy painters was Metz that Guillaume Janneau's encyclopaedic *La peinture française au XVII^e siècle*, one of whose goals appears to be to mention every French painter known to art history, does not indicate so much as one artist active in this outpost of French control within Lorraine.⁸ And not only was Metz a far cry from the Delft of Jan Vermeer, Pieter de Hooch and Carel Fabritius as a cradle of famous artists; while the extent to which the ownership of paintings was diffused among all social classes in the "bourgeois" Netherlands is well known, it is not generally recognized just how common it was for ordinary French town-dwellers as well to own paintings at this time. Yet Metz's archives contain a series of unusually precise probate inventories, and these note the existence of paintings in the possession of the majority of people whose belongings were recorded. Furthermore Metz was a religiously divided city with a large Protestant minority; its study consequently permits comparison of patterns of painting ownership between the members of the two different confessions which co-existed, if not always peacefully, within seventeenth-century France. As we shall see, exploration of the contents of Metz's inventories can establish the size of the private market for art in a provincial town of seventeenth-century France and permit comparisons with the Dutch

⁶ Theodore K. Rabb, "The Historian and the Art Historian Revisited", *Jl. Interdisciplinary Hist.*, xiv (1984), pp. 648-50.

⁷ I. H. Montijn in *History*, lxviii (1983), p. 326.

⁸ Guillaume Janneau, *La peinture française au XVII^e siècle* (Geneva, 1965).

situation; it can reveal certain patterns of Catholic and Protestant religiosity; and it can suggest certain insights about attitudes towards both the family and political authorities.

The sample on which this study is based is composed of 270 inventories from the years 1645-57 and 1667-72.⁹ One hundred and four of these inventories belong to Protestants, who can be identified as such from the registers of baptisms, marriages and burials of the local Reformed Church.¹⁰ The sample contains people of all social levels from the First President of Metz's *parlement* to a crippled old woman living off the charity of her neighbours, making comparisons between different social strata possible as well. As is typical of such studies, however, the sample is skewed towards the upper levels of society, since inventories were more frequently commissioned by families of high status.

Several deficiencies of the inventories must be noted. Only a small fraction of them attach valuations to the objects they list, making it impossible to ascertain the precise wealth of most of the individuals in question, and thus to correlate painting ownership with wealth. Metz's inventories after death are also somewhat unusual in that they generally categorize objects according to the nature of the things in question (wooden furniture, clothing and the like), rather than according to the rooms in which they were found. They consequently make it impossible to offer any confident generalizations about the placement of different sorts of paintings in different locations around the house, although one or two inventories which do follow the layout of the house suggest that a logic often governed this. This is clearest in the case of Claude de Bretagne, marquis de Loisy, the First President of the *parlement*. The central room of his house declared his political and corporate loyalties, displaying portraits of the king, the First President and his father, and twenty-four of the *conseillers* in the *parlement* — as well as a portrait of St. François de Sales and a genre scene depicting a fruitseller. "La chambre de madame" was decorated more intimately with a Venus, several landscapes including one pastoral scene with shepherds and shepherdesses, and paintings of Joseph and "Ste. Marie Egyptienne". Meanwhile the marquis's son, himself also a president of the *parlement*, had paintings of St. John the Baptist, "une charité nue", and the Maréchal de la Ferté,

⁹ These are conserved in the Archives départementales de la Moselle, Metz (hereafter A.D.M.), B 3351-7 and 3362-5. I utilized only those inventories concerning inhabitants of the city of Metz.

¹⁰ Archives communales de Metz, GG 236-53.

governor of the French-controlled parts of Lorraine during the Thirty Years War, in his bedroom.¹¹

Metz may not have been known as an artistic centre, but the city contained a small group of painters nonetheless. Three appear on a 1637 census in which occupations are listed for eleven of the city's fourteen parishes — this at a time when Metz's total population stood at 15,023 in the wake of a killing plague.¹² Fortunately an inventory has survived for one of these artists, Henry Ribon, making it possible to gain an idea of how at least one of these painters organized his business.¹³ Ribon is the classic example of the obscure painter. None of his works is known to have survived, and all that the standard French biographical dictionary of artists states about him is that he was born and died in Nancy, which may well be wrong.¹⁴ Although Ribon unquestionably had certain links to court circles at Nancy — his first wife's uncle was a servant of the duke of Lorraine — his business at the time of his wife's death in 1648 was oriented entirely towards production for the urban market, both in Metz and elsewhere. His *boutique* contained twenty-one large oil paintings, which could have been either his own work or that of other artists, depicting such diverse subjects as the Crucifixion, the Virgin, a hunting scene, "des mangeurs de fromage", Louis XIII and "Madame la Mareschale de Schombert". Several unidentified works in tempera, some picture frames, and thirty-nine volumes of portraits and engravings, which probably provided the models from which Ribon worked, were also scattered around the shop. No outstanding debts indicate any work which Ribon had done on commission.¹⁵ By contrast, he told the notary that he had sent nine of his paintings to Paris and eight to Thionville to be sold by merchants in those cities. He was an artist who painted pictures for an anonymous urban market, rather than on commission.

¹¹ A.D.M., B 3364, inv. of 7 Mar. 1670.

¹² Archives communales de Metz, DD 13. Just two years earlier Metz had contained over 19,000 inhabitants, and the population would recover to the same level by 1684: Jean Rigault, "La population de Metz au XVII^e siècle: quelques problèmes de démographie", *Annales de l'Est*, 5th ser., ii (1951), pp. 308-10.

¹³ A.D.M., B 3353, inv. of 8 Apr. 1648.

¹⁴ E. Bénézit, *Dictionnaire critique et documentaire des peintres, sculpteurs, dessinateurs et graveurs*, 10 vols. (Paris, 1976), viii, p. 727. Bénézit's entry appears to follow Albert Jacquot, "Essai de répertoire des artistes lorrains peintres, peintres verriers, faïenciers, émailleurs", *Réunion des sociétés des beaux-arts des départements*, xxiii (1899), pp. 485-6. The 1637 Metz census lists "Henry Ribon peintre" as being "de la ville".

¹⁵ Cf. "Inventaires du logis de Simon Vouet dans la Grande Galerie du Louvre, 1639 et 1640", ed. Gaston Brière, *Mémoires de la fédération des sociétés historiques et archéologiques de Paris et de l'Ile-de-France*, iii (1951), pp. 117-72.

That a substantial market existed for paintings such as those which Ribon produced is clear from the inventories. Among the possessions of Chrestienne Viviot, the widow of a tinsmith and a Catholic, we find paintings of the Crucifixion, the Descent from the Cross, and Louis XIII, as well as single-figure images of Christ, the Virgin and St. Catherine. Abraham Baudouin, a Protestant *marchand tanneur*, owned Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, Christ Entering Jerusalem, the Resurrection of Lazarus, the Passion, the Miracle of the Loaves and the Fishes, and a painted depiction of the Ten Commandments.¹⁶ In all, paintings appear in 66 per cent of the inventories examined. Given the weighting of the sample towards the upper ranks of society, this means that paintings hung in approximately 58 per cent of all the city's households.¹⁷ The mean number of paintings per household (those without paintings as well as those with them) was 5.5.

By contrast, roughly two-thirds of Delft's inhabitants owned canvases in this same period, and the average household there contained eleven, indicating an overall level of demand for easel paintings to be hung in private residences within the city just over twice that found in Metz.¹⁸ To compare properly the market for ready-made paintings in France and the Netherlands it is necessary to recall that it was relatively common for artworks to hang in peasant households in the United Provinces by the mid-seventeenth century, something that was certainly not the case in France.¹⁹ At the outside this represented a further doubling of the demand for paintings; Holland was 60 per cent rural in 1622, but it seems unlikely that peasants would have owned as many paintings per capita as town-dwellers.²⁰ A comparative perspective thus confirms that the market for art was unusually extensive in the Netherlands, but it also underscores the fact that the difference between France and the Netherlands in the size of the market for paintings to hang in non-aristocratic homes was a matter of degree rather than kind. It is inaccurate to assert, as Haley does,

¹⁶ A.D.M., B 3356, invs. of 16 Mar., 21, 22 Oct. 1655.

¹⁷ This figure was computed by weighting the Protestant results against the 1684 "Extrait et estat général des habitants de la ville de Metz qui font profession de la religion Prétenduë Refformée", *Annuaire de la Société d'histoire et d'archéologie de la Lorraine*, iii (1891), pp. 345-86, which includes a full occupational listing.

¹⁸ Montias, *Artists and Artisans in Delft*, p. 220.

¹⁹ Jan de Vries, "Peasant Demand Patterns and Economic Development: Friesland, 1550-1750", in William N. Parker and Eric L. Jones (eds.), *European Peasants and their Markets: Essays in Agrarian Economic History* (Princeton, 1975), p. 222.

²⁰ Jan de Vries, *The Dutch Rural Economy in the Golden Age, 1500-1700* (New Haven, 1974), p. 86.

that outside the Netherlands paintings belonged exclusively to the crown, the nobility and the church.²¹ At the same time the comparison of Metz and Delft confirms the frequently expressed observation that the situation of Dutch artists was a particularly difficult and competitive one. Where Metz had but a handful of painters among its 15,000 inhabitants (recall here that the 1637 census omits occupational listings in three parishes), Delft, with a population of twenty-eight to thirty thousand inhabitants around the same time, housed fifty-eight master painters — and, of course, the church did not offer them the additional source of commissions that it did French artists.²² That many Dutch artists should have failed, or taken up other occupations, is hardly surprising in light of these figures, and one can see how the highly competitive situation of painters in a town such as Delft would have served as a forcing-house for talent and innovation.

The unsystematic character of earlier studies of painting ownership in French towns makes it hard to determine exactly how much the French urban market expanded over time, but some evidence can help place the figures from Metz in better perspective. On the basis of information gathered by Georges Wildenstein, it can be calculated that paintings appear in 46 per cent of Parisian inventories from the years 1556-65 and 54 per cent from the period 1600-10.²³ The 66 per cent figure from Metz thus indicates the continuation of a steady, but hardly revolutionary, expansion of the market during the late sixteenth and first half of the seventeenth centuries. While Wildenstein's exploration of Parisian inventories unfortunately fails to indicate how many paintings are listed in each document, it does suggest that a broadening of the range of paintings in private hands also occurred during this period. In late sixteenth-century Paris privately owned paintings were overwhelmingly religious in character, with portraits forming the only other genre of importance. By the mid-seventeenth century in Metz such other kinds of works as genre scenes, historical paintings, and landscapes formed 32 per cent of the total. After this expansion of the market between 1550 and 1650 the percentage of town-dwellers acquiring easel paintings appears to have levelled off, but the number of works owned per household may have continued to increase, largely as a result of the continued multiplication of non-religious paintings. Canvases appear in "over

²¹ Haley, *Dutch in the Seventeenth Century*, p. 130.

²² Montias, *Artists and Artisans in Delft*, pp. 136, 220.

²³ Figures calculated from Wildenstein, *Goût pour la peinture dans la bourgeoisie parisienne entre 1550 et 1610*.

two-thirds" of all inventories in later eighteenth-century Lyons, with the average number of paintings *and listed engravings* per household standing at 8.2. The percentage of religious paintings among different groups in society was markedly lower than in Metz.²⁴ These figures are partial and must be interpreted with caution. Nonetheless, they suggest overall growth in the demand for paintings on the part of French town-dwellers between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. Further exploration could enable us to understand the exact course and extent of this expansion, the comparative importance of aristocratic and ecclesiastical demand, and thus the precise significance of the urban market for what is unquestionably the central theme of a social history of French art in this period, namely the rise of French painters from a peripheral to a central position within the world of European art.

What sort of paintings did Metz's inhabitants own? Most of the paintings listed in the inventories were in all likelihood works such as those produced by Ribon, for they fall within a restricted range of subjects which appear to have been reproduced with regularity. Only a few were so closely tied to the specific interests or attributes of their owners as to suggest that they must have been specially commissioned. Where the medium is specified, it is usually oil or tempera.²⁵ Most works for which a valuation is provided are appraised at just a few *livres messins* each, about the same as a small piece of wooden furniture and more than most books, although not as much as a folio Bible in good condition. A few more valuable works also appear; one painting of Troy burning owned by the *parlementaire* Louis Maguis was assessed at 60 *livres*. Tellingly, however, no works are attributed to a specific artist, and the descriptions of the paintings are brief and include no observation about their style. Unlike in the Netherlands, a speculative art market in which the authorship of a painting was important for its value and in which even relatively modest public officials could identify the styles of specific masters had not yet developed in Metz in the mid-seventeenth century. Only in the eighteenth century, especially after 1750, do attributions begin to appear with frequency in French inventories.²⁶

²⁴ Garden, *Lyon et les lyonnais*, p. 471.

²⁵ A few works are described as "tableaux en taille douce". These have been eliminated from consideration in all calculations, as they probably represent only the tip of the iceberg of engravings. Many cheap woodcuts and etchings were surely of too little value to be recorded in the inventories.

²⁶ On attributions and comments on style in Delft inventories, see Montias, *Artists and Artisans in Delft*, pp. 230-8. On the appearance of attributions in eighteenth-century

Much of the interest of the paintings listed in the inventories lies in what they can tell us about the religious culture of those who owned them. Surprisingly little difference appears between Metz's Protestants and Catholics when one compares the *number* of paintings owned by the members of each religion. Even though Reformed Protestantism rejected any use of images which bordered too closely on idolatry and although the rise of the French Calvinist movement was accompanied by vigorous outbursts of iconoclasm, paintings hung in almost precisely the same number of Huguenot households in mid-seventeenth-century Metz as in Catholic ones. (The exact figures are 65 and 66 per cent). The median number of paintings owned in both cases is also the same. Metz's Protestants tended to be of slightly higher status than the city's Catholics, and when the two communities are broken down along occupational categories, small differences emerge which suggest a slightly greater propensity to acquire paintings among Catholics than among Protestants of similar status. (See Table 1.) Catholics of similar status also tended to own slightly more paintings, and nine of the ten largest collections belonged to members of the Roman church, with the result that the mean number of pictures owned by Catholic painting-owners was

TABLE 1
PAINTING OWNERSHIP OF SELECTED OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORIES
BY RELIGION IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY METZ*

	Protestants			Catholics		
	Number of cases	% of inventories noting paintings	Mean number of Paintings	Number of cases	% of inventories noting paintings	Mean number of Paintings
Nobles and <i>officiers</i>	10	80	8	16	100	20.5
Learned professions	18	82	9.3	13	77	9.3
Merchants and lesser officials	26	77	6.9	26	88	8.2
Artisans, "bourgeois", labourers and unknown	50	52	4.4	111	55	6

* Sources: Archives départementales de la Moselle, Metz, B 3351-7, 3362-5; Archives communales de Metz, GG 236-53.

(n. 26 cont.)

France, see Wildenstein, "Goût pour la peinture dans la bourgeoisie parisienne, autour de 1700", pp. 135-6, 138; Garden, *Lyon et les lyonnais*, p. 471.

8·9, as opposed to 6·5 for the Huguenots. But these differences were small. If the case of Metz is at all typical, Calvinism may have brought about the collapse of large-scale ecclesiastical commissions in those lands in which it became the dominant religion, but it cut into the private market for works of art far less than one might imagine.

Strong contrasts emerge, however, when one examines the kinds of paintings owned by the members of each confession. Religious paintings were far rarer in Protestant than in Catholic households. As Table 2 shows, they account for 61 per cent of all works owned by members of the Roman church and just 27 per cent of the canvases

TABLE 2
TYPES OF PAINTINGS OWNED BY RELIGION IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY METZ*

	Protestants	Catholics	Total
Religious	66 (27)	357 (61)	423 (51)
Portraits	32 (13)	112 (19)	144 (17)
Historical/Mythological	35 (14)	24 (4)	59 (7)
Genre	40 (16)	45 (8)	85 (10)
Encyclopaedic	49 (20)	13 (2)	62 (7)
Landscape	19 (8)	28 (5)	47 (6)
Still life	3 (1)	9 (2)	12 (1)

* Note and sources: The sources are as given in Table 1. Figures in parentheses denote percentages.

in Reformed hands. The Huguenots also appear to have had a slight reticence about acquiring portraits. In compensation, they purchased many more genre paintings, historical and mythological works, and the sorts of encyclopaedic series such as the Four Seasons, the Five Senses, and the Twelve Months of the Year that were quite popular in the early seventeenth century and had to be classified as a separate category of paintings, since artists variously represented these either as landscape or genre scenes, or as allegorical personifications. Comparison of the Protestant figures with those from Delft reveals that the percentage of religious paintings among Metz's Huguenots was very close to that among Delft's population as a whole (24 per cent). The Dutch, however, owned considerably fewer historical/mythological works (7 per cent) and genre scenes (5 per cent) and were far more partial instead to those classically Dutch genres, landscapes (33 per cent) and still lifes (14 per cent).²⁷

²⁷ Calculated from Montias, *Artists and Artisans in Delft*, Table 8·3, combining figures for the period 1640-69.

TABLE 3
THE MOST POPULAR PAINTING SUBJECTS IN SEVENTEENTH-
CENTURY METZ*

	Number owned by		Total
	Catholics	Protestants	
<i>Religious</i>			
Virgin Mary	60	2	62
Virgin and Child	22	1	23
Virgin with Saints	8	—	8
Annunciation	12	1	13
Saints	77	2	79
Mary Magdalen	24	1	25
Nativity	12	7	19
Holy Family	4	1	5
Christ	15	3	18
Christ and Saints	2	1	3
Life of Christ	15	3	18
Last Supper	4	2	6
Passion scenes	4	1	5
Crucifixion	39	—	39
Descent from the Cross	12	1	13
Entombment and Resurrection	5	—	5
Other New Testament scenes	16	15	31
Susannah	2	5	7
Judith	3	1	4
Other Old Testament scenes	15	18	33
Miscellaneous	6	1	7
<i>Portraits</i>			
Family members	18	4	22
Royalty	14	6	20
Other noteworthy figures	44	11	55
Unidentified people	23	11	34
Dogs	13	—	13
<i>Historical/Mythological</i>			
Roman emperors	15	11	26
Venus	3	—	3
Other	6	24	30
<i>Genre</i>			
A courtesan	6	12	18
Shepherds	7	—	7
Other	32	28	60
<i>Encyclopaedic</i>			
The Four Seasons	10	14	24
The Twelve Months	—	22	22
The Five Senses	3	7	10
The Four Elements	—	5	5
Other	—	1	1
<i>Landscape</i>			
“Un paysage”	27	14	41
City of Geneva	—	2	2
Other	1	3	4
<i>Still life</i>	9	3	12

* Sources: as given in Table 1.

The contrast between Protestant and Catholic taste is even more striking when one examines the specific subjects of the religious paintings owned by members of the two faiths. (See Table 3.) Religious paintings were, of course, far more than decorative objects in this period; they were valued for what they represented. Many devotional writers of the later middle ages recommended the use of images as aids to meditation and prayer, and the same prescriptions were reiterated and spread even more widely by confraternity statutes in the early modern period. Thus the White Penitents of Toulouse were required to pray each evening with a fellow brother of the association "in a suitable place in the house where they will keep a votive image of Our Lord or of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and there, on bended knee, they will make an examination of conscience and, beating themselves, they will humbly ask pardon of God for their sins".²⁸ The four most popular religious subjects in Catholic households in Metz — the Virgin, paintings of saints, the Crucifixion and Deposition, and the Magdalen — were all topics which lent themselves to such devotional uses. The Crucifixion and the Virgin were precisely the sorts of subjects recommended by the Penitents, while the Magdalen became an important symbol of penance in the Catholic art of the seventeenth century, and the votive character of saints' images is obvious. Among the saints, St. Francis was the most frequently encountered figure (thirteen appearances), a reflection of the considerable influence exercised by the Franciscans in seventeenth-century Lorraine.²⁹ He was followed in turn by St. Catherine (twelve appearances) — and by Joseph (six appearances), whose cult was strongly stimulated by the Counter-Reformation. This order of ranking is very different from that found in later sixteenth-century Paris, where St. John and St. Jerome were the most frequently honoured.³⁰

²⁸ Sixten Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative: The Rise of the Dramatic Close-Up in Fifteenth-Century Devotional Painting* (Acta Acad. Aboensis, Human., ser. A, xxxi, no. 2, Åbo, 1965), ch. 1; Marguerite Pecquet, "La Compagnie des Pénitents Blancs de Toulouse", *Annales du Midi*, lxxxiv (1972), p. 218. See also *Les papiers des dévots de Lyon: recueil de textes sur la Compagnie secrète du Saint-Sacrement, ses statuts, ses annales, la liste de ses membres, 1630-1731*, ed. Georges Guigue (Lyon, 1922), p. 49: "Each confrère will keep in a visible place in his house an effigy of the Holy Sacrament in the form of an image or painting, so that his children and domestics may revere it". I would like to thank Philip T. Hoffman for calling these papers to my attention.

²⁹ See here René Taveneaux, "Jacques Callot, témoin de la Réforme catholique", *Le pays lorrain*, xlix (1968), pp. 99-116.

³⁰ Wildenstein, *Goût pour la peinture dans la bourgeoisie parisienne entre 1550 et 1610*, p. 25. One presumes that the St. Catherine in question in Metz was St. Catherine of Alexandria, although the inventories do not provide any more precise identification.

While Metz's Catholics favoured images of devotion and veneration, the city's Huguenots shunned these with remarkable uniformity. Whereas ninety paintings of the Virgin (with or without Child) appear in Catholic hands, along with another twelve paintings of the Annunciation, just four canvases of these topics appear in Protestant households. A similar contrast emerges when one examines paintings of the saints, the Crucifixion and the Magdalen. The contrasting patterns of painting ownership revealed by Table 3 show the strength of Huguenot antipathy towards the veneration of images and the cult of the saints, reinforced by the confessional polarization which occurred during the century following the rise of Protestantism in France and which turned images such as the Crucifix into bitterly contested symbols, ardently embraced by Catholicism and therefore just as bitterly detested by the Huguenots.

"Nevertheless", Calvin had written, "I am not so scrupulous as to consider that one should tolerate no images at all".³¹ Paintings of sacred histories were permissible, and indeed most of the religious paintings owned by the Protestants were illustrations of different biblical episodes — in effect, visual complements to their intense biblical culture. These show clearly the Huguenot identification with the world of the Old Testament; 37 per cent of the Protestant-owned religious paintings were devoted to Old Testament subjects, as opposed to just 6 per cent of the Catholic-owned religious paintings. The rare characteristically Catholic images which do turn up in Protestant inventories usually suggest no serious inclination towards Catholic patterns of religiosity. The exception is the apothecary Pierre Piot, who owned paintings of the Virgin, Mary Magdalen and St. Sebastian along with six other works on religious subjects. More typical is the case of Moyse Richard, whose painting of the Madonna and Child is explicitly described as old; Richard also owned six other canvases recounting episodes from the Old and New Testaments — and a view of Geneva.³² The overall impression gained from the pattern of painting ownership among Metz's Huguenots is of a community remarkably united in its rejection of things papistical.

The sorts of paintings found in private hands in Metz varied not only according to religion, but also to status. As Table 4 shows, not only did noblemen, high royal officials and garrison officers own the largest number of paintings, they also owned the smallest percentage

³¹ John Calvin, *Institution de la religion chrestienne*, ed. Jean-Daniel Benoit, 5 vols. (Paris, 1957-63), i, p. 135 n.

³² A.D.M., B 3357, inv. of 7 Dec. 1657; B 3352, inv. of 15 Dec. 1646.

TABLE 4
 TYPES OF PAINTINGS OWNED BY MEMBERS OF SELECTED OCCUPATIONAL GROUPS IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY
 METZ*

	Religious	Portraits	Historical/ Mythological	Genre	Encyclopaedic	Landscape	Still life
Nobles, <i>officiers</i> and military officers (34 cases)	106 (38)	88 (32)	25 (9)	28 (10)	1 (0)	20 (7)	10 (4)
Learned professions (31 cases)	45 (48)	13 (14)	3 (3)	14 (15)	10 (11)	9 (10)	—
Merchants (38 cases)	52 (54)	4 (4)	15 (16)	16 (17)	5 (5)	3 (3)	1 (1)
Artisans (87 cases)	90 (76)	5 (4)	13 (11)	3 (3)	1 (1)	7 (6)	—

* Note and sources: the sources are as given in Table 1. Figures in parentheses denote percentages.

of religious paintings and were by far the greatest acquirers of portraits. While the percentage of religious works increases regularly as one descends the social scale, this is primarily because the members of the lower orders bought fewer paintings overall. The members of the aristocracy and the learned professions owned more religious paintings per capita than did their humbler neighbours; they simply surrounded these with a greater profusion of other canvases. The strong classical culture of the educated members of the learned professions did not translate into a great penchant for large-scale history paintings recounting episodes from classical mythology or history. Historical and mythological paintings were owned in larger numbers by merchants and members of the aristocracy, although the frequency of such works among the former group is exaggerated by one case of a merchant who owned a set of twelve paintings of “les douze empereurs romains”. Genre scenes, by contrast, appealed to all groups, but seem to have been particularly favoured by merchants and members of the learned professions. Landscapes appealed to all strata and still lifes, a new and a rare genre, were especially favoured by the aristocracy.

Portraits form a particularly revealing group of pictures. Specially commissioned portraits regularly expressed loyalty to individuals or corporate bodies, or reflected the interests and status of their owners. The twenty-four portraits of members of the *parlement* of Metz displayed in the *hôtel* of the court’s First President, Claude de Bretagne, are one example of this. More striking yet, the *grande gallerie* of Jean de Ligniville, comte de Bey, contained “un chasseur assis son chien près de luy”, paintings of two stags, and ten portraits of hunting dogs, each with the dog’s name beneath it. De Ligniville, the reader will hardly be surprised to learn, was the *Grand Veneur* of the duke of Lorraine and the author of a treatise on hounds and the hunt. His *hôtel* also contained a portrait of the count of Vaudémont, a member of the ruling house of Lorraine.³³

Alongside such specially commissioned portraits were numerous paintings of important public figures produced to satisfy a broader demand. Paintings of the king were the most common of these, appearing in seventeen households, or roughly one in sixteen. In the great majority of cases where the inventory indicates the identity of the king displayed, this was Louis XIII or the young Louis XIV. These portraits were thus generally expressions of loyalty to the

³³ A.D.M., B 3364, inv. of 7 Mar. 1670; B 3354, inv. of 18 Oct. 1650; François-Georges Pariset, *Georges de La Tour* (Paris, 1948), p. 351.

reigning monarch, not of attachment to a popular king of the past, admiration for whom could also imply ambivalence towards the man currently seated on the throne. Royal portraits appear in Catholic and Protestant households with roughly equal frequency, and they were owned by people in all social strata. They were, however, most common in the households of officials or military men directly in the royal service. Only one artisan and one merchant in the sample owned such portraits.

One of the consequences of the virtually complete rejection of political history on the part of French historians of the past few generations is that virtually nothing is known even about those points where politics might intersect with the concerns of a historiography which seeks to reconstruct the total historical experience of ordinary people of the past — as, for instance, the question of how strongly ordinary Frenchmen of the *ancien régime* were aware of political events at the centre, felt loyalty towards their king, and participated in a national political culture. We know it was customary during the numerous popular rebellions of the seventeenth century for the *insurgés* to appeal to an idealized figure of the king, but otherwise the history of popular attachment — or indifference — to the crown has hardly begun to be written. For this reason the proper context into which to place the frequency with which royal portraits appear in private homes in Metz is unavailable. It is obvious that such portraits brought a distant monarch closer to his subjects and betokened a degree of attachment to the figure of the king. At the same time, some comparative information suggests that the frequency of such portraits in Metz was anything but exceptional. In eighteenth-century Paris, royal portraits hung in the house of nearly one merchant or artisan in ten, a rather ambiguous contrast that could be attributed either to a growing sense of attachment to the crown over the intervening period or to Parisians' particularly close proximity to the person of the king. In seventeenth-century Delft about one family in four owned a portrait of a member of the House of Orange. In the republican United Provinces, attachment to national heroes was apparently considerably stronger than in monarchical France.³⁴

Portraits of other noteworthy political figures, such as Richelieu, Anne of Austria, the First President de Bretagne, and above all Metz's successive governors, also recur with some frequency, but

³⁴ Chatelus, "Thèmes picturaux dans les appartements de marchands et artisans parisiens", p. 315; Montias, "Collectors' preferences in 17th Century Delft", Tables 1, 2.

these are far more exclusively confined to the houses of military officers or royal officials, among whom they may indicate clientage ties to the figures in question. Since such positions were held predominantly by Catholics, these portraits turn up overwhelmingly in Catholic hands. Huguenot loyalties were meanwhile occasionally expressed by portraits of important Protestant figures. Paintings of Metz's four pastors, of the early Huguenot poet Clément Marot, and of the great ministers Pierre du Moulin and Theodore Beza all appear in Calvinist hands. So too do two views of Geneva, one of which represents the city besieged by the duke of Savoy.

By contrast with the portraits of important public personages, family portraits were still relatively rare, especially in comparison with the massive diffusion they would experience from the end of the century onwards (an interesting reflection of the sentimentalization of the family group made famous by Philippe Ariès — as well, perhaps, as a weakening of religious strictures against vanity).³⁵ Family portraits appear in eleven *messin* households, all belonging to members of the aristocracy or the urban élite, whereas in eighteenth-century Paris these are found by the hundreds among the city's merchants and artisans.³⁶ Most of the portraits in Metz depict either the deceased or members of his or her immediate nuclear family. A few aristocrats, however, displayed portraits of their father or other members of a preceding generation, while the "tableau représentant la généalogie des Le Duchat" found among the possessions of Adam Le Duchat, a *bourgeois*, shows that a concern for lineage could extend to the *haute bourgeoisie* as well.

To recapitulate, paintings may not have hung in the houses of ordinary town-dwellers in seventeenth-century France in as great a profusion as they did in the Low Countries, but works of art were, nonetheless, widely disseminated objects whose investigation, where probate records note their subject-matter with some care, clearly has a great deal to teach not only historians of art and of religion, but students of the family and of political authority as well. The evidence presented here from Metz confirms that the popular market for art was particularly large and particularly competitive in Holland; it also indicates the contours of the market in France and suggests a certain expansion between the later sixteenth century and the middle of the seventeenth. The members of Metz's sizeable Huguenot minority were almost as

³⁵ Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood* (New York, 1962).

³⁶ Chatelus, "Thèmes picturaux dans les appartements de marchands et artisans parisiens", pp. 315-16.

likely as their Catholic neighbours to own paintings, but the sorts of paintings owned by the adherents of each faith revealed the radical dichotomy in religious sensibilities between the two groups in this era of confessional polarization. The paintings Metz's inhabitants owned also reveal a good deal about their attachment to the monarchy and to powerful political patrons and show that town-dwellers below the level of the urban aristocracy were still reticent about displaying portraits of themselves and had not yet begun to honour and to sentimentalize the family group in the way they would increasingly come to do from the end of the century onwards.

This study has been based on a relatively small sample of inventories from one town during a restricted period of time. More ambitious enquiries along similar lines could define still more precisely the evolving contours of the popular market for art during the *ancien régime*. Such studies could be used to reveal changes over time in religious sensibilities, particularly in the attachment to different Catholic saints and devotional practices. They ought, as this article has already tried to suggest, to be an essential element of a still much needed investigation of popular attitudes towards political authority and the person of the king. Along slightly different, but related, lines, statistical exploration of the extent of royal, aristocratic and ecclesiastical patronage, as well as further examination of the pattern of artistic production revealed by the probate inventories of painters both famous and anonymous, could illuminate the precise importance of different forms of economic relationships within the art world and help us to understand just how large the crown, church and aristocracy bulked within this world. Since Philippe Ariès, historians of the family have been aware of the value of iconographic evidence for their subject, yet the rise and transformations of the family portrait have never been properly charted. In short, a great deal more work calls to be done. The statistical investigation of paintings which the researcher cannot even see will never become the dominant mode of art historical research. Nonetheless it offers one valuable means towards the creation of a truly historical art history, free from the distortions introduced by selective survival and judgements of quality, and capable of integration into a democratic history of culture. It also promises to enable us to situate the production of art more precisely in its socio-economic context than previous, more impressionistic, methods have generally allowed. An important field of research beckons historians and art historians alike.