

Chapter 14 Primary Source Activity

Goldsmiths and jewelers were important in Renaissance art (textbook pages 344–348) as nobles, cardinals, and popes filled their palaces with elaborate candlesticks and other objects of gold and silver. Benvenuto Cellini, born in Florence in 1500, was a brilliant craftsman and an adventurer whose hot temper often got him in trouble. In this section from his lively autobiography, Cellini describes a meeting with Francis I, king of France, who patronized many artists. The saltcellar Francis ordered is a famous example of Renaissance art. ♦ *As you read, consider the relationship between artists and their patrons. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

The King Orders a Saltcellar

Being very well satisfied with what he had seen, the King returned to his palace, after bestowing on me too many marks of favour to be here recorded. On the following day he sent for me at his dinner-hour. . . . When I arrived, the King had reached his second course; he began at once to speak to me, saying, with a pleasant cheer, that having now so fine a basin and jug of my workmanship, he wanted an equally handsome saltcellar to match them; and begged me to make a design, and to lose no time about it. I replied: “Your Majesty shall see a model of the sort even sooner than you have commanded; for while I was making the basin, I thought there ought to be a saltcellar to match it; therefore I have already designed one, and if it is your pleasure, I will at once exhibit my conception.”

The King turned with a lively movement of surprise and pleasure to the lords in his company—they were the King of Navarre, the Cardinal of Lorraine, and the Cardinal of Ferrara—exclaiming as he did so: “Upon my word, this is a man to be loved and cherished by every one who knows him.” Then he told me that he would very gladly see my model.

I set off, and returned in a few minutes; for I had only to cross the river, that is, the Seine. I carried with me the wax model which I had made in Rome at the Cardinal of Ferrara’s request. When I appeared again before the King and uncovered my [model], he cried out in astonishment: “This is a hundred times more divine a thing than I had ever dreamed of. What a miracle of a man! He ought never to stop working.” Then he turned to me with a beaming countenance, and told me that he greatly liked the piece, and wished me to execute it in gold.

The Cardinal of Ferrara looked me in the face, and let me understand that he recognized the model as the same which I had made for him in Rome. I replied that I had already told him I should carry it out for one who was worthy of it.

“ . . . This is a hundred times more divine a thing than I had ever dreamed of.”

Source: *The Life of Benvenuto Cellini*, Written by Himself, trans. John Addington Symonds (Heritage Press, n.d.).

Questions to Think About

1. Why did King Francis invite Cellini to the palace?
2. How could Cellini come up with a model so quickly?
3. **Drawing Conclusions** From this scene, what conclusions can you draw about Cellini’s personality? What is his attitude toward the powerful men who support his art?
4. **Activity** In the library or in an encyclopedia, look for illustrations of the work of Renaissance goldsmiths and jewelers such as Cellini. Choose one object and write a paragraph describing it.