

# Christina, Queen of Sweden

**Christina** (Swedish: *Kristina*, Swedish pronunciation: [krɪ²stiːna]; 18 December 1626 – 19 April 1689), a member of the House of Vasa, was Queen of Sweden from 1632 until her abdication in 1654.<sup>[a]</sup> She succeeded her father Gustavus Adolphus upon his death at the Battle of Lützen in 1632, but began ruling the Swedish Empire when she reached the age of eighteen in 1644.<sup>[7]</sup>

The Swedish queen is remembered as one of the most learned women of the 17th century.<sup>[8]</sup> She was fond of books, manuscripts, paintings, and sculptures. With her interest in religion, philosophy, mathematics, and alchemy, she attracted many scientists to Stockholm, wanting the city to become the "Athens of the North". The Peace of Westphalia allowed her to establish an academy or university when and wherever she wanted.<sup>[9]</sup>

In 1644, she began issuing copper in lumps as large as fifteen kilograms to serve as currency.<sup>[b]</sup> Christina's financial extravagance brought the state to the verge of bankruptcy, and the financial difficulties caused public unrest. Christina argued for peace to end the Thirty Years' War and received indemnity. Meanwhile, she caused a scandal when she decided not to marry,<sup>[10]</sup> and when she converted to Catholicism secretly in Brussels and publicly in Innsbruck. The "Minerva of the North" relinquished the throne to her cousin, and settled in Rome.<sup>[11]</sup>

Pope Alexander VII described Christina as "a queen without a realm, a Christian without faith, and a woman without shame."<sup>[10]</sup> Notwithstanding, she played a leading part in the theatrical and musical community and protected many Baroque artists, composers, and musicians.

Being the guest of five consecutive popes,<sup>[12]</sup> and a symbol of the Counter Reformation, Christina is one of the few women buried in the Vatican grotto. Her unconventional lifestyle and

**Christina**



Portrait by Sébastien Bourdon, who exaggerated her eyes.<sup>[1]</sup>

**Queen of Sweden**

<b>Reign</b>	16 November <span>[O.S. 6 November]</span> 1632 – 16 June <span>[O.S. 6 June]</span> 1654
<b>Coronation</b>	20 October 1650
<b>Predecessor</b>	<u>Gustav II Adolf</u>
<b>Successor</b>	<u>Charles X Gustav</u>
<b>Born</b>	8 December <span>[O.S. 8 December]</span> 1626 <div><u>Tre Kronor Castle</u>, <u>Stockholm</u></div>
<b>Died</b>	19 April 1689 (aged 62) <div><u>Rome</u>, <u>Papal States</u></div>
<b>Burial</b>	22 June 1689 <div><u>St. Peter's Basilica</u>, <u>Vatican City</u></div>
<b>Names</b>	<div>Christina Augusta or Christina</div> <div>Alexandra</div>
<b>House</b>	<u>Vasa</u>
<b>Father</b>	<u>Gustav II Adolf of Sweden</u>
<b>Mother</b>	<u>Maria Eleonora of Brandenburg</u>
<b>Religion</b>	<u>Lutheran</u> (1626–1654) <div><u>Catholic</u> (1654–1689)</div>

masculine dressing have been featured in countless novels, plays, operas, and film. In all the biographies about Christina, her gender and cultural identity play an important role.<sup>[13]</sup>

Signature



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## Early life

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Christina was born in the royal castle Tre Kronor on 18 December [O.S. 8 December] 1626. Her parents were the Swedish king Gustavus Adolphus and his German wife, Maria Eleonora. They had already had three children: two daughters (a stillborn princess in 1621, then the first Princess Christina, who was born in 1623 and died the following year) and a stillborn son in May 1625.<sup>[c]</sup>

Excited expectations surrounded Maria Eleonora's fourth pregnancy in 1626. When the baby was born, it was first thought to be a boy as it was "hairy" and screamed "with a strong, hoarse voice."<sup>[14]</sup>

She later wrote in her autobiography that, "Deep embarrassment spread among the women when they discovered their mistake." The king, though, was very happy, stating, "She'll be clever, she has made fools of us all!"<sup>[15]</sup> From most accounts, Gustav Adolf appears to have been closely attached to his daughter, and she appears to have admired him greatly.



Tre Kronor in Stockholm by Govert Dircksz Camphuysen. Most of Sweden's national library and royal archives were destroyed when the castle burned in 1697.

The Crown of Sweden was hereditary in the House of Vasa, but from King Charles IX's time onward (reigned 1604–11), it excluded Vasa princes descended from a deposed brother (Eric XIV of Sweden) and a deposed nephew (Sigismund III of Poland). Gustav Adolf's legitimate younger brothers had died years earlier. The one legitimate female left, his half-sister Catharine, came to be excluded in 1615 when she married a non-Lutheran. So Christina became the undisputed heir presumptive. From Christina's birth, King Gustav Adolph recognized her eligibility even as a female heir, and although called "queen", the official title she held as of her coronation by the Riksdag in February 1633 was king.<sup>[16]</sup>

## Regency

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Portrait of king Gustaf Adolf of Sweden

Before Gustav Adolf left for Germany to defend Protestantism in the Thirty Years' War, he secured his daughter's right to inherit the throne, in case he never returned, and gave orders to Axel Gustafsson Banér,<sup>[11]</sup> his marshal, that Christina should receive an education of the type normally only afforded to boys.<sup>[17]</sup>

Her mother, of the House of Hohenzollern, was a woman of volatile temperament. It is possible she was insane. After the king died on 6 November 1632 on the battlefield, his corpse was brought home in a coffin, with his heart in a separate box. Maria Eleonora ordered that the king should not be buried until she could be buried with him. She also demanded that the coffin be kept open, and went to see it regularly, patting it and taking no notice of the putrefaction. Eventually, the embarrassed chancellor, Axel Oxenstierna, saw no other solution than to have a guard posted at the room to prevent further episodes.<sup>[18]</sup> As a result, he was not buried until 22 June 1634, more than eighteen months later.

In 1634, the Instrument of Government, a new constitution, was introduced by Oxenstierna. The constitution stipulated that the "King" must have a Privy Council, which was headed by Oxenstierna himself.<sup>[19]</sup>

Maria Eleonora had been indifferent to her daughter but now, belatedly, Christina became the center of her mother's attention. Gustav Adolf had decided that in the event of his death, his daughter should be cared for by his half-sister, Catherine of Sweden<sup>[d]</sup> and half-brother Carl Gyllenhielm as regent. This solution did not suit Maria Eleonora, who had her sister-in-law banned from the castle. In 1636, Chancellor Oxenstierna saw no other solution than to exile the widow to Gripsholm castle, while the governing regency council would decide when she was allowed to meet her nine-year-old daughter.<sup>[20]</sup> For the subsequent three years, Christina thrived in the company of her aunt Catherine and her family.

In 1638, after the death of her aunt and foster mother Catherine of Sweden, the Royal Regency Council under Axel Oxenstierna saw the need to appoint a new foster mother to the underage monarch (her mother being exiled), which resulted in a reorganization of the queen's household. In order to prevent the young queen from being dependent upon a single individual and favorite mother figure, the Royal Council decided to split the office of head lady-in-waiting (responsible for the queen's female courtiers) and the office royal governess (or foster-mother) in four, with two women appointed to share each office. Accordingly, Ebba Leijonhufvud and Christina Natt och Dag were appointed to share the position of royal governess and foster mother with the title *Upptuktelse-Förestånderska* ('Castigation Mistress'), while Beata Oxenstierna and Ebba Ryning were appointed to share the position of head lady-in-waiting, all four with the formal rank and title of *Hovmästarinna*.<sup>[21]</sup>



A contemporary portrait of Maria Eleonora, showing the resemblance to her daughter Christina

The Royal Council's method of giving Queen Christina several foster mothers to avoid her forming an attachment to a single person appears to have been effective, as Christina did not mention her foster mothers directly in her memoirs and did not seem to have formed an attachment to any of them; in fact, with only a few exceptions, such as Ebba Sparre, Lady Jane Ruthven and Louise van der Nooth, Christina did not show any interest in any of her female courtiers, and she generally mentions them in her memoirs only to compare herself favorably toward them by referring to herself as more masculine than they.<sup>[21]</sup>

Christina was educated as a royal male would have been. The theologian Johannes Matthiae Gothus became her tutor; he gave her lessons in religion, philosophy, Greek and Latin. Chancellor Oxenstierna taught her politics and discussed Tacitus with her. Oxenstierna wrote proudly of the 14-year-old girl that, "She is not at all like a female" and that she had "a bright intelligence". Christina seemed happy to study ten hours a day. Besides Swedish she learned at least seven other languages: German, Dutch, Danish, French, Italian, Arabic and Hebrew.<sup>[e]</sup>

In 1636–1637, Peter Minuit and Samuel Blommaert negotiated with the government to found New Sweden, the first Swedish colony in the New World. In 1638, Minuit erected Fort Christina in what is now Wilmington, Delaware; the Christina River was also named after her, as well as the Queen Village neighborhood in Center City, Philadelphia.

## Reign

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In 1644, Christina was declared an adult, although the coronation was postponed because of the war with Denmark-Norway. In December 1643, Swedish troops had overrun Holstein and Jutland in the Torstenson War. The Swedes achieved much from their surprise attack, and at the Treaty of Brömsebro Denmark

added the isles of Gotland and Ösel to Christina's domain while Norway lost the districts of Jämtland and Härjedalen to her. Under Christina's rule, Sweden, now virtually controlling the Baltic Sea, had unrestricted access to the North Sea and was no longer encircled by Denmark–Norway.<sup>[22]</sup> In 1649, Louis de Geer founded the Swedish Africa Company and in 1650, Christina hired Hendrik Carloff to improve trade on Gold Coast.<sup>[23]</sup>

In 1649, with the help of her uncle, John Casimir, and her cousins, Christina tried to reduce the influence of Oxenstierna, and she declared John Casimir's son, her cousin Charles Gustav, as her heir presumptive. The following year, Christina resisted demands from the other estates (clergy, burghers, and peasants) in the Riksdag of the Estates for the reduction of the number of noble landholdings that were tax-exempt. She never implemented such a policy.<sup>[24]</sup>



The 14-year-old Christina as queen, painting by Jacob Heinrich Elbfas

## Thirty Years' War



An image of Christina on a 1645 Erfurt 10 ducat coin. Between 1631 and 1648, during the Thirty Years' War, Erfurt was occupied by Swedish forces.<sup>[25][f]</sup>

Her father, Gustavus Adolphus, had come to the aid of the German Protestants in the Thirty Years' War, to diminish Catholic influence and gain economic influence in the German states around the Baltic Sea. He won several battles, and in 1631, Cardinal Richelieu decided France would support Sweden with money and soldiers. But Gustavus was killed in 1632.

Count Oxenstierna became regent and continued Sweden's part in the war. Defeated in the Battle of Nördlingen (1634), the Swedish army retreated from southern Germany to Pomerania. Though Sweden won some later battles, the war effort was exhausting.

Christina reached her majority in 1644, and Chancellor Oxenstierna soon discovered that her political views differed from his own. In 1645, he sent his son, Johan Oxenstierna, to the Peace Congress in the Westphalian city of Osnabrück, to argue against peace with the Holy Roman Empire. Christina, however, wanted peace at any cost and sent her own delegate, Johan Adler Salvius.

The Peace of Westphalia was signed between May and October 1648, effectively ending the European wars of religion. Sweden received an indemnity of five million thalers, used primarily to pay its troops. Sweden further received Western Pomerania (henceforth Swedish Pomerania), Wismar, the Archbishopric of Bremen, and the Bishopric of Verden as hereditary fiefs, thus gaining a seat and vote in the Diet of the Holy Roman Empire and in the respective diets (*Kreistag*) of three Imperial Circles: the Upper Saxon Circle, Lower Saxon Circle, and Lower Rhenish-Westphalian Circle; the city of Bremen was disputed.<sup>[28]</sup>

Shortly before the conclusion of the peace settlement, she admitted Salvius into the council, against Chancellor Oxenstierna's wishes. Salvius was no aristocrat, but Christina wanted the opposition to the aristocracy present.

## Patronage of the arts

In 1645, Christina invited Hugo Grotius to become her librarian, but he died on his way in Rostock. That same year she founded Ordinari Post Tijdender ("Regular Mail Times"), the oldest currently published newspaper in the world. In 1647, Johann Freinsheim was appointed as her librarian. After the Battle of Prague (1648), where her armies looted Prague Castle, many of the treasures collected by Rudolph II were brought back to Stockholm. Hence Christina acquired for her library a number of valuable illustrated works and rare manuscripts. The inventory drawn up at the time mentions 100 *an allerhand Kunstbüchern* ("a hundred art books of different kinds"), among them two world-famous manuscripts: Codex Gigas and Codex Argenteus.<sup>[29]</sup>



Queen Christina (at the table on the right) in discussion with French philosopher René Descartes. (Romanticized painting by Nils Forsberg (1842-1934), after Pierre Louis Dumesnil)

In 1648, she commissioned 35 paintings from Jacob Jordaens for a ceiling in Uppsala Castle. In 1649, 760 paintings, 170 marble and 100 bronze statues, 33,000 coins and medallions, 600 pieces of crystal, 300 scientific instruments, manuscripts and books (including the *Sanctae Crucis laudibus* by Rabanus Maurus, the Codex Argenteus and the Codex Gigas<sup>[30]</sup>) were transported to Stockholm. The art, from Prague Castle, had belonged to Rudolf II, Holy Roman Emperor and was captured by Hans Christoff von Königsmarck during the Battle of Prague and the negotiations of the Peace of Westphalia.<sup>[31]</sup> By 1649–1650, "her desire to collect men of learning round her, as well as books and rare manuscripts, became almost a mania," Goldsmith wrote.<sup>[32]</sup> To catalogue her new collection she asked Isaac Vossius to come to Sweden and Heinsius to purchase more books on the market.<sup>[33]</sup>

The "Semiramis from the North" corresponded with Pierre Gassendi, her favorite author. Blaise Pascal offered her a copy of his pascaline. She had a firm grasp of classical history and philosophy.<sup>[34]</sup> Christina studied Neostoicism, the Church Fathers, and Islam; she systematically looked for a copy of the *Treatise of the Three Impostors*, a work bestowing doubt on all organized religion.<sup>[35]</sup> In 1651, the kabbalist Menasseh ben Israel offered to become her agent or librarian for Hebrew books and manuscripts; they discussed his messianic ideas as he had recently spelled them out in his latest book, *Hope of Israel*. Other illustrious scholars who came to visit were Claude Saumaise, Johannes Schefferus, Olaus Rudbeck, Johann Heinrich Boeckler, Gabriel Naudé, Christian Ravis, Nicolaas Heinsius and Samuel Bochart, together with Pierre Daniel Huet and Marcus Meibomius, who wrote a book about Greek dance.

Christina was interested in theatre, especially the plays of Pierre Corneille; she was herself an amateur actress.<sup>[36][37]</sup> In 1647, the Italian architect Antonio Brunati was ordered to build a theatrical setting in one of the larger rooms of the palace.<sup>[38]</sup> The court poet Georg Stiernhielm wrote several plays in the Swedish language, such as *Den fångne Cupido eller Laviancu de Diane*, performed with Christina in the main part of the goddess Diana.<sup>[36][37]</sup> She invited foreign companies to play at Bollhuset, such as an Italian opera troupe in 1652 with Vincenzo Albrici and a Dutch theater troupe with Ariana Nozeman and Susanna van Lee in 1653.<sup>[36][37]</sup> Among the French artists she employed was Anne Chabanceau de La Barre, who was made court singer.<sup>[36]</sup> From 1638 Oxenstierna employed a French ballet troupe under Antoine de Beaulieu, who also had to teach Christina to move around more elegantly.<sup>[36][37]</sup>

In 1646, Christina's good friend, the French ambassador Pierre Chanut, met and corresponded with the philosopher René Descartes, asking him for a copy of his *Meditations*. Upon showing the queen some of the letters, Christina became interested in beginning a correspondence with Descartes. She invited him to Sweden, but Descartes was reluctant until she asked him to organize a scientific academy. Christina sent a ship to pick up the philosopher and 2,000 books.<sup>[39]</sup> Descartes arrived on 4 October 1649. He resided with Chanut, and finished his *Passions of the Soul*. It is highly unlikely Descartes wrote a "Ballet de la Naissance de la Paix", performed on her birthday.<sup>[40]</sup> On the day after, 19 December 1649, he probably

started his private lessons for the queen. With Christina's strict schedule he was invited to the cold and draughty castle at 5:00 AM daily to discuss philosophy and religion. Soon it became clear they did not like each other; she disapproved of his mechanical view, and he did not appreciate her interest in Ancient Greek.<sup>[41]</sup> On 15 January Descartes wrote he had seen Christina only four or five times.<sup>[42]</sup> On 1 February 1650 Descartes caught a cold. He died ten days later, early in the morning on 11 February 1650, and according to Chanut the cause of his death was pneumonia.<sup>[43][g]</sup>

## Marriage issue



Christina by David Beck

Already at the age of nine Christina was impressed by the Catholic religion and the merits of celibacy.<sup>[48]</sup> She read a biography on the virgin queen Elizabeth I of England with interest. Christina understood that it was expected of her to provide an heir to the Swedish throne. Her first cousin Charles was infatuated with her, and they became secretly engaged before he left in 1642 to serve in the Swedish army in Germany for three years. Christina revealed in her autobiography that she felt "an insurmountable distaste for marriage" and "for all the things that females talked about and did." As she was chiefly occupied with her studies, she slept three to four hours a night, forgot to comb her hair, donned her clothes in a hurry and wore men's shoes for the sake of convenience. Her unruly hair became her trademark. Her closest female friend was Ebba Sparre, with whom she shared a bed and possibly a sexual relationship.<sup>[49]</sup> Christina, said to possess charm, called her "Belle" and most of her spare time was spent with *la belle comtesse*. She introduced the passion of her youth to the English ambassador Whitelocke as her "bed-fellow" and praised both her mind and her beauty.<sup>[50][51]</sup>

When Christina left Sweden, she continued to write passionate letters to Sparre, in which she told her that she would always love her. However, such emotional letters were relatively common at that time, and Christina would use the same style when writing to women she had never met, but whose writings she admired.<sup>[51]</sup>

On 26 February 1649, Christina announced that she had decided not to marry and instead wanted her first cousin Charles to be heir to the throne. While the nobility objected to this, the three other estates – clergy, burghers, and peasants – accepted it. The coronation took place on 22 October 1650. Christina went to the castle of Jacobsdal where she entered in a coronation carriage draped in black velvet embroidered in gold and pulled by three white horses. The procession to Storkyrkan was so long that when the first carriages arrived, the last ones had not yet left Jacobsdal (a distance of roughly 10.5 km or 6.5 miles). All four estates were invited to dine at the castle. Fountains at the marketplace splashed out wine for three days, a whole roast ox was served, and illuminations sparkled, followed by a themed parade (*The Illustrious Splendors of Felicity*) on 24 October.<sup>[52]</sup>

## Religion and personal views

Her tutor, Johannes Matthiae, influenced by John Dury and Comenius, who since 1638 had been working on a new Swedish school system, represented a gentler attitude than most Lutherans. In 1644, he suggested a new church order, but it was voted down as this was interpreted as Crypto-Calvinism. Queen Christina defended him against the advice of Chancellor Oxenstierna, but three years later, the proposal had to be withdrawn. In 1647, the clergy wanted to introduce the Book of Concord (Swedish: *Konkordieboken*) – a

book defining correct Lutheranism versus heresy, making some aspects of free theological thinking impossible. Matthiae was strongly opposed to this and was again backed by Christina. The Book of Concord was not introduced.<sup>[56]</sup>

She had long conversations about Copernicus, Tycho Brahe, Bacon, and Kepler with Antonio Macedo, secretary, and interpreter for Portugal's ambassador.<sup>[57]</sup> Macedo was a Jesuit, and in August 1651, smuggled on his person a letter from Christina to his general in Rome.<sup>[58]</sup> In reply, Paolo Casati and Francesco Malines came to Sweden in the spring of 1652, trained in both natural sciences and theology. She had more conversations with them, being interested in Catholic views on sin, the immortality of the soul, rationality, and free will. The two scholars revealed her plans to Cardinal Fabio Chigi. Around May 1652 Christina decided to become Catholic. She sent Matthias Palbitzki to Madrid; in August King Philip IV of Spain sent the Spanish diplomat Antonio Pimentel de Prado to Stockholm.<sup>[59][60]</sup>



*Christina of Sweden*, by Sébastien Bourdon (1653). Museo del Prado<sup>[53][54][55]</sup>

After reigning almost twenty years, working at least ten hours a day, Christina had what some have interpreted as a nervous breakdown. She suffered from high blood pressure, complained about bad eyesight and pain in her neck. Grégoire François Du Rietz, since 1642 the court physician,<sup>[61]</sup> was called when she suddenly collapsed in 1651.<sup>[h]</sup> In February 1652, the French doctor Pierre Bourdelot arrived in Stockholm. Unlike most doctors of that time, he held no faith in blood-letting; instead, he ordered sufficient sleep, warm baths, and healthy meals, as opposed to Christina's hitherto ascetic way of life. She was only twenty-five and advising that she should take more pleasure in life, Bourdelot asked her to stop studying and working so hard<sup>[65]</sup> and to remove the books from her apartments. For years, Christina knew by heart all the sonnets from the Ars Amatoria and was keen on the works by Martial<sup>[66]</sup> and Petronius. The physician showed her the 16 erotic sonnets of Pietro Aretino, which he kept secretly in his luggage. By subtle means Bourdelot undermined her principles. Having been stoic, she now became an Epicurean.<sup>[67]</sup> Her mother and de la Gardie were very much against the activities of Bourdelot and tried to convince her to change her attitude towards him; Bourdelot returned to France in 1653 "laden in riches and curses".<sup>[68]</sup>

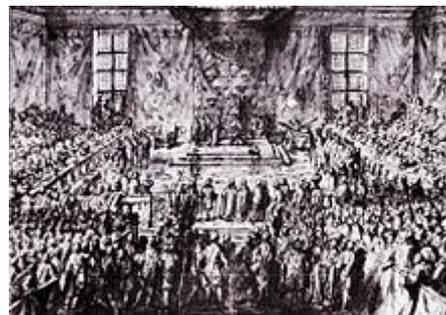
## Abdication

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When Christina decided she wanted her first cousin Charles to be heir to the throne, she agreed to stay on the condition the councils never again asked her to marry. In 1651, Christina lost much of her popularity after the beheading of Arnold Johan Messenius, together with his 17-year-old son, who had accused her of serious misbehavior and of being a "Jezebel".<sup>[69][70]</sup> According to them "Christina was bringing everything to ruin, and that she cared for nothing but sport and pleasure."<sup>[71]</sup>

In 1653, she founded the Amaranten order. Antonio Pimentel was appointed as its first knight; all members had to promise not to marry (again).<sup>[72]</sup> In the same year, she ordered Vossius (and Heinsius) to make a list of about 6,000 books and manuscripts to be packed and shipped to Antwerp. In February 1654, she plainly told the Council of her plans to abdicate. Oxenstierna told her she would regret her decision within a few months. In May, the Riksdag discussed her proposals. She had asked for 200,000 *rikstalers* a year, but received dominions instead. Financially she was secured through a pension and revenue from the town of Norrköping, the isles of Gotland, Öland Ösel and Poel, Wolgast, and Neukloster in Mecklenburg and estates in Pomerania.<sup>[73]</sup>

Her plan to convert<sup>[74]</sup> was not the only reason for her abdication, as there was increasing discontent with her arbitrary and wasteful ways. Within ten years, she and Oxenstierna<sup>[75]</sup> had created 17 counts, 46 barons and 428 lesser nobles. To provide these new peers with adequate appanages, they had sold or mortgaged crown property representing an annual income of 1,200,000 rikstalers.<sup>[76]</sup> During the ten years of her reign, the number of noble families increased from 300 to about 600,<sup>[77]</sup> rewarding people such as Lennart Torstenson, Du Rietz, Louis De Geer and Johan Palmstruch for their efforts. These donations took place with such haste that they were not always registered, and on some occasions, the same piece of land was given away twice.<sup>[78]</sup>



Christina's abdication in 1654, drawing by Erik Dahlberg

Christina abdicated her throne on 6 June 1654 in favor of her cousin Charles Gustav.<sup>[74]</sup> During the abdication ceremony at Uppsala Castle, Christina wore her regalia, which were ceremonially removed from her, one by one. Per Brahe, who was supposed to remove the crown, did not move, so she had to take the crown off herself. Dressed in a simple white taffeta dress, she gave her farewell speech with a faltering voice, thanked everyone, and left the throne to Charles X Gustav, who was dressed in black. Per Brahe felt that she "stood there as pretty as an angel." Charles Gustav was crowned later on that day. Christina left the country within a few days.

## Departure and exile

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Portrait by Jacob Ferdinand Voet

In the summer of 1654, Christina left Sweden in men's clothing with the help of Bernardino de Rebolledo, and rode as Count Dohna, through Denmark. Relations between the two countries were still so tense that a former Swedish queen could not have traveled safely in Denmark. Christina had already packed and shipped abroad valuable books, paintings, statues, and tapestries from her Stockholm castle, leaving its treasures severely depleted.<sup>[79][80]</sup>

Christina visited Frederick III, Duke of Holstein-Gottorp, and while there thought that her successor should have a bride. She sent letters recommending two of the Duke's daughters to Charles. Based on this recommendation, he married Hedwig Eleonora.<sup>[81]</sup> On 10 July Christina arrived in Hamburg and stayed with Jacob Curiel at Krameramtsstuben.

Christina visited Johann Friedrich Gronovius, and Anna Maria van Schurman in the Dutch Republic. In August, she arrived in the Southern Netherlands and settled down in Antwerp. For four months Christina was lodged in the mansion of a Jewish merchant. She was visited by Archduke Leopold Wilhelm of Austria; the Prince de Condé, the ambassador Pierre Chanut, as well as the former governor of Norway, Hannibal Sehested. In the afternoons she went for a ride, and each evening parties were held; there was a play to watch or music to listen to. Christina ran quickly out of money and had to sell some of her tapestries, silverware, and jewelry. When her financial situation did not improve, the archduke invited her to his Brussels palace on Coudenberg. On 24 December 1654, she converted to the Catholic faith in the archduke's chapel in the presence of the Dominican Juan Guêmes,<sup>[82]</sup> Raimondo Montecuccoli and Pimentel.<sup>[83]</sup> Baptized as Kristina Augusta, she adopted the name Christina Alexandra.<sup>[i]</sup> She did not declare her conversion in public, in case the Swedish council might refuse to pay her alimony. In addition, Sweden was preparing for war against Pomerania,

which meant that her income from there was considerably reduced. The pope and Philip IV of Spain could not support her openly either, as she was not publicly a Catholic yet. Christina succeeded in arranging a major loan, leaving books and statues to settle her debts.<sup>[85]</sup>

In September, she left for Italy with her entourage of 255 persons and 247 horses. The pope's messenger, the librarian Lucas Holstenius, himself a convert, waited for her in Innsbruck. On 3 November 1655, Christina announced her conversion to Catholicism in the Hofkirche and wrote to Pope Alexander VII and her cousin Charles X about it. To celebrate her official conversion, *L'Argia*, an opera by Antonio Cesti, was performed. Ferdinand Charles, Archduke of Austria, already in financial trouble, is said to have been almost ruined by her visit. Her departure was on 8 November.<sup>[86]</sup>

## Setting off to Rome



Celebrations for Christina at Palazzo Barberini on 28 February 1656

The southbound journey through Italy was planned in detail by the Vatican and had a brilliant triumph in Ferrara, Bologna, Faenza and Rimini. In Pesaro, Christina became acquainted with the handsome brothers Santinelli, who so impressed her with their poetry and adeptness of dancing that she took them into service, as well as a certain Gian Rinaldo Monaldeschi. The official entry into Rome took place on 20 December, in a coach designed by Bernini<sup>[87]</sup> through Porta Flaminia, which today is known as Porta del Popolo.<sup>[j]</sup> Christina met Bernini on the next day, she invited him to her apartment the same evening and they became lifelong friends.

"Two days afterwards she was conducted to the Vatican Basilica, where the pope gave her confirmation. It was then that she received from the pope her second name of Alexandra, the feminine form of his own."<sup>[88]</sup> She was granted her own wing inside the Vatican, decorated by Bernini.

Christina's visit to Rome was the triumph of Pope Alexander VII and the occasion for splendid Baroque festivities. For several months, she was the only preoccupation of the Pope and his court. The nobles vied for her attention and treated her to a never-ending round of fireworks, jousts, mock duels, acrobatics, and operas. On 31 January *Vita Humana* an opera by Marco Marazzoli was performed. At the Palazzo Barberini, where she was welcomed on 28 February by a few hundred privileged spectators, she watched an amazing carousel in the courtyard.<sup>[89][90]</sup>

## Palazzo Farnese

Christina had settled down in the Palazzo Farnese, which belonged to the Duke of Parma. Every Wednesday she held the palace open to visitors from the higher classes who kept themselves busy with poetry and intellectual discussions. Christina opened an academy in the palace on 24 January 1656, called Academy of Arcadia, where the participants enjoyed music, theater, and literature. The poet Reyer Anslo was presented to her. Belonging to the Arcadia-circle was also Francesco Negri, a Franciscan from Ravenna who is regarded as the first tourist to visit North Cape, Norway.<sup>[k]</sup> Another Franciscan was the Swede Lars Skytte, who, under the name pater Laurentius, served as Christina's confessor for eight years.<sup>[l]</sup>

Twenty-nine-year-old Christina gave occasion to much gossip when socializing freely with men her own age. One of them was Cardinal Decio Azzolino, who had been a secretary to the ambassador in Spain, and responsible for the Vatican's correspondence with European courts.<sup>[91]</sup> He was also the leader of the Squadron Volante, the free-thinking "Flying Squad" movement within the Catholic Church. Christina and Azzolino were so close that the pope asked him to shorten his visits to her palace, but they remained

lifelong friends. In a letter on 26 January 1676<sup>[92]</sup> to Azzolino Christina writes (in French) that she would never offend God or give Azzolino reason to take offense, but this "does not prevent me from loving you until death, and since piety relieves you from being my lover, then I relieve you from being my servant, for I shall live and die as your slave." As he had promised to remain celibate, his replies were more reserved.<sup>[m]</sup> In the meantime Christina learned that the Swedes had confiscated all her revenue as the princess had become a Catholic.

## Visits to France and Italy

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Letter from Queen Christina to Decio Azzolino in the National Archives of Sweden



Decio Azzolino by Jacob Ferdinand Voet

King Philip IV of Spain ruled the Duchy of Milan and the Kingdom of Naples. The French politician Mazarin, an Italian himself, had attempted to liberate Naples from Spanish rule, against which the

locals had fought before the Neapolitan Republic was created. A second expedition in 1654 had failed and the Duke of Guise gave up. Christina's goal was to become a mediator between France and Spain in their contest to control Naples. Her plan detailed that she would lead French troops to take Naples and rule until bequeathing the crown to France after her death. Christina sent home all her Spanish servants, including her confidant Pimentel and her confessor Guêmes.<sup>[94]</sup> On 20 July 1656 Christina set sail from Civitavecchia for Marseille where she arrived nine days later. In early August, she traveled to Paris, accompanied by the Duke of Guise. Mazarin gave her no official sponsorship but gave instructions that she be celebrated and entertained in every town on

her way north.

On 8 September she arrived in Paris and was shown around; ladies were shocked by her masculine appearance and demeanor and the unguarded freedom of her conversation. When visiting the ballet with la Grande Mademoiselle, she, as the latter recalls, "surprised me very much – applauding the parts which pleased her, taking God to witness, throwing herself back in her chair, crossing her legs, resting them on the arms of her chair, and assuming other postures, such as I had never seen taken but by Travelin and Jodelet, two famous buffoons... She was in all respects a most extraordinary creature".<sup>[95]</sup>

Christina was treated with respect by the young Louis XIV and his mother, Anne of Austria, in Compiègne. On 22 September 1656, the arrangement between her and Louis XIV was ready. He would recommend Christina as queen to the Kingdom of Naples and serve as guarantor against Spanish aggression. As Queen of Naples, she would be financially independent of the Swedish king, and also capable of negotiating peace between France and Spain.<sup>[n]</sup>

On her way back Christina visited the beautiful and atheistic Ninon de l'Enclos in the convent at Lagny-sur-Marne. In early October, she left France and arrived in Torino. During the winter Christina lived in the apostolic palace in Pesaro, probably to flee the plague which infested several regions including Naples. During the Naples Plague (1656) almost half of the population died within two years.<sup>[96]</sup> In July 1657, she returned to France, likely being impatient. It is not known where she stayed that summer.

## The death of Monaldeschi

On 15 October 1657 apartments were assigned to her at the Palace of Fontainebleau, where she committed an action that stained her memory: the execution of marchese Gian Rinaldo Monaldeschi, her master of the horse and formerly leader of the French party in Rome.<sup>[97][98]</sup> For two months she had suspected Monaldeschi of disloyalty; she secretly seized his correspondence, which revealed that he had betrayed her interests. Christina gave three packages of letters to Le Bel, a priest, to keep them for her in custody. Three days later, at one o'clock on Saturday afternoon, she summoned Monaldeschi into the *Galerie des Cerfs*, discussing the matter and letters with him. He insisted that betrayal should be punished with death. She was convinced that he had pronounced his own death sentence. After an hour or so Le Bel was to receive his confession. Both Le Bel and Monaldeschi entreated for mercy, but he was stabbed by her domestics – notably Ludovico Santinelli – in his stomach and in his neck. Wearing his coat of mail, which protected him, he was chased around in an adjacent room before they finally succeeded in dealing him a fatal wound in his throat. "In the end, he died, confessing his infamy and admitting [Santinelli's] innocence, protesting that he had invented the whole fantastic story in order to ruin [him]."<sup>[99]</sup>

Father Le Bel was told to have him buried inside the church, and Christina, seemingly unfazed, paid an abbey to say a number of Masses for his soul. She "was sorry that she had been forced to undertake this execution, but claimed that justice had been carried out for his crime and betrayal."<sup>[100]</sup>

Mazarin, who had sent her old friend Chanut, advised Christina to place the blame due to a brawl among courtiers, but she insisted that she alone was responsible for the act. She wrote to Louis XIV who two weeks later paid her a friendly visit without mentioning it. In Rome, people felt differently; Monaldeschi had been an Italian nobleman, murdered by a foreign barbarian with Santinelli as one of her executioners. The letters proving his guilt are gone; Christina left them with Le Bel and only he confirmed that they existed. Christina never revealed what was in the letters, but according to Le Bel, it is supposed to have dealt with her "amours", either with Monaldeschi or another person. She herself wrote her version of the story for circulation in Europe.

The killing of Monaldeschi in a French palace was legal, since Christina had judicial rights over the members of her court, as her vindicator Gottfried Leibniz claimed.<sup>[101]</sup> As her contemporaries saw it, Christina as queen had to emphasize right and wrong, and her sense of duty was strong. She continued to regard herself as queen regnant all her life.

She would gladly have visited England, but she received no encouragement from Cromwell and stayed in Fontainebleau as nobody else offered her a place. Anne of Austria, the mother of Louis XIV, was impatient to be rid of her cruel guest; Christina had no choice but to depart. She returned to Rome and dismissed Santinelli in 1659, claiming to be her ambassador in Vienna without her approval.<sup>[102]</sup>

## Back to Rome

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On 15 May 1658, Christina arrived in Rome for the second time, but this time it was definitely no triumph. With the execution of Monaldeschi, her popularity was lost. Pope Alexander VII remained in his summer residence and wanted no further visits from her. He described her as 'a woman born of a barbarian, barbarously brought up and living with barbarous thoughts [...] with a ferocious and almost intolerable pride'.<sup>[103]</sup> She stayed at the Palazzo Rospigliosi, which belonged to Mazarin, the French cardinal, situated close to the Quirinal Palace; so the pope was enormously relieved when in July 1659, she moved to



Galerie des Cerfs



Christina's bedroom in the Palazzo Corsini

Trastevere to live in Palazzo Riario, below the Janiculum, designed by Bramante. It was Cardinal Azzolino, her "bookkeeper" who signed the contract, as well as provided her with new servants to replace Francesco Santinelli, who had been Monaldeschi's executioner.<sup>[10]</sup>

The Riario Palace became her home for the rest of her life. She decorated the walls with tapestries by Giovanni Francesco Grimaldi<sup>[105]</sup> and paintings, mainly from the Venetian School and Renaissance; and almost no paintings from northern European painters, except Holbein, Van Dyck and Rubens. Her collections included very little religious subject matter and an abundance of mythological imagery, so it seems that Christina was also much

interested in classical history, prompting misbegotten academic speculation about the genuineness of her conversion.<sup>[106]</sup> No Roman collection of art could match hers. She owned Correggio's Danaë and two versions of Titian's Venus and Adonis, tapestries, sculpture, medallions, drawings by Raphael, Michelangelo, Caravaggio, Titian, Veronese and Goltzius and portraits of her friends Azzolino, Bernini, Ebba Sparre, Descartes, ambassador Chanut and doctor Bourdelot.

## Revisiting Sweden

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In April 1660 Christina was informed that Charles X Gustav had died in February. His son, Charles XI, was only five years old. That summer, she went to Sweden, pointing out that she had left the throne to her first cousin and his descendant, so if Charles XI died, she would take over the throne again. But as she was a Catholic that was impossible, and the clergy refused to let the priests in her entourage celebrate any Masses. Christina left Stockholm and went to Norrköping. Eventually she submitted to a second renunciation of the throne, spending a year in Hamburg to get her finances in order on her way back to Rome. Already in 1654, she had left her income to the banker Diego Teixeira in return for him sending her a monthly allowance and covering her debts in Antwerp. She visited the Teixeira family at Jungfernstieg and entertained them in her own lodgings.<sup>[107]</sup>

In the summer of 1662, she arrived in Rome for the third time, followed by some fairly happy years. A variety of complaints and allegations made her resolve in 1666 once more to return to Sweden. She proceeded no farther than Norrköping, where she received a decree she was only allowed to settle in Swedish Pomerania. Christina immediately decided to go back to Hamburg. There she was informed that Alexander VII, her patron and tormentor, had died in May 1667. The new pope Clement IX, a victory for the Squadron Volante,<sup>[108][109]</sup> had been a regular guest at her palace. In her delight at his election, she threw a brilliant party at her lodgings in Hamburg, with illuminations and wine in the fountain outside. The party enraged Hamburg's Lutheran populace, and the party ended in a shooting, an attempt to seize the Queen, and her escape in disguise through a back door.<sup>[110]</sup> Again she met with the charlatan Giuseppe Francesco Borri.<sup>[111]</sup>



Portrait of Christina; painted in 1661 by Abraham Wuchters

On 16 September 1668, John II Casimir abdicated the Polish–Lithuanian throne and returned to France. The Polish monarchy was elective and Christina, as a member of the House of Vasa, put herself forward as a candidate for the throne.<sup>[112]</sup> She recommended herself being Catholic, an old maid and intended to remain one.<sup>[113]</sup> She had Pope Clement IX's support; but her failure seemed to please her since this meant that she could return to her beloved Azzolino.<sup>[113]</sup> She left the city on 20 October 1668.<sup>[114]</sup> <sup>[115]</sup>

## Later life

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The elderly Christina

Christina's fourth and last entry in Rome took place on 22 November 1668. Clement IX often visited her; they had a shared interest in plays. Christina organized meetings of the Accademia in the Great Hall<sup>[116]</sup> which had 'a platform for singers and players'.<sup>[117]</sup> When the pope suffered a stroke, she was among the few he wanted to see at his deathbed. In 1671, Christina established Rome's first public theatre in a former jail, Tor di Nona.<sup>[118]</sup>

The new pope, Clement X, worried about the influence of theatre on public morals. When Innocent XI became pope, things turned even worse; within a few years he made Christina's theatre into a storeroom for grain, although he had been a frequent guest in her royal box with the other cardinals. He forbade women to perform with song or acting, and the wearing of décolleté dresses. Christina considered this sheer nonsense, and let women perform in her palace. In 1675, she invited António Vieira to become her confessor.<sup>[119]</sup> Itinerant doctor and scapegrace, Nicolaas Heinsius the Younger, the legitimized son of a former literatus at Christina's court in Stockholm, arrived in Rome in 1679, converted and was appointed the Queen's personal physician until about 1687, providing autobiographical material for his picaresque novel, *The*

*Delightful Adventures and Wonderful Life of Mirandor* (1695).<sup>[120]</sup> Christina wrote an unfinished autobiography, of which there are several drafts extant,<sup>[121]</sup> essays on her heroes Alexander the Great, Cyrus the Great and Julius Cæsar, on art and music ("Pensées, L'Ouvrage du Loisir" and "Les Sentiments Héroïques")<sup>[34]</sup> and acted as patron to musicians and poets as Vincenzo da Filicaja.<sup>[p]</sup> Carlo Ambrogio Lonati and Giacomo Carissimi were Kapellmeister; Lelio Colista luteplayer; Loreto Vittori and Marco Marazzoli singers and Sebastiano Baldini librettist.<sup>[122][123]</sup> She had Alessandro Stradella and Bernardo Pasquini to compose for her; Arcangelo Corelli dedicated his first work, *Sonata da chiesa opus 1*, to her.<sup>[124][125]</sup> On 2 February 1687 Corelli or Alessandro Scarlatti directed a tremendous orchestra <sup>[126]</sup> performing a Pasquini cantata in praise for James II, England's first Catholic monarch since Mary I<sup>[127]</sup> to welcome Roger Palmer, 1st Earl of Castlemaine as the new ambassador to the Vatican, accompanied by the painter John Michael Wright, who knew Rome and spoke Italian.<sup>[128]</sup>

In 1656, Christina had appointed Carissimi as her *maestro di cappella del concerto di camera*. Lars Englund of Uppsala University' Department of Musicology has hypothesized that Christina's early involvement with Italian music, and in particular church music from Rome, "was part of a deliberate self-transformation, from a ruling Lutheran regent to a Catholic Queen without a land."<sup>[129]</sup>

Christina's politics and rebellious spirit persisted long after her abdication of power. When Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes, abolishing the rights of French Protestants (Huguenots), Christina wrote an indignant letter, dated 2 February 1686, directed at the French ambassador Cesar d'Estrees. Louis did not

appreciate her views, but Christina was not to be silenced. In Rome, she made Pope Clement X prohibit the custom of chasing Jews through the streets during the carnival. On 15 August 1686, she issued a declaration that Roman Jews were under her protection, signed *la Regina* – the queen.<sup>[130][131]</sup>

Christina remained very tolerant towards the beliefs of others all her life. She on her part felt more attracted to the views of the Spanish priest Miguel Molinos, whom she employed as a private theologian. He had been investigated by the Holy Inquisition for proclaiming that sin belonged to the lower sensual part of man and was not subject to man's free will. Christina sent him food and hundreds of letters when he was locked up in Castel Sant'Angelo.<sup>[68]</sup>

## Death and burial

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In February 1689, the 62-year-old Christina fell seriously ill after a visit to the temples in Campania, and received the last rites. She suffered from diabetes mellitus.<sup>[1]</sup> Christina seemed to recover, but in the middle of April she developed an acute streptococcus bacterial infection known as erysipelas, then contracted pneumonia and a high fever. On her deathbed, she sent the pope a message asking if he could forgive her insults. She died on 19 April 1689 in Palazzo Corsini at six in the morning.<sup>[132]</sup>

Christina had asked for a simple burial in the Pantheon, Rome, but the pope insisted on her being displayed on a *lit de parade* for four days in the Riario Palace. She was embalmed, covered with white brocade, a silver mask, a gilt crown, and a scepter. "The Queen wore a thin mantle, decorated with hundreds of crowns and fur bordered with ermine, under this a splendid garment in two pieces, thin gloves and drawers of knitted silk and a pair of elegant textile bootees".<sup>[133]</sup> In similar fashion to the popes, her body was placed in three coffins – one of cypress, one of lead and finally one made of oak. The funeral procession on 2 May led from Santa Maria in Vallicella to St. Peter's Basilica, where she was buried within the Grotte Vaticane – one of only three women ever given this honor (the other two being Matilda of Tuscany and Maria Clementina Sobieska). Her intestines were placed in a high urn.<sup>[9]</sup>



Christina's sarcophagus in the extensive papal crypt at the Vatican

In 1702, Clement XI commissioned a monument for the queen, in whose conversion he vainly foresaw a return of her country to the Faith and to whose contribution towards the culture of the city he looked back with gratitude. This monument was placed in the body of the basilica and directed by the artist Carlo Fontana.<sup>[1]</sup>

Christina had named Azzolino her sole heir to make sure her debts were settled, but he was too ill and worn out even to join her funeral, and died in June the same year. His nephew, Pompeo Azzolino, was his sole heir, and he rapidly sold off Christina's art collections.

## Art collector

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Until 1649, when Christina was twenty-three, the Swedish royal art collection was unimpressive, with good tapestries but for paintings, little more than "about a hundred works by minor German, Flemish, and Swedish painters".<sup>[134]</sup> But in May 1649, the fabulous loot from the occupation of Prague Castle the previous year arrived, with the pick of the collection amassed by the obsessive collector Rudolph II, Holy Roman Emperor (1552–1612), one of the most important in Europe. Rudolf's bulk purchases had included the famous collection of Emperor Charles V's leading minister Cardinal Granvelle (1517–86), which he



Christina by [David Beck](#)

had forced Granvelle's nephew and heir to sell to him. Granvelle had been the "greatest private collector of his time, the friend and patron of [Titian](#) and [Leoni](#) and many other artists",<sup>[135]</sup>

Christina was entranced by her new possessions, and remained a keen collector for the rest of her life, and as a female art collector is only exceeded by [Catherine the Great](#) of Russia in the [Early Modern](#) period. Rudolf had collected old and contemporary works from both Italy and northern Europe, but it was the Italian paintings that excited Christina, and by her death, her collection contained relatively few northern works other than portraits.<sup>[136]</sup>

Most of the Prague booty remained in Sweden after Christina's departure for exile: she only took about 70 to 80 paintings with her, including about 25 portraits of her friends and family, and some 50 paintings, mostly Italian, from the Prague loot, as well as statues, jewels, 72 tapestries, and various other works of art. She was concerned that the royal collections would be claimed by her successor, and prudently sent them ahead to [Antwerp](#) in a ship in August 1653, almost a year before she abdicated, an early sign of her intentions.<sup>[137]</sup>

Christina greatly expanded her collection during her exile in Rome, for example adding the five small [Raphael predella](#) panels from the [Colonna Altarpiece](#), including the [Agony in the Garden](#) now reunited with the main panel in New York, which were bought from a convent near Rome.<sup>[138]</sup> She was apparently given Titian's [Death of Actaeon](#) by the greatest collector of the age, [Archduke Leopold William of Austria](#), Viceroy in Brussels – she received many such gifts from Catholic royalty after her conversion,<sup>[139]</sup> and gave some generous gifts herself, notably [Albrecht Dürer's](#) panels of [Adam and Eve](#) to [Philip IV of Spain](#) (now [Prado](#)). She also gave away two paintings by [Pieter Bruegel the Elder](#), [Dull Gret](#) and [The Cripples](#) (now [Louvre](#)). In such ways, the balance of her collection shifted to Italian art.<sup>[140]</sup>

The Riario Palace finally provided a suitable setting for her collection, and the [Sala dei Quadri](#) ("Paintings Room") had her finest works, with thirteen [Titians](#) and eleven [Veroneses](#), five [Raphaels](#) and several [Correggios](#).<sup>[141]</sup> Titian's [Venus Anadyomene](#) was among them. [Venus mourns Adonis](#) by Veronese was from Prague, and is now back in Sweden ([Nationalmuseum](#)).

Christina liked to commission portraits of herself, friends, and also notable people she had not met, from 1647 sending [David Beck](#), her Dutch court painter, to several countries to paint notabilities.<sup>[142]</sup> She encouraged artists to study her collection, including the drawings, and exhibited some of her paintings, but apart from portraits she commissioned or bought few works by living painters, except for drawings. Sculptors did rather better, and [Bernini](#) was a friend, while others were commissioned to restore the large collection of classical sculpture which she had begun to assemble while still in Sweden.<sup>[143]</sup>

On her death she left her collection to Cardinal Decio Azzolino, who himself died within a year, leaving the collection to his nephew, who sold it to Don Livio Odescalchi, commander of the Papal army,<sup>[144]</sup> at which point it contained 275 paintings, 140 of them Italian.<sup>[145]</sup> The year after Odescalchi's death in 1713, his heirs began protracted negotiations with the great French connoisseur and collector [Pierre Crozat](#), acting as intermediary for [Philippe II, Duke of Orléans](#), from 1715 the Regent of France. The sale was finally concluded and the 123 paintings included in the sale were delivered in 1721, forming the core of the [Orleans Collection](#), the paintings from which were mostly sold in London after the [French Revolution](#), with many of them being on display in the [National Gallery](#).<sup>[146]</sup> The French experts complained that Christina had cut down several paintings to fit her ceilings,<sup>[147]</sup> and had over-restored some of the best works, especially the [Correggios](#), implicating [Carlo Maratti](#).<sup>[148]</sup>

At first, removing her collections from Sweden was seen as a great loss to the country; but in 1697, Stockholm castle burned down with the loss of almost everything inside, so they would have been destroyed if they had remained there. Today very few major works from her collection still remain in the country. The sculpture collection was sold to the King of Spain and mostly remains in Spanish museums and palaces.<sup>[149]</sup> Her large and important library was bought by Alexander VIII for the Vatican Library, while most of the paintings ended up in France, as the core of the Orleans Collection – many remain together in the National Gallery of Scotland. 1700 drawings from her collection (among them works by Michelangelo (25) and Raphael) were acquired in 1790 by Willem Anne Lestevenon for the Teylers Museum in Haarlem, the Netherlands.<sup>[150]</sup>



Bust of Christina by Giulio Cartari in Palacio Real de La Granja de San Ildefonso

## Appearance



Persian coat owned by Christina, probably woven under Shah Abbas II's Government (1586–1628).

Historical accounts of Christina include regular reference to her physical features, mannerisms and style of dress. Christina was known to have a bent back, a deformed chest, and irregular shoulders. Some historians have speculated that references to her physical attributes may be over-represented in related historiography, thus giving the impression that this was of greater interest to her contemporaries than was actually the case.<sup>[151]</sup> However, given how influential Christina became in her own era (especially for those in Rome), it is likely her style and mannerisms were at least of general interest to those around her, and this is reflected in many accounts.<sup>[91][151]</sup> As a result of conflicting and unreliable accounts (some no better than gossip), the way in which Christina is described, even today, is a matter of debate.<sup>[133]</sup>

According to Christina's autobiography, the midwives at her birth first believed her to be a boy because she was "completely hairy and had a coarse and strong voice". Such ambiguity did not end with her birth; Christina made cryptic statements about her "constitution" and body throughout her life. Christina also believed a wet nurse had carelessly dropped her to the floor when she was a baby. A shoulder bone broke, leaving one shoulder higher than the

other for the rest of her life.<sup>[s]</sup> A number of her contemporaries made reference to the differing height of her shoulders.<sup>[153]</sup>

As a child, Christina's mannerisms could probably best be described as those of a tomboy. Her father insisted she should receive "the education of a prince", and some have interpreted this as acceptance, on the part of the king, that she had masculine features or that there was some form of gender ambiguity in her upbringing.<sup>[68]</sup> She was educated as a prince and taught (and enjoyed) fencing, horse riding and bear hunting.<sup>[154][130]</sup>

As an adult, it was said that Christina "walked like a man, sat and rode like a man, and could eat and swear like the roughest soldiers".<sup>[68]</sup> Christina's contemporary John Bargrave described her comportment in a similar fashion but said witnesses ascribed her style more to childishness or madness than masculinity.<sup>[91]</sup> When she arrived in Rome in 1655, she had shaven her head and wore a big, dark wig.<sup>[68]</sup> By 1665, according to Edward Browne, she regularly wore a velvet justacorps, cravat, and peruke (man's wig).<sup>[68]</sup>

While Christina may not have been alone in her own time for choosing masculine dress (Leonora Christina Ulfeldt, for example, was known for dressing the same way), she also had physical features some described as masculine.<sup>[68]</sup><sup>[t]</sup><sup>[155]</sup> According to Henry II, Duke of Guise, "she wears men's shoes and her voice and nearly all her actions are masculine".<sup>[156]</sup> When she arrived in Lyon, she again wore a toque and had styled her hair like that of a young man. It was noted that she also wore large amounts of powder and face cream. In one account she "was sunburnt, and she looked like a sort of Egyptian street girl, very strange, and more alarming than attractive".<sup>[68]</sup>

Living in Rome, she formed a close relationship with Cardinal Azzolino, which was controversial but symbolic of her attraction to relationships that were not typical for a woman of her era and station.<sup>[91]</sup><sup>[157]</sup> She abandoned her manly clothes and took to wearing décolleté dresses so risqué that they drew a rebuke from the Pope.<sup>[68]</sup>

As an older woman, Christina's style changed a little. François Maximilian Misson (visiting Rome in the spring of April 1688) wrote:

She is over sixty years of age, very small of stature, exceedingly fat, and corpulent. Her complexion and voice and face are those of a man. She has a big nose, large blue eyes, blonde eyebrows, and a double chin from which sprout several tufts of beard. Her upper lip protrudes a little. Her hair is a light chestnut colour, and only a palms breadth in length; she wears it powdered and standing on end, uncombed. She is very smiling and obliging. You will hardly believe her clothes: a man's jacket, in black satin, reaching to her knees, and buttoned all the way down; a very short black skirt, and men's shoes; a very large bow of black ribbons instead of a cravat; and a belt drawn tightly under her stomach, revealing its rotundity all too well.<sup>[68]</sup>



Christina in her later years

## Gender ambiguity and sexuality

In her *Autobiography* (1681), Christina is flirting with her androgynous personality.<sup>[13]</sup> The question of her sexuality has been debated, even as a number of modern biographers generally consider her to have been a lesbian, and her relationships with women were noted during her lifetime;<sup>[51]</sup> Christina seems to have written passionate letters to Ebba Sparre, and Guilliet suggested a relationship between Christina and Gabrielle de Rochechouart de Mortemart, Rachel, a niece of Diego Teixeira,<sup>[152]</sup> and the singer Angelina Giorgino.<sup>[12]</sup> Some historians assert she maintained heterosexual,<sup>[10]</sup> non-sexual,<sup>[158]</sup> lesbian,<sup>[159]</sup> or

bisexual relationships during the course of her life depending on which source is consulted.<sup>[160][161]</sup> According to Veronica Buckley, Christina was a "dabbler" who was "...painted a lesbian, a prostitute, a hermaphrodite, and an atheist" by her contemporaries, though "in that tumultuous age, it is hard to determine which was the most damning label".<sup>[68][162]</sup> Christina wrote near the end of her life that she was "neither Male nor Hermaphrodite, as some People in the World have pass'd me for".<sup>[68]</sup>

Bargrave recounted that Christina's relationship with Azzolino was both "familiar" (intimate) and "amorous" and that Azzolino had been sent (by the Pope) to Romania as punishment for maintaining it.<sup>[91]</sup> Buckley, on the other hand, believed there was "in Christina a curious squeamishness with regard to sex" and that "a sexual relationship between herself and Azzolino, or any other man, seems unlikely".<sup>[68]</sup> Based on historical accounts of Christina's physicality, some scholars believe that she may have been an intersex individual.<sup>[68][163][48]</sup>

In 1965, these conflicting accounts led to an investigation of Christina's remains. Physical anthropologist Carl-Herman Hjortsjö, who undertook the investigation, explained: "Our imperfect knowledge concerning the effect of intersex on the skeletal formation [...] makes it impossible to decide which positive skeletal findings should be demanded upon which to base the diagnosis" of an intersex condition. Nevertheless, Hjortsjö speculated that Christina had reasonably typical female genitalia because it is recorded by her physicians Bourdelot and Macchiati that she menstruated.<sup>[164]</sup> Hjortsjö's osteological analysis of Christina's skeleton led him to state that they were of a "typically female" structure.<sup>[165]</sup>

Some of the symptoms could be due to polycystic ovary syndrome, a complex multi-endocrine disorder including hirsutism (male pattern/type hair growth) due to increased androgen hormone levels, and abdominal obesity due to the hormone insulin receptor defects. Buckley suggested that her low comprehension of the need for most social norms, little desire to act, dress, or do other social norms, and her preference to wear, act, and do only that which she deemed logically practical, point to her having a pervasive developmental disorder, such as Asperger syndrome.<sup>[68]</sup>

## Legacy

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The complex character of Christina has inspired numerous plays, books, and operatic works:

- Jacopo Foroni's 1849 opera *Cristina, regina di Svezia* is based on the events surrounding her abdication. Other operas based on her life, include Alessandro Nini's *Cristina di Svezia* (1840), Giuseppe Lillo's *Cristina di Svezia* (1841), and Sigismond Thalberg's *Cristina di Svezia* (1855)
- August Strindberg's published *Kristina* (1901)
- Zacharias Topelius wrote a historical allegory *Stjärnornas Kungabarn* (1899–1900)
- Christina's life was famously fictionalized in the classic feature film *Queen Christina* (1933). This film, starring Greta Garbo, depicted a heroine whose life diverged considerably from that of the real Christina.
- In the Italian film *Love and Poison* (1950/52) Christina is played by actress Lois Maxwell.
- Kaari Utrio published *Kartanonherra ja kaunis Kristin* (1969).



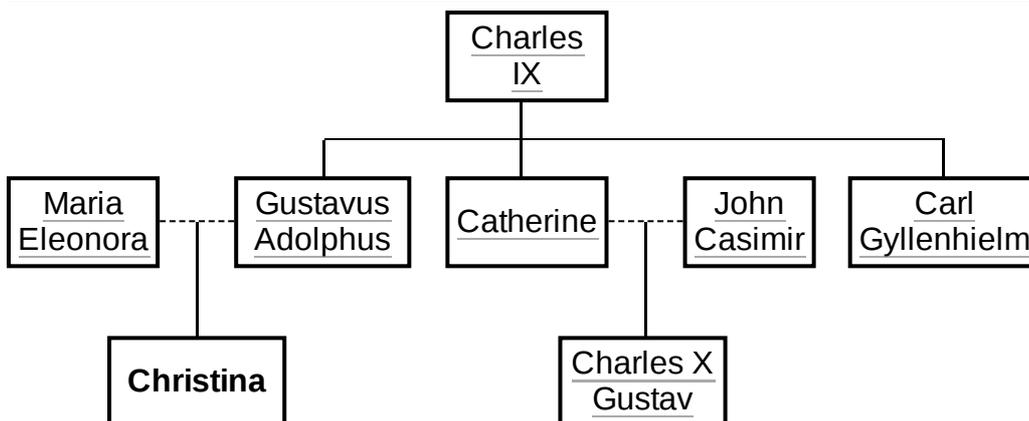
Ebba Sparre married in 1652 a brother of Magnus Gabriel de la Gardie. Painting by Sébastien Bourdon

- In *The Abdication* (1974), starring Liv Ullmann, Christina arrives in the Vatican and falls in love with cardinal Azzelino. The script was based on a play by Ruth Wolff.
- Herta J. Enevoldsen wrote two novels in Danish on her life, *Heltekongens Datter* (1975) and *En Dronning Værdig* (1976).
- Laura Ruohonen wrote "Queen C" (2003), which presents a woman centuries ahead of her time who lives by her own rules.
- In Eric Flint's alternative history 1632 series, part of his Assiti Shards universe, she is a major character.
- Comedian Jade Esteban Estrada portrayed her (2004) in the solo musical *ICONS: The Lesbian and Gay History of the World Vol. 2*.
- Michel Marc Bouchard's play *Christina, The Girl King*, is a biographical depiction of Queen Christina's short rule premiered in 2012.
- Mika Kaurismäki's film, *The Girl King*, based on the play, premièred December 11, 2015. In it, she is portrayed as a lesbian, lover of Countess Ebba Sparre.
- She is featured as the leader of the Swedish civilization in the video game expansion pack *Civilization VI: Gathering Storm*, although her name is spelled, Kristina. Her unique ability grants her buildings and wonders with Great Works slots (Must be 3 slots for buildings and 2 slots for wonders) automatic theming (granting Tourism and Culture bonuses) once they are filled with Great Works without regard to normal theming rules. In addition, she has a unique Government Plaza building that grants her multiple Great Works slots and extra points towards Great People that can create said Great Works.

Place names:

- Kristiine District of Tallinn, Estonia.
- Queen Village, Philadelphia.
- Christina River
- Kristinestad, Finland.

## Family tree



## Footnotes

- With the titles of Queen of the Swedes, Goths (or Geats) and Wends<sup>[2]</sup> (*Suecorum, Gothorum Vandalorumque Regina*);<sup>[3]</sup> Grand Princess of Finland, and Duchess of Estonia, Livonia and Karelia,<sup>[4]</sup> Bremen-Verden, Stettin, Pomerania, Cassubia and Vandalia,<sup>[5]</sup> Princess of Rugia, Lady of Ingria and of Wismar.<sup>[6]</sup>
- See History of copper currency in Sweden).

- c. The three were buried in Riddarholmskyrkan in Stockholm.
- d. She was married to John Casimir, Count Palatine of Kleeburg, and moved home to Sweden after the outbreak of the Thirty Years' war. Their children were Maria Eufrosyne, who later married one of Christina's close friends Magnus Gabriel De la Gardie, and Karl Gustav, who inherited the throne after Christina.
- e. Letters still exist, written by her in German to her father when she was five. When the ambassador of France, Pierre Hector Chanut, arrived in Stockholm in 1645, he stated admiringly, "*She talks French as if she was born in the Louvre!*" (According to B. Guilliet she spoke with a sort of Liège dialect.)
- f. There are seven gold coins known to exist bearing the effigy of Queen Christina: a unique 1649 five ducat,<sup>[26]</sup> and six 1645 10 ducat specimen.<sup>[27]</sup>
- g. Over time there have been speculations regarding the death of the philosopher.<sup>[44]</sup> Theodor Ebert claimed that Descartes did not meet his end by being exposed to the harsh Swedish winter climate, as philosophers have been fond of repeating, but by arsenic poisoning.<sup>[45][46]</sup> It has been suggested Descartes was an obstacle to Christina's becoming a true Catholic.<sup>[47]</sup>
- h. Petrus Kirstenius was invited by Axel Oxenstierna to become a personal physician of Queen Christina of Sweden and Professor of Medicine at Uppsala University in 1636. Grégoire François Du Rietz became the physician in 1642. Around 1645? she appointed Benedict (Baruch) Nehamias de Castro from Hamburg as her Physician in ordinary. Wullenius was her physician since 1649, and when Descartes fell ill. Hermann Conring was invited in 1650, but he seems to have rejected the offer. Du Rietz was called when she suddenly collapsed in 1651. For an hour she seemed to be dead. In August 1651, she asked for the Council's permission to abdicate, but gave in to their pleas for her to retain the throne. In February 1652, the French doctor Pierre Bourdelot arrived in Stockholm. Otto Sperling, who was doctor to the household of Leonora Christine, met Christina in Sweden in the winter of 1653. In July 1654, the English physician Daniel Whistler returned to London. In Rome Giuseppe Francesco Borri came to see her in 1655 and after 1678 when he was released from prison; Cesare Macchiati traveled with her to Sweden, and was her physician until her death;<sup>[62]</sup> Romolo Spezioli after 1675.<sup>[63][64]</sup> Nikolaes Heinsius the Younger arrived in Rome in 1679, when he became her personal physician until about 1687.
- i. Alexandra was a confirmation name in 1654, chosen in honor of the reigning pope, Alexander VII, and one of her heroes, Alexander the Great. The pope had urged her to also add "Maria" in honor of the Virgin, but she refused.<sup>[84]</sup>
- j. Bernini had decorated the gate with Christina's coat of arms (an ear of corn) beneath that of Pope Alexander (six mountains with a star above). Also today one can read the inscription *Felici Faustoq Ingressui Anno Dom MDCLV* ("to a happy and blessed entry in the year 1655").
- k. Negri wrote eight letters about his walk through Scandinavia all the way up to "Capo Nord" in 1664.
  - l. He too had been a pupil of Johannes Matthiae, and his uncle had been Gustav Adolf's teacher. As a diplomat in Portugal, he had converted and asked for a transfer to Rome when he learnt of Christina's arrival.
- m. Christina wrote him many letters during her travels. After her death, Azzolino burnt most of their correspondence; about 80 have survived. Some details were written in a code that was decrypted by Carl Bildt, in Rome around 1900.<sup>[93]</sup>
- n. Mazarin however found another arrangement to ensure peace; he strengthened this with a marriage arrangement between Louis XIV and his first cousin, Maria Theresa of Spain – the wedding took place in 1660. But this was unknown to Christina, who sent different messengers to Mazarin to remind him of their plan.

- o. Monaldeschi was a traitor, Santinelli had stolen from Christina' for years.<sup>[104]</sup>
- p. In her basement there was a laboratory, where she, Giuseppe Francesco Borri and Azzolino experimented with alchemy.
- q. From 2005 to 2011, her marble sarcophagus was positioned next to that of Pope John Paul II when his grave was moved.
- r. Christina was portrayed on a gilt and bronze medallion, supported by a crowned skull. Three reliefs below represented her relinquishment of the Swedish throne and abjuration of Protestantism at Innsbruck, the scorn of the nobility, and faith triumphing over heresy. It is an unromantic likeness, for she is given a double chin and a prominent nose with flaring nostrils.
- s. E. Essen-Möller and B. Guillet suggest it had to do with her alleged intersex condition.<sup>[152]</sup>
- t. Her contemporary Samuel Pepys, for example, describes women riding horses in *mannish* clothing.

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