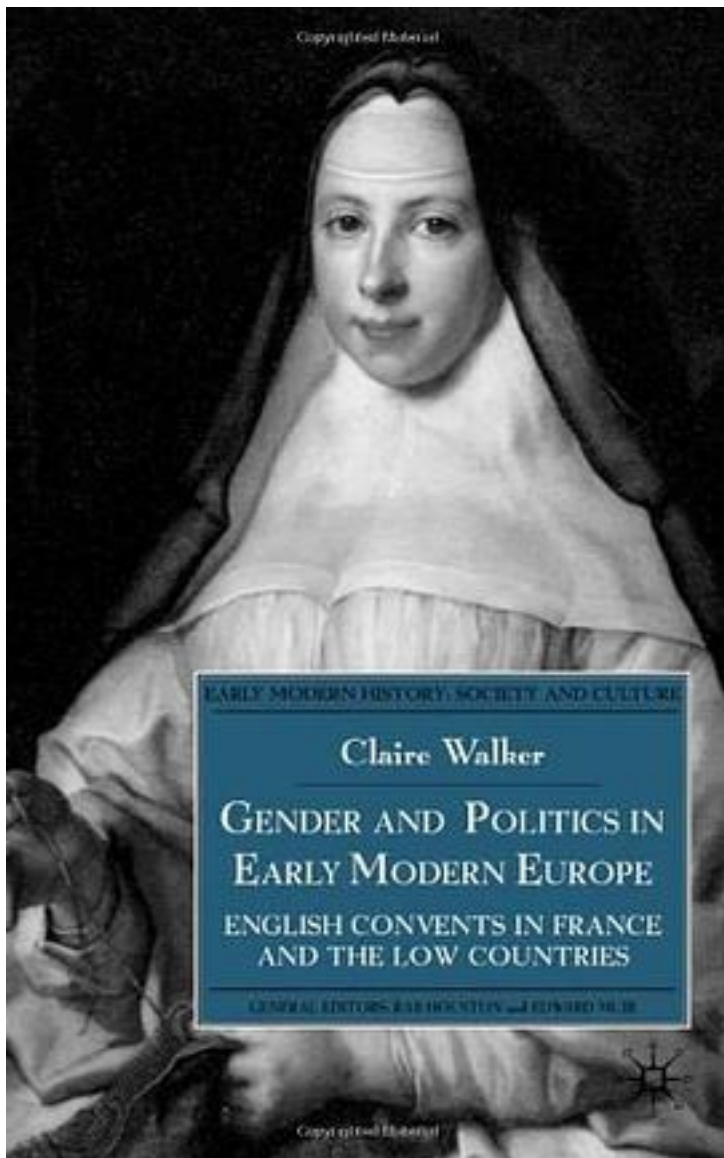# Gender and Politics in Early Modern Europe

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In 1598 the monastic life for English women was revived, sixty years after Henry VIII dissolved the last convents. Over the next century twenty-two expatriate cloisters were established in the southern Netherlands, France and Portugal, recruiting the daughters of the English Catholic gentry and aristrocracy. In contrast to the better known educative and missionary order founded by Mary Ward, these religious houses were strictly contemplative and thus enclosed. Yet neither exile nor incarceration constrained the nuns' activities within the narrow confines of their convent walls. Instead they participated in the major political and confessional controversies of the seventeenth century. As craftswomen, musicians, patrons, political activists, authors, mystics and spirtual advisors, the English abbesses and their nuns reveal how early modern women successfully negotiated the strictures imposed by a patriarchal church and society to create female spaces outside the usual spheres of domestic household and royal court.

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目录:

[Gender and Politics in Early Modern Europe_下载链接1_](#)

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