

Philippe de Gueldre (1467–1547): “Royne de Sicile” et “povre ver de terre.”
Ghislain Tranié.

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Philippe de Geuldre (1467–1547) does not seem an obvious figure for a lengthy historical study. Although Duchess of Lorraine, Philippe had limited efficacy as a political figure, and she lived out most of her adult life as a nun in the order of Saint Clare. But Ghislain Tranié demonstrates why we must understand Philippe in terms of gendered power in capacious terms. Tranié uses literature, art, architecture, performance studies, and traditional archival practices to reconstruct Philippe’s life and afterlives, situating Philippe in Franco-Burgundian politics and as a figure of popular sanctity. Divided into sections devoted to female access to power, Philippe’s roles at court and in the convent, and the elaboration of her hagiography and legacy, Tranié offers a textured account of a complicated woman negotiating a volatile time.

Tranié first lays out gendered aspects of public life. In the eschatological climate of the early sixteenth century, signs and prodigies were associated with feminine inferiority, even as women were associated with prophecy and discourses of regeneration. Dynastic politics brought women to prominence, and representational strategies depicted powerful women within religious iconographic schema. Tranié highlights matrilineal lines of secular and ecclesiastical power. Artistic representations of prominent women, including a string of regnant duchesses between 1477 and 1553, featured their importance in dynastic priorities. While Burgundian politics and the house of Lorraine (with its ambitions in Europe and the Holy Land) figure centrally, Tranié situates women such as Margaret of York and Marguerite of Luxembourg in broader European power struggles. Throughout, Tranié emphasizes intersecting discursive, symbolic, and material forms of feminine power and authority, including artistic and religious patronage, to counter assumptions of female disability. Tranié demonstrates how the script for women to exercise power through piety and patronage functioned.

Born probably in 1467, Philippe was educated at the Burgundian court and married to René II, Duke of Lorraine, in 1485. Philippe had twelve children, five of whom survived to adulthood. By 1500, she was associated with saintly motherhood. Her feminine image balanced the masculinization of power by the Lorraine dukes. Philippe served as regent when René was absent and for her son, Antoine, after his accession. She carried out the quotidian duties to keep the state running, but Philippe’s political role was less important than her part in extending the ducal line and enhancing its reputation for Catholic militancy. Extensive cultural work under Philippe’s auspices was crucial. Emphasis on the providential rise of the house of Lorraine, along with imagery of Philippe as a Christlike figure of embodied suffering, structured messages about religious conviction and heroic sacrifice. Philippe served as a link back to Charlemagne and Saint Louis and forward to the crusading aspirations of the dukes of Lorraine.

Within the convent, the former duchess took up rigorous engagement with the *devotio moderna* and patronage of the Colettine Poor Clares at Pont-à-Mousson. Philippe positioned her actions as vigorous Catholicism against Protestantism, utilizing knowledge drawn from her secular life to help defend the Colettines against intrusive control by male clerics. Tranié situates Philippe within the tradition of noblewomen who retired to convents, but her longevity made her unusual. Her combination of high secular rank (aspirational queen of Sicily) and identification with low status (she called herself an “earthworm”) facilitated Philippe’s assimilation to the tradition of popular sainthood that prevailed in Lorraine. Drawing on the conventions of convent hagiographies, the *Vie de Philippe de Gueldre* (first edition 1585) situated Philippe as a would-be saint. Tranié’s analysis of iterations of the *Vie* meticulously considers its creation, engagements with mysticism, efforts to counter Protestantism, and changing emphases with respect to personal sanctity and the ambitions of the house of Lorraine. Accounts of Philippe’s sanctity straddle the conflicting imperatives of Catholic militancy and traditional feminine piety. Philippe’s reputation variously served to counter concerns about sorcery in Lorraine, affirm the ducal family’s orthodoxy, and provide an example of active feminine Catholicity. By the eighteenth century, commentators figured Philippe as a Catholic allegory of Lorraine. While Philippe was never formally canonized and her convent was dispersed during the Revolution, Tranié brilliantly demonstrates the importance of understanding not just the individual woman, but how feminine power was created through an ensemble of gender practices.

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A period piece; period dress; period charm: even popular speech marks the pastness of the past by talking in periods. “It’s not my period,” responds the historian, making clear how we partition the past by dividing it periodically. This habit of periodizing the past—of parceling it into periods and estranging it from the present by giving it a period flavor—began in the period formerly known as the Renaissance but now generally called early modern. That shift in both naming and framing shows that periodization has a history and that it is not just historians who have a stake in how we divide the various parts of the past.

Early Modern Histories of Time brings together a distinguished team of scholars to examine the period when periodization first became an urgent issue. In fifteen discrete