

Éliane Viennot. *La France, Les Femmes et Le Pouvoir: L'invention de la loi salique (V^e–XVI^e siècle)*.

Paris: Perrin, 2006. 728 pp. index. bibl. €27. ISBN: 2-262-02061-2.

Éliane Viennot's recent book *Marguerite de Valois: "La reine Margo"* (2005) explores both the life and the myth of that queen. In this new work on women's power in France she does something similar for the Salic Law. She first acquaints

her readers with the original laws of the Salian Franks, which said nothing about women being excluded from ruling, and did not exclude them from landholding either. She then proceeds to examine the position of women in relation to power in four chronological periods from the time of the Franks through the developments of sixteenth-century France. The connecting theme is the search for how and why the Salic Law code became the (fictitious) source for the Salic Law excluding women from the throne and what its influence has been.

Part 1 covers the fifth through tenth centuries and shows the status of women in Frankish laws, and the power and influence of both secular and religious women. Viennot begins with the early Frankish culture and society that practiced relative gender equality. She compares the relevant passage of several sixth- and eighth-century editions of the original law code of the Salian Franks, none of which mention the crown. She points out that in the early centuries women, especially queens and noblewomen, played an important part in the Christianization of the Franks. In contrast to the later misogyny of the Church, local bishops often worked with elite women to obtain conversions and supported their establishment of religious foundations.

The original law of the Salian Franks is of fundamental importance to the thesis of the book, but the book is much more than a description of how the law was misused. In the second part, covering the ninth through twelfth centuries, new laws reflected the new political conditions, and the Frankish laws were largely forgotten. The French Church gained power as it took over secular protective and administrative roles during the post-Carolingian disorder. Restoration and growth were gradually achieved and ladies, the feminine equivalent of lords, held fiefs and exercised administrative and even judicial powers in their territories. The French Church's close association with powerful women was scrutinized by the Roman Church as the latter launched the Gregorian Reform. The Roman Church expanded its control over Western Christendom, elevating the role of men in the Church at the expense of both secular and religious women.

Viennot's third period covers the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, when the submission of women to men became a foundation of clerical culture. The period is marked by the emergence of the clergy as a social group that was increasingly important in secular society because their administrative skills were important to centralizing secular governments. The exclusion of daughters in the direct line from the throne in favor of more distant male heirs also marks this period. The need to justify male inheritance to the throne led to the revival of the old Salic Law, or, rather, the fabrication of a new Salic Law into something entirely different.

The fourth part covers the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and comprises about one-half of the book. It is here that the effect of the new, fabricated Salic Law really began to show culturally. The value of this portion of the book is in its intricate description of French society and the interplay between this Salic Law and other elements of French culture in the Renaissance. Viennot covers women's status and power, and their loss of status and power in this period for a broad range

of society. The fabrication of the law was itself an important element in the loss of female power, but it was also a manifestation of other political and cultural trends in favor of male power. It was these trends which sustained the Salic Law even after Renaissance historians realized it was false. These power losses were not universal, however, nor were they entirely unopposed even in this period.

Viennot has created a work full of images of women's power and influence in both church and state from the fifth through the sixteenth century. Because of its breadth and depth, specialists may wish to argue points in particular areas, but one remarkable quality of this work is how sharply focused and carefully crafted it is. It develops the theme of the invention of the Salic Law, but puts it thoroughly in its historical context over the centuries. In that way it functions as a comprehensive gendered history of the period and provides another valuable layer to the history of France.

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