



A portrait of Philippe, Duke of Orléans by Pierre Mignard. Image courtesy commons.wikimedia.org.

## Orléans, Philippe, Duke of (1640-1701)

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Known as "Monsieur," Philippe, Duke of Orléans was the second son of Louis XIII and the younger brother of Louis XIV. Born on September 21, 1640, he was Duke of Anjou until 1660 and Duke of Orléans thereafter. Living in the shadow of his brother, the "Sun King," Philippe played no political role in his country's history and is remembered today chiefly for his homosexuality.

In Nancy Barker's words, "Not only did his sexual preference develop into a cardinal aspect of his character, but . . . in great measure it defined his reputation for posterity."

Yet Philippe undoubtedly had many princely qualities. The Duke of Saint-Simon described him as possessing a "natural grandeur" and "an affability and an integrity that drew [people] to him." He was highly cultured, patronized the opera, and assembled a remarkable art collection.

Philippe showed real military ability when given a command during the Dutch War (1672-1679), but his victory over William of Orange at Cassel (April 11, 1679) aroused his brother's jealousy, and he never saw action again. Louis XIV never forgot that Louis XIII's younger brother (the previous Duke of Orléans) had been a leader of the opposition to royal policies; he made sure that his own brother was in no position to play the same role.

Philippe's effeminacy--in contrast to the king's flaunted virility--helped to discredit him. The Duke of Saint-Simon has left a portrait of Philippe at fifty as "a small, pot-bellied man, mounted on stilts (so high were the heels of his shoes), always adorned like a woman, covered with rings, bracelets and jewels everywhere, with a long wig . . . and ribbons wherever he could put them, reeking of every kind of perfume."

According to the abbé de Choisy, a transvestite cleric who knew Philippe well, the Duke "would very much have liked also to be able to wear women's clothing, but he dared not, because of his dignity (princes are imprisoned by their grandeur)."

Thanks to the immense wealth of his brother, Philippe was able to create a libertine court at his chateau at Saint-Cloud that functioned as a kind of shadow court to Versailles. Although he had many lovers, the chevalier of Lorraine exerted the greatest and longest-lasting influence over him.

Despite his marked preference for the company of handsome male favorites and lovers, Philippe did his dynastic duty and was twice married, first to Henriette Stuart of England (1644-1670) from 1661 to 1670, then to Elisabeth-Charlotte, known as the Princess Palatine (1652-1722), from 1671.

His first wife was almost continuously pregnant, while his second marriage produced three children. Three daughters and one son lived to adulthood and married; all the Catholic dynasties of Europe count Philippe of Orléans among their ancestors.

Although he was in fact a doting father, the Princess Palatine complained in her letters that "Monsieur is a

debauchee and his only occupation is . . . to recommend his favourites and to obtain from His Majesty [the king] all sorts of pensions and favours for them. As for his children, he doesn't even think of them."

Philippe died on June 9, 1701 at St. Cloud, with the king at his bedside.

With the specific case of the Duke of Orléans in mind, Robert Oresko suggests that historians use memoirs and notarial records to reconstitute networks of sex and friendship among homosexuals belonging to national elites in order better to understand the distribution of patronage and preferment in the royal courts of early modern Europe.

The tragedy of the Duke of Orléans was not his homosexuality and effeminacy (as homophobic historians have repeatedly claimed), but rather that there was no place for him in Louis XIV's political system, a state of affairs that condemned him to a life of insignificance and futility.

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