



State of Virginity: Gender, Religion, and Politics in an Early Modern Catholic State (Social History, Popular Culture, and Politics in Germany)

Ulrike Strasser

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In premodern Germany, both the emerging centralized government and the powerful Catholic Church redefined gender roles for their own ends. Ulrike Strasser's interdisciplinary study of Catholic state-building examines this history from the vantage point of the virginal female body. Focusing on Bavaria, Germany's first absolutist state, Strasser recounts how state authorities forced chastity upon lower-class women to demarcate legitimate forms of sexuality and maintain class hierarchies. At the same time, they cloistered groups of upper-class women to harness the spiritual authority associated with holy virgins to the political authority of the state. The state finally recruited upper-class virgins as teachers who could school girls in the gender-specific morals and type of citizenship favored by authorities.

Challenging Weberian concepts that link modernization to Protestantism, Strasser's study illustrates the modernizing power of Catholicism through an examination of virginity's central role in politics, culture, and society. Weaving together the stories of marriage and convent, of lay as well as religious women, *State of Virginity* makes important contributions to the historical study of sexuality and the growing feminist literature on the state. It will be of particular interest to students and scholars of political and religious history, women's studies, and social history.



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