

Marie-Antoinette and her circle of friends





« It seems to be my fate to bring misfortune » (1788)



The Empress Eugénie and her ladies in waiting (1855)

Empress Eugénie: an official court

Marie-Antoinette: a « minimum service » - A **closed** circle of friends: **considerable damage** to her reputation at court and in the public opinion

The joys of a private life vs. representation





Versailles: the most brilliant court in Europe

Little regard for existing hierarchies and ages



« She unfortunately makes fun of everybody without putting the least restraint on herself »

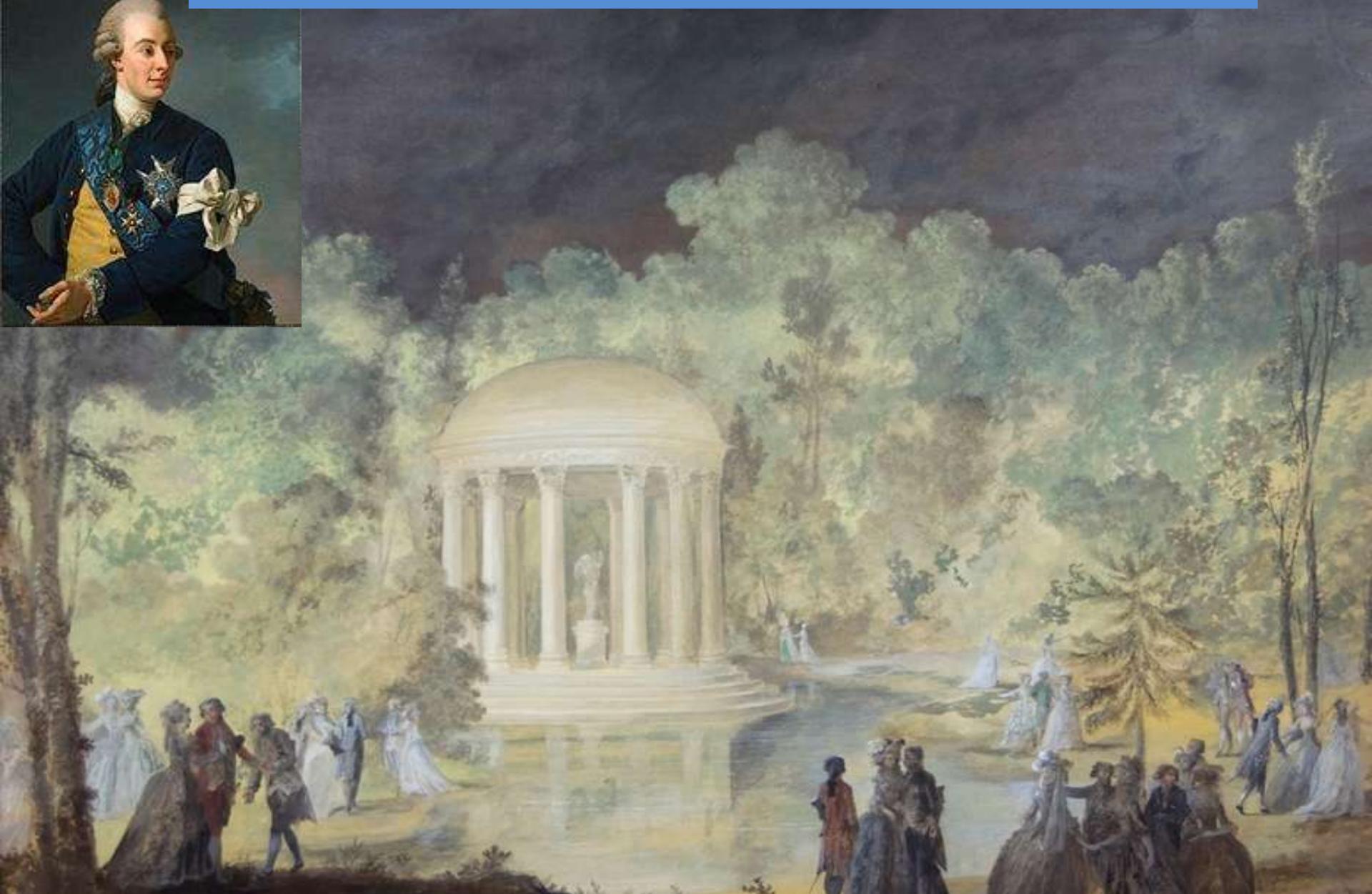
The « strait-laced » or « old » courtiers
("the centenarians") not welcomed

« When one has passed thirty, I cannot understand how one dares appears at court »
(Marie-Antoinette)

*« Little Queen, have a care;
If you behave with such an air
You'll be sent back over there »*



Official evening party in honor of King Gustav III of Sweden (21 June 1784)



“The Queen had opened the gardens to respectable people who had been warned that they must dress in white, which really provided an elysian sight”

Louis XVI: jealous of his power

Marie-Antoinette so-called political influence helped build the image of a weak & hesitant king



Louis XVI knew how to govern with
the support of strong ministers
(mentors)

NO influence on the Queen
All freedom left to Marie-Antoinette to organize court
amusements
BUT
No involvement in politics

Women should have no part in the
affairs of state

Maurepas (1774-1781)



Vergennes (1774-1787)

Maria-Theresa & Joseph II: Marie-Antoinette to influence France's foreign policy and favor
Austria's interests
Marie-Antoinette failed completely in that mission



Marie-Antoinette did not seek to serve her family's interests
To appease diplomatic differences between France & Austria

1784 diplomatic tensions between Austria & The Netherlands (United Provinces)



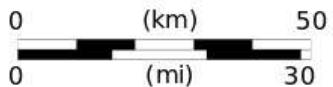
Attempt by Joseph II to force the river Scheldt
Threat of war: Joseph calls on Louis XVI to intervene



Pays-Bas autrichiens (1789)

Légende :

- ville
- frontière internationale
- frontière provinciale



« What will be my position if one cannot play down this fatal germ of division? »

Marie-Antoinette: little “return on investment” (Austrian diplomacy disappointed)





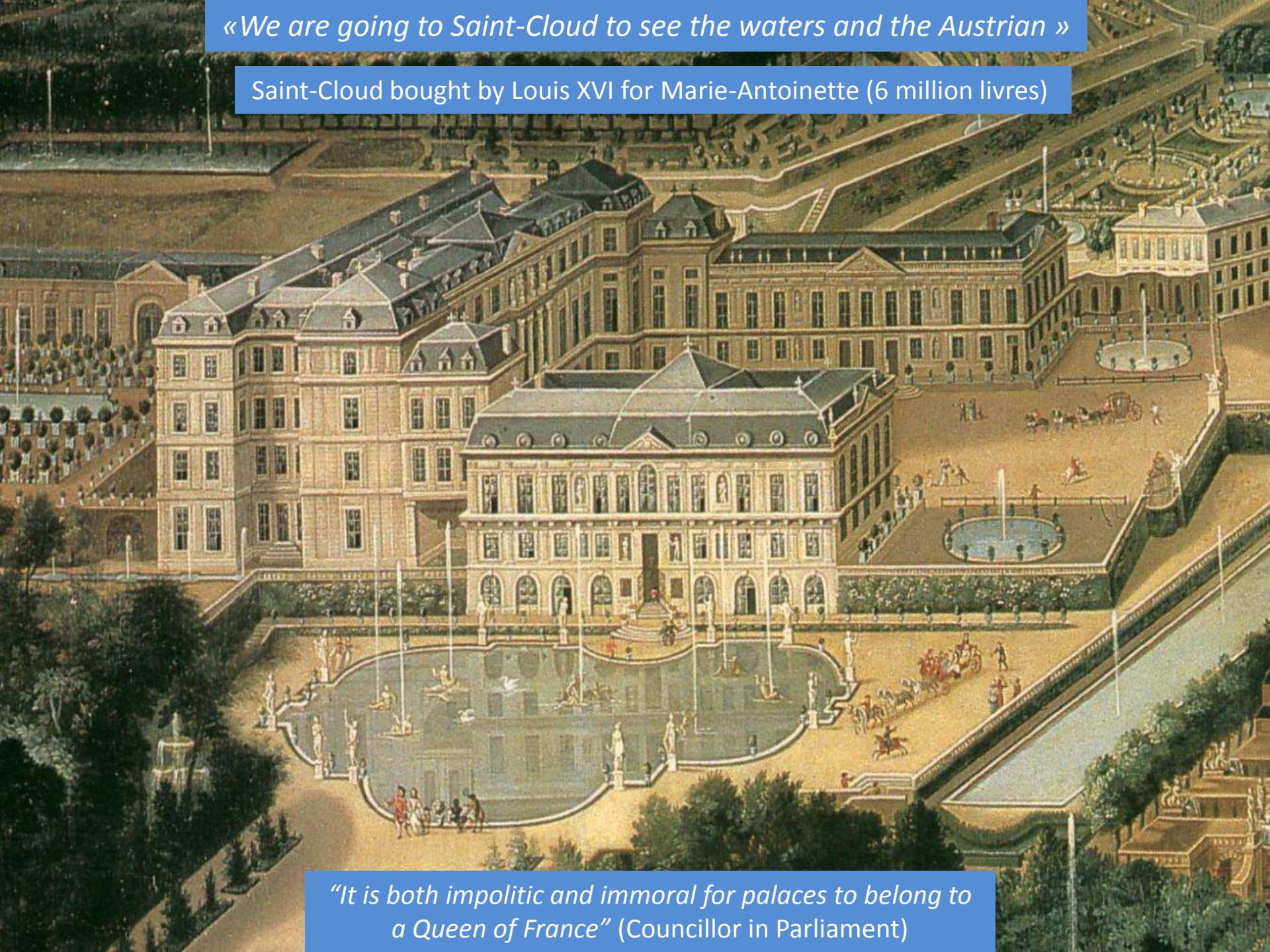
Princesse de Lamballe



Comtesse de Polignac

«We are going to Saint-Cloud to see the waters and the Austrian »

Saint-Cloud bought by Louis XVI for Marie-Antoinette (6 million livres)



“It is both impolitic and immoral for palaces to belong to a Queen of France” (Councillor in Parliament)





Princesse de Lamballe: no influence at court
A confidante



Comtesse de Polignac: friendship extremely
damageable

The carnival of 1771



Marie-Antoinette: in search of friendships

Loveless marriage
A vulnerable position
at Versailles



A very wealthy young widow





Comtesse de Noailles
« Madame Etiquette »



Marie-Antoinette touched by the shy & honest Madame de Lamballe



A protective feeling for Mme de Lamballe



Mme de Lamballe
appointed
“Superintendant of the
Queen’s Household”
(1775)

1775: enters Yolande de Polignac



« *The Queen has an even stronger affection for her than for any who have gone before her* »

Mercy-Argenteau



A calculated modesty

Marie-Antoinette charmed by her « candour », her « careless grace » and sensibility
“*When I am alone with her, I am no longer the queen, I am myself!*” (Marie-Antoinette)

A portrait painting of a young woman with light brown hair, wearing a large straw hat decorated with white flowers and a red ribbon. She is dressed in a white blouse with a large, ruffled collar and a dark, flowing skirt. The background is a soft-focus landscape.

A 14 year friendship

Her face bore the marks
of « *her shameful
villainy* »

« *No face ever expressed more
charm and sweetness* »

Diane de Polignac



September 1775: Jules de Polignac appointed First Equerry
Growing criticisms at court

Fontainebleau (1775): Marie-Antoinette and Mme de Polignac inseparable





A greedy family & circle of friends
Pressure on the Queen



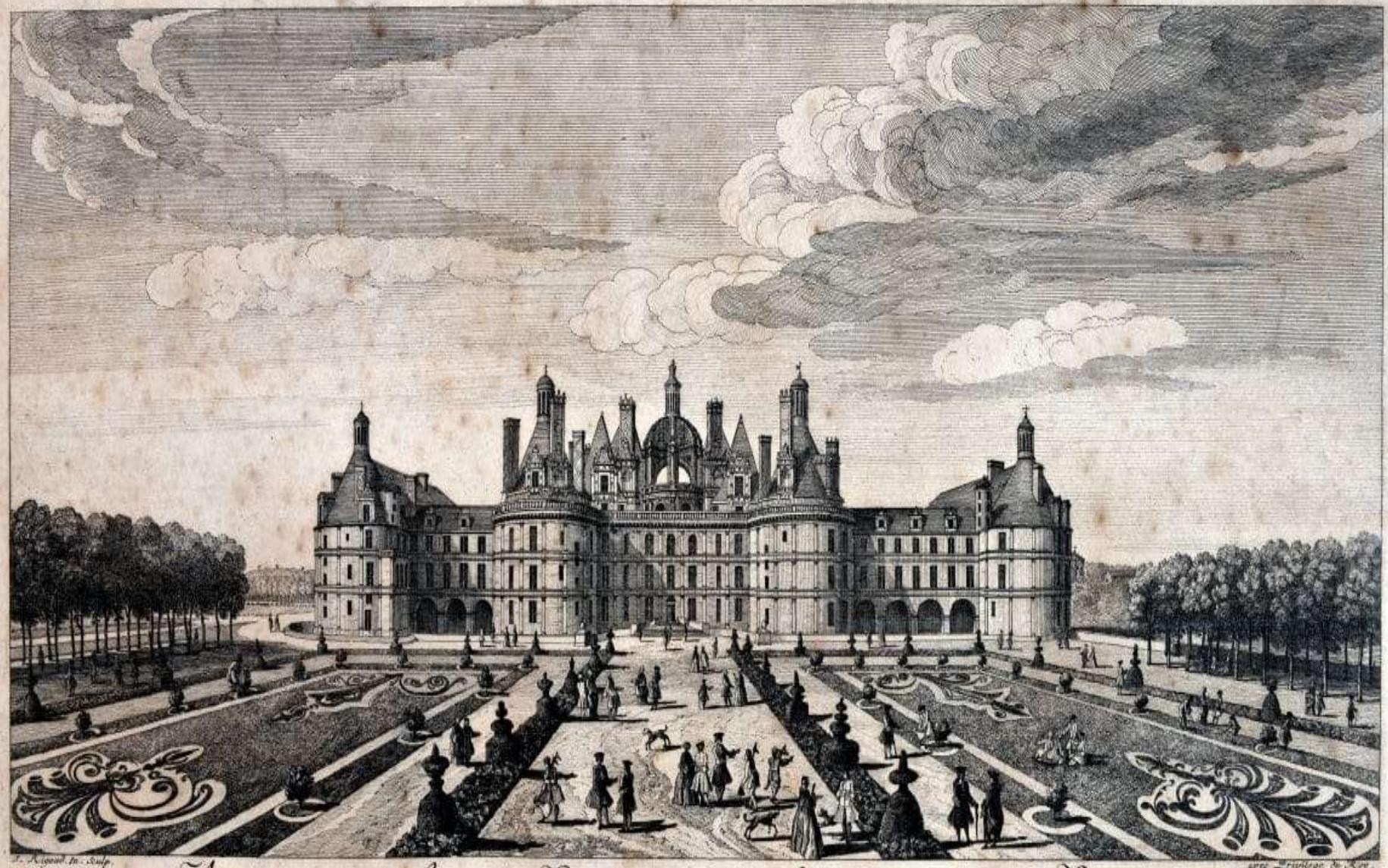
Comte de Vaudreuil

Control over Mme de Polignac's
circle (the Queen's circle)

*"The Comte de Vaudreuil who
governs the Queen does not always
know how to govern himself"*



Comte d'Adhémar of dubious
nobility but « *very fashionable* »



Autre vue du Château Royal de Chambord du côté du Parterre

J. Augustin le Rupt

gravé & tiré par J. Augustin le Rupt

LA
FOLLE JOURNÉE,
OU
LE MARIAGE DE FIGARO,
COMÈDIE
EN CINQ ACTES, EN PROSE,
PAR M. DE BEAUMARCHAIS.

Représentée pour la première fois, par les Comédiens
français ordinaires du Roi, le mardi 27 avril 1784.

En forme de dialogue,
Parue gracie à la vente. Vendue au public.

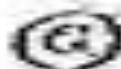
The play initially banned by Louis XVI

Figaro's tirade:

"No, my lord Count, you shan't have her... you shall not have her! Just because you are a great nobleman, you think you are a great genius—Nobility, fortune, rank, position! How proud they make a man feel! What have you done to deserve such advantages? Put yourself to the trouble of being born—nothing more"



1785.





Marie-Antoinette
intrigued by Mme
de Polignac

Did Yolande de Polignac realize she contributed to Marie-Antoinette's growing unpopularity?
Versailles: a bubble



Marie-Antoinette: to avoid
boredom (the perpetual disease
of the great)



Baron de Besenval
Lieutenant-Colonel of the Swiss
Guards (the « *old Celadon* »)

An excellent style of bad manners
but witty

« *It is always the same when she is given
the opportunity of amusing herself* »

The Queen accused of lesbianism

An “epidemic” of pamphlets, satirical songs and pornographic libels

A passionate friendship



« I was not spared. Both tastes were freely attributed to me: for women and for lovers »
(Marie-Antoinette to her mother)



The 17th century “canard”: printed broadsides often enhanced by engraving designed to appeal to the credulous

Nouvellistes picked up news from places of gossips – Underground newspapers



The first libels against Marie-Antoinette's reputation came from Versailles



Comte de Provence: the author of satirical pamphlets against the royal couple

Maurepas: his collection of songs & libels shared with the king's aunts

Madame Adelaide: « *The Austrian woman* »

« *A despicable courtier hatches (the libels) in the dark; another courtier puts them into verse* »

Epidemic of libels reached a peak in 18th century London (freedom of the press)



Reverend Henry Bate: the launch of
The Morning Post (1772)



Reverend William Jackson ("Dr. Viper") known
for "*the extreme and unexampled virulence of
his invectives...*"

Marie-Antoinette's reaction to the libels: **to ignore them**
Complete indifference until the affair of the diamond necklace (1785)



Little interest for reading
Ignorance of the real world (beyond the gates of Versailles)

Trianon: a miniaturized & idealized world
No trips within France

Louis XVI at Cherbourg (1786)



Duchesse de Polignac appointed **Governess** of the Royal Children (1782)

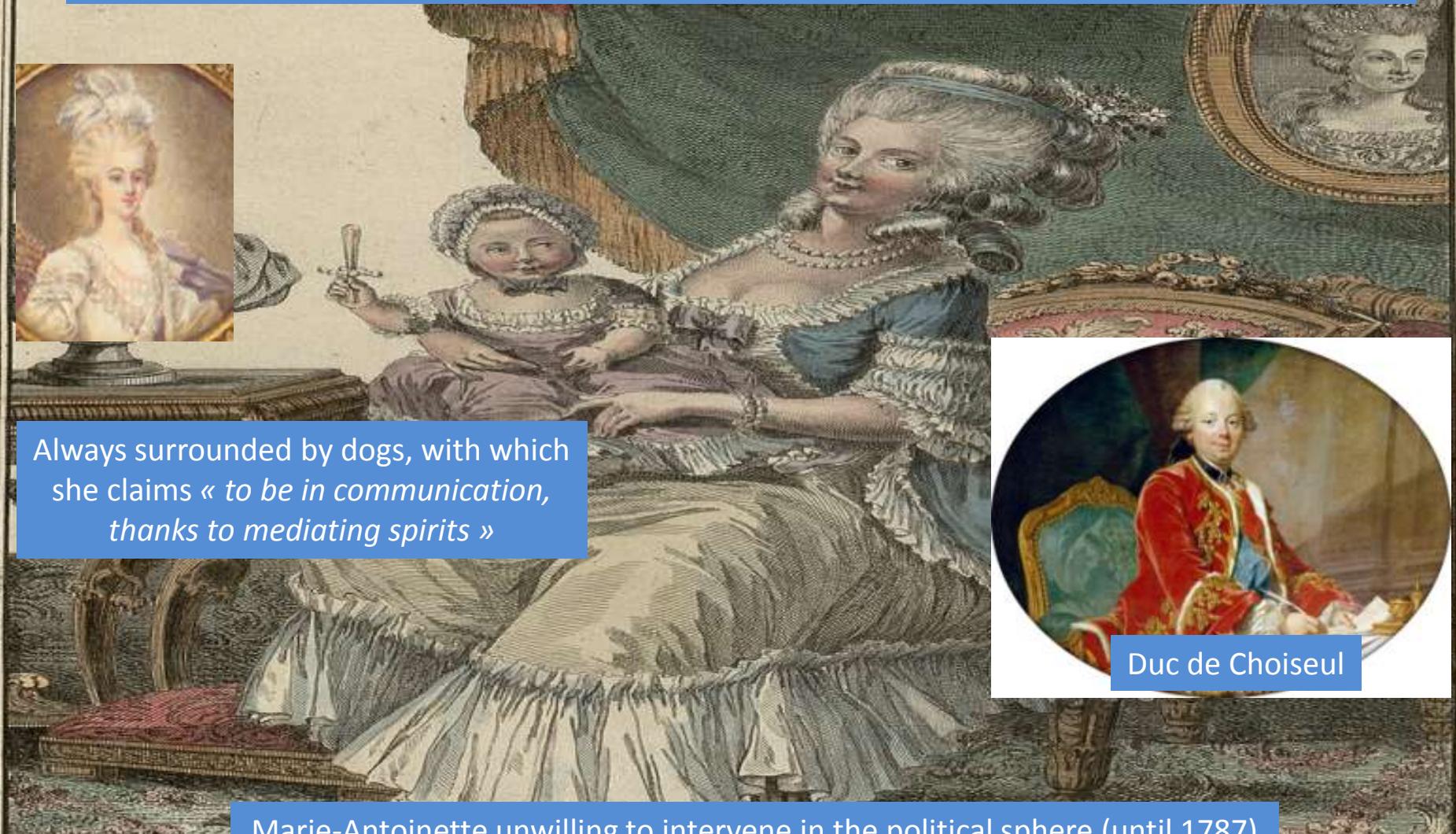


Princesse de Guéménée (Governess of the Children of France until 1782)

A member of one of the most powerful aristocratic families (**Rohan-Soubise**) – Political ambition
A great deal of leisure time (lavish lifestyle)



Always surrounded by dogs, with which
she claims « *to be in communication,
thanks to mediating spirits* »



Duc de Choiseul

Marie-Antoinette unwilling to intervene in the political sphere (until 1787)

1. The Queen hesitant to get involved in complex issues
2. Little interest for politics



Duc de Lauzun



Fersen: Marie-Antoinette's true love
Friendship with the Polignac clan cools down



An ungrateful bunch

14 July 1789: the storming of the Bastille



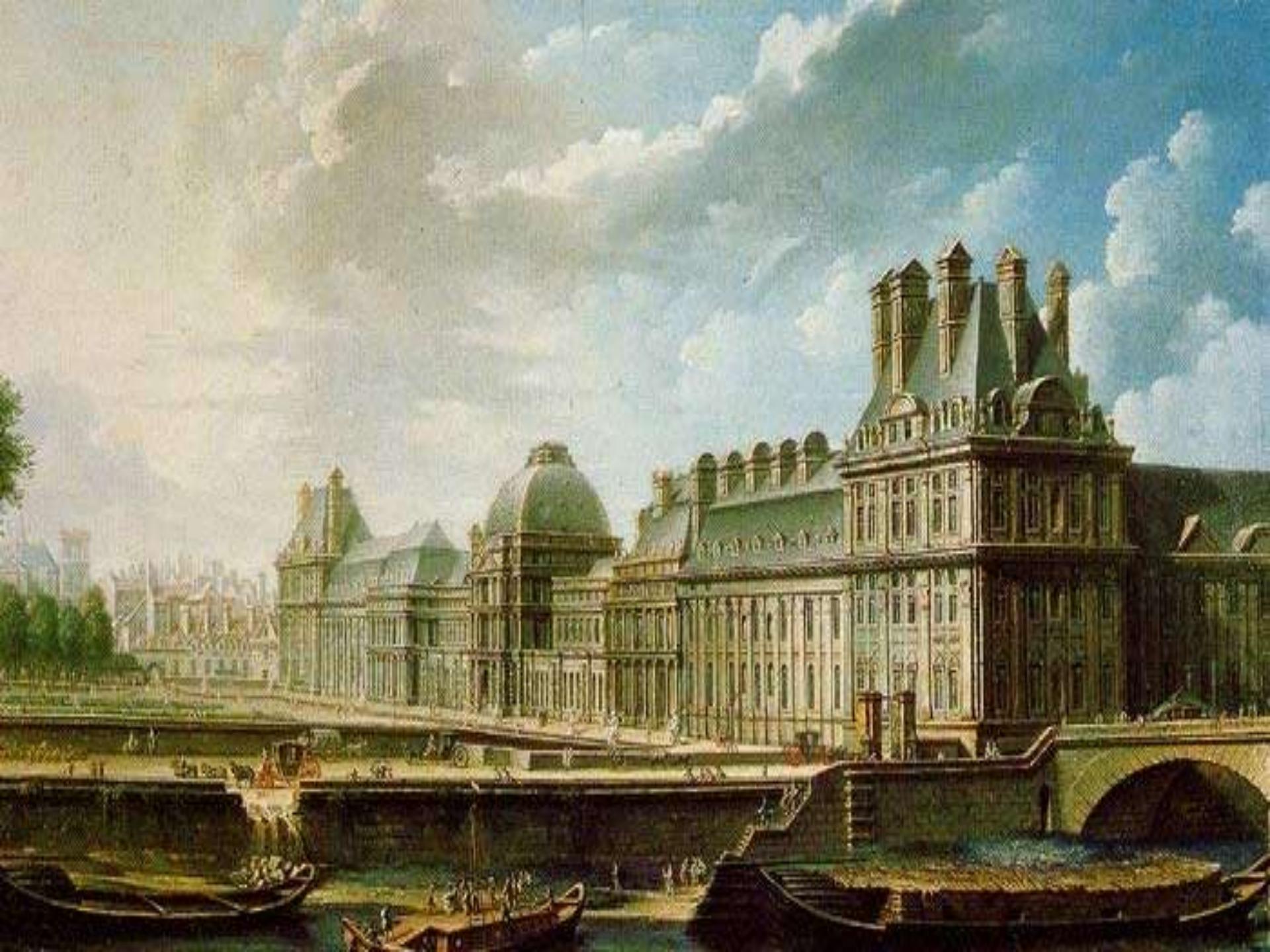
16 July 1789: Louis XVI orders the Polignac clan to leave France



« Farewell, dearest of friends, the world is a dreadful one. Farewell, I have only the strength to embrace you »

5 October 1789: Mme de Lamballe absent from court

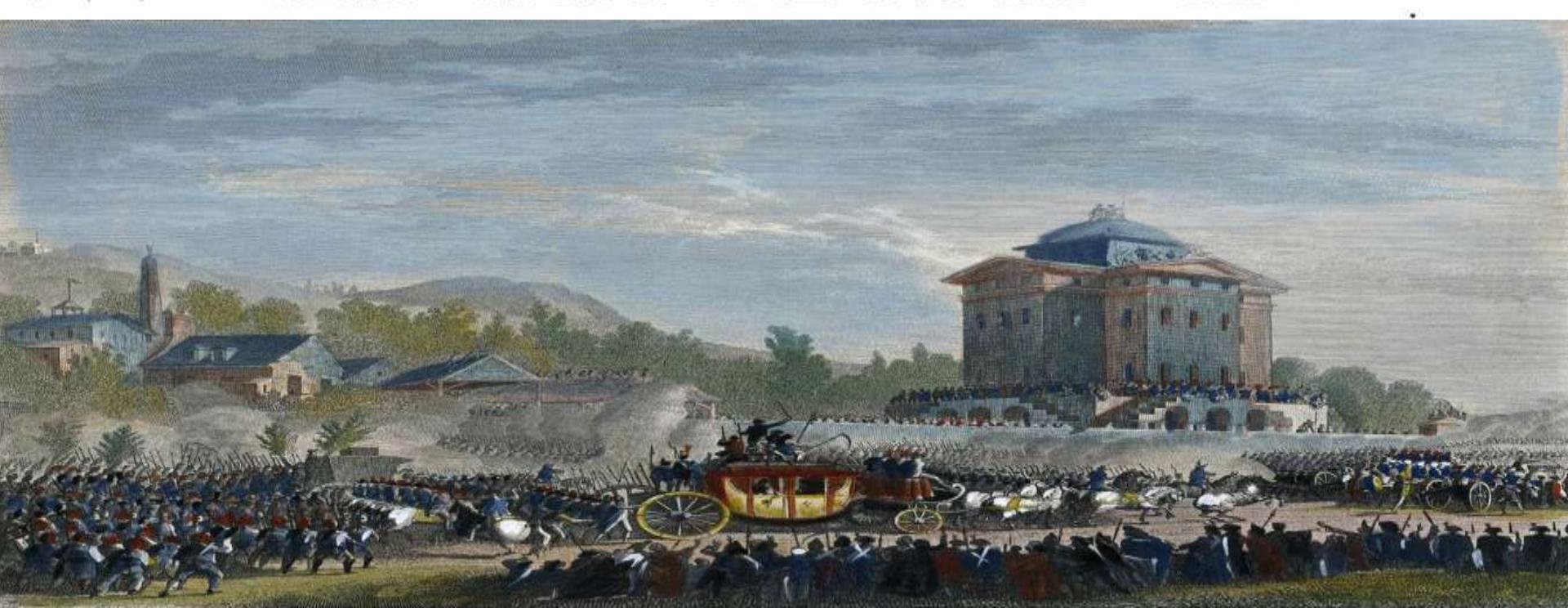
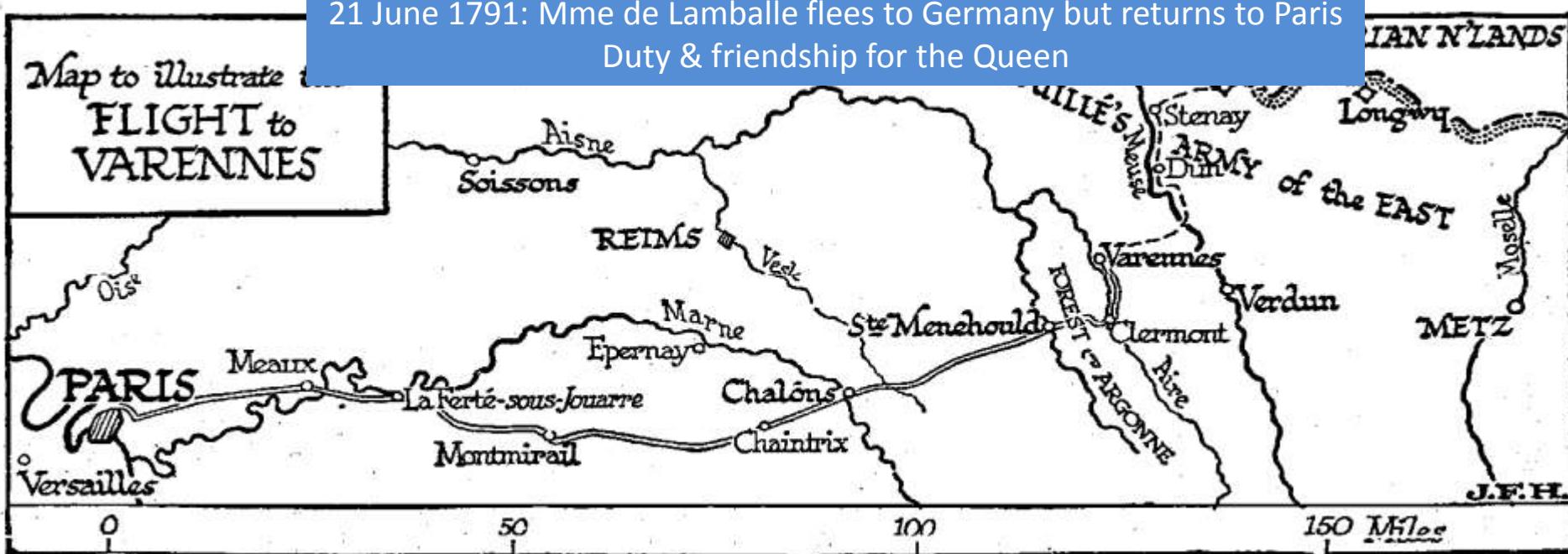






21 June 1791: Mme de Lamballe flees to Germany but returns to Paris
Duty & friendship for the Queen

Map to illustrate the
FLIGHT to VARENNES









16 Octobre 1793
9 December 1793 (*« Morte de douleur »*)

