



The Affair of the Diamond Necklace  
One of the most famous heist in history

A fatal blow to the prestige of the French monarchy

# LES LIAISONS DANGEREUSES,

O U

## LETTRES

Recueillies dans une Société, & publiées  
pour l'instruction de quelques autres.

Par M. C. . . . . DE L...

Pai va les mains de mon temps, & l'ai publiés ces Lettres.  
J. J. ROUSSEAU , Prof. de la Nouvelle Héloïse.

### PREMIERE PARTIE.



A AMSTERDAM;

Et se trouve à PARIS,

Chez DURAND Neveu , Libraire , à la  
Sageffe , rue Galande.

M. DCC. LXXXII.



Dessin exécuté par Karl Lagerfeld pour le marquis de Brinvillette en 1987,  
représentant Marie-Antoinette porté du collier.

Hollywood at its worst

# The Affair of the Necklace

Music Composed and Conducted by

**DAVID NEWMAN**

Marie-Antoinette: from adulation to resentment

Extravagant lifestyle & disdain for traditions

The Queen accused of acting as a fifth columnist for Austrian interests



# Marie-Antoinette's passion for jewels

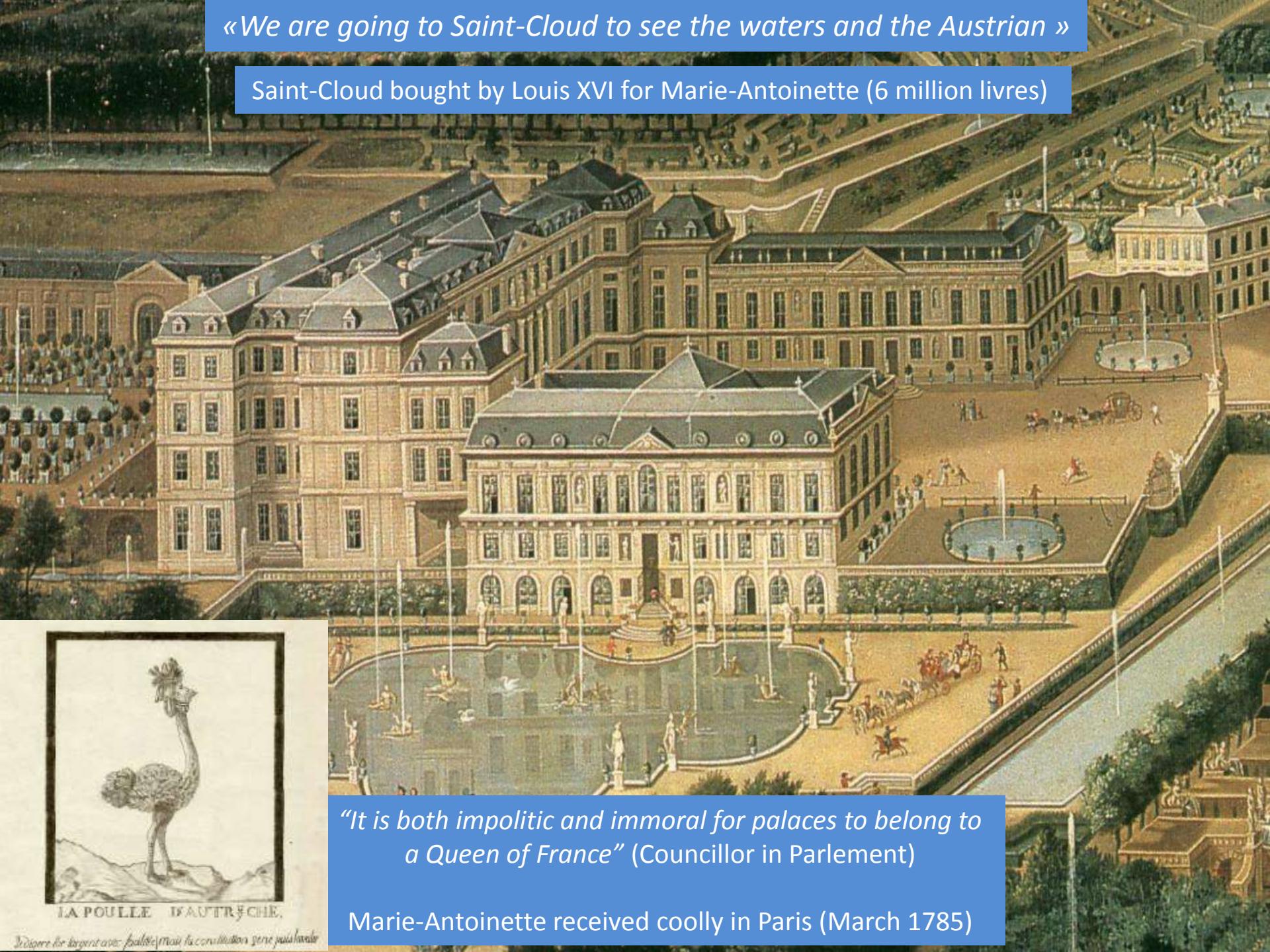
## 1774-1778: a spiral of spending



A pair of diamond earrings:  
450 000 livres

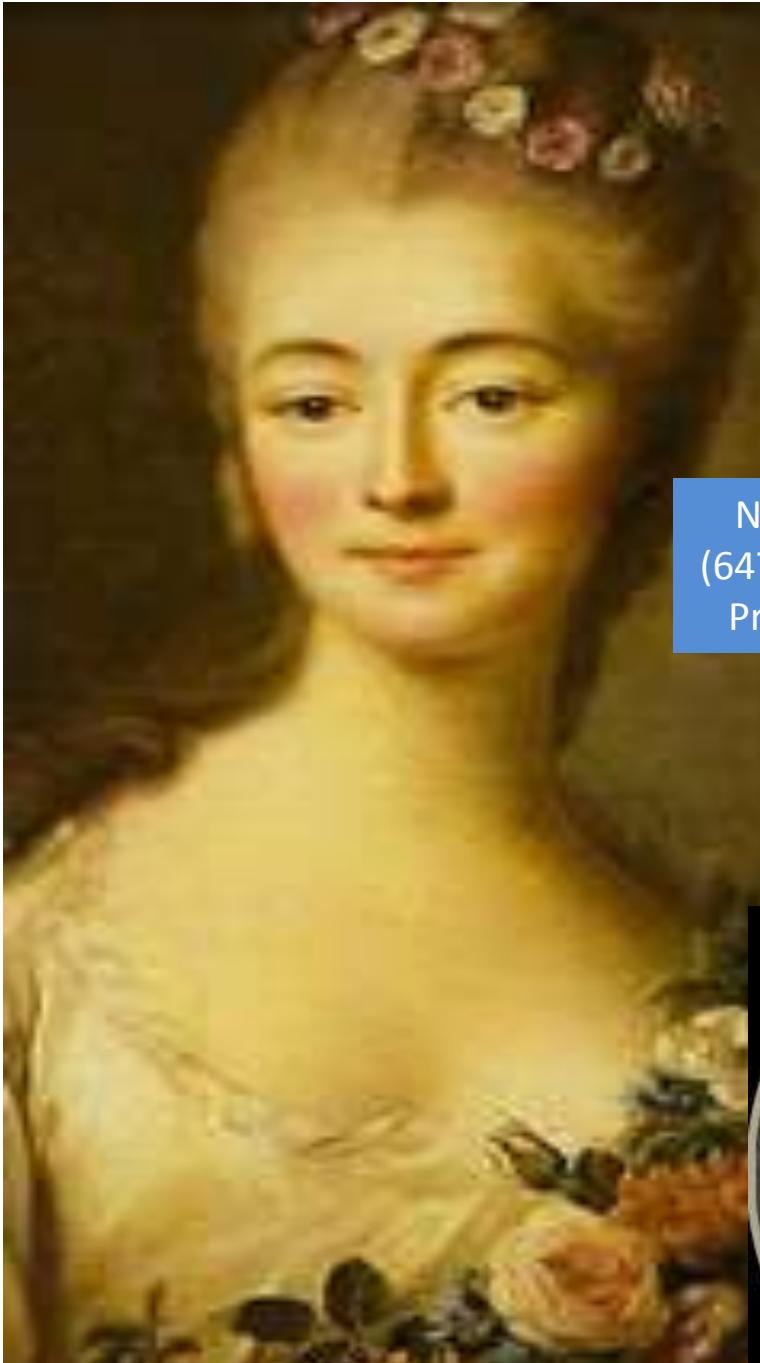
«We are going to Saint-Cloud to see the waters and the Austrian »

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 Parlement)

Marie-Antoinette received coolly in Paris (March 1785)



Necklace « *en esclavage* »  
(647 diamonds – 2 800 carats)  
Price tag: \$1 600 000 livres



Charles Auguste Böhmer & Bassenge (son-in-law): to create the « *most beautiful necklace in the world* »

Marie-Antoinette to Böhmer: necklace too expensive & rather ugly  
("like a collar for a circus horse")



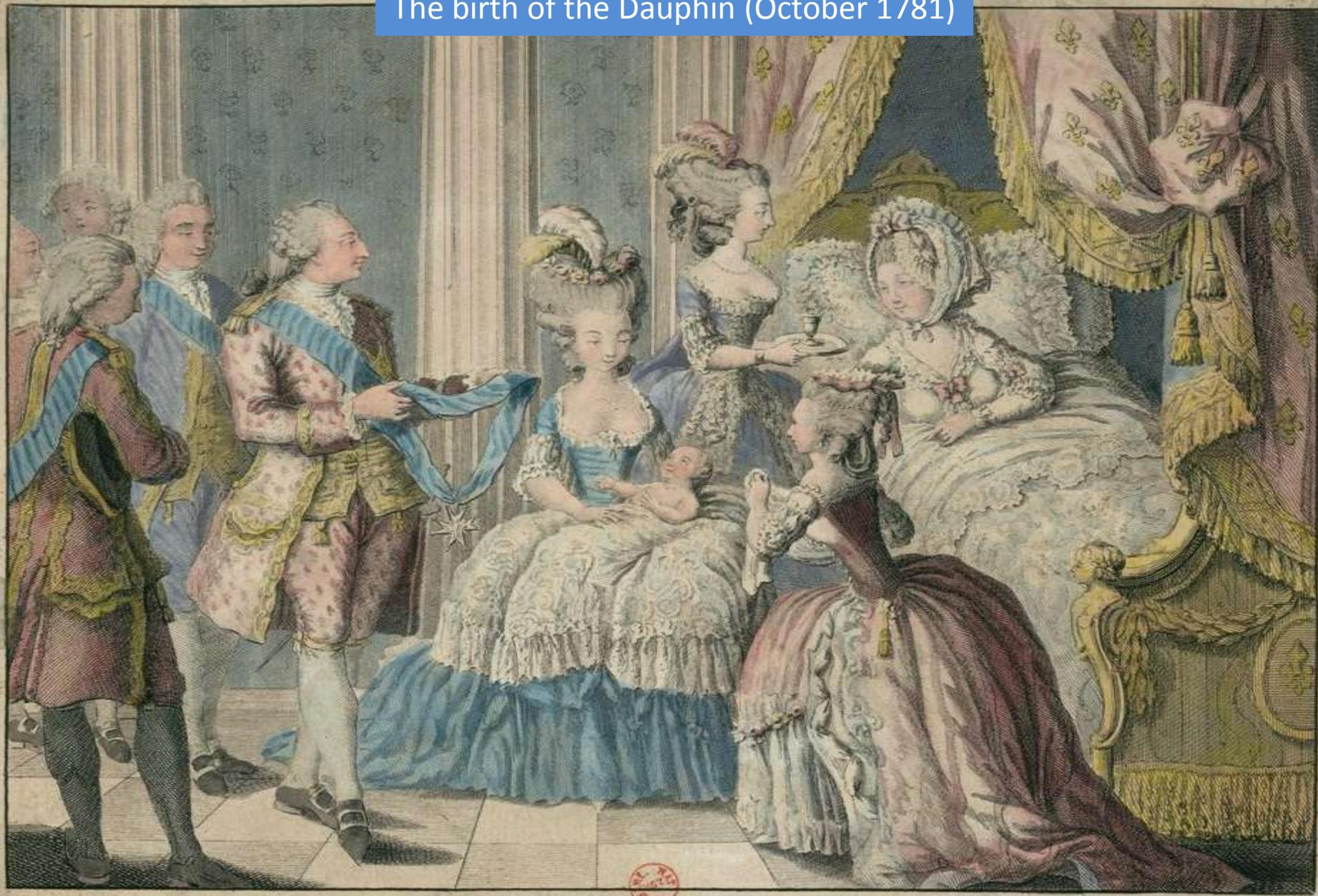
1779: second attempt  
Marie-Antoinette: NO!

# The American War of Independence

*"France is more in need of a vessel than a necklace"*



The birth of the Dauphin (October 1781)



NAISSANCE DE LOUIS-XAVIER-FRANÇOIS DAUPHIN DE FRANCE né le 22.Octobre 1781.

François quelle est votre allegreffe :

Le Roi vient d'exaucer vos vœux,

Langusté fruit de sa tendresse .

Comme lui vous rendra heureux .

A Paris rue St.Jean de Beauvais la 4<sup>e</sup> porte cochère à droite en entrant par la rue des Foyers .

*« We have real satisfaction in thinking that the most beautiful set of diamonds in existence will belong to the greatest and best of Queens »* (Böhmer, 12 July 1785)

THE  
BARBER OF SEVILLE,  
OR THE  
USELESS PRECAUTION;  
A  
C O M E D Y  
IN FOUR ACTS.  
WITH  
SONGS, &c.  
By the AUTHOR of EUGENIE, or the  
SCHOOL for RAKES.  
ADDRESSED TO  
R. B. SHERIDAN, Esq;  

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LONDON:  
Printed for J. CHOUQUET. 1776.



*« That man exists to torture me. He has always some mad scheme in mind »*  
(Marie-Antoinette)

**1 August:** Böhmer visits Mme Campan (the Queen's *première femme de chambre*)  
A contract between the Queen & the **Cardinal de Rohan** signed "Marie-Antoinette de France"  
A fake – The Queen always signed "Marie-Antoinette"



Baron de Breteuil (Minister of the King's Household)



« Comtesse » de la Motte-Valois  
A “friend” of the Queen

Her story: the Queen willing to buy  
the necklace discreetly through the  
intermediary of the Cardinal de  
Rohan

Rohan known for his lavish lifestyle  
Marie-Antoinette: « *He has used my name like a vile and clumsy forgerer* »

Louis, prince de Rohan-Guémené  
Elegant, polite, extremely ambitious & **naive**  
Grand Almoner of France, Bishop of Strasbourg, Academician



Rohan: an acute case of self-delusion  
Prime ministerial ambitions (but highly unqualified for high office)

The Rohan-Soubise: one of the most powerful aristocratic families (**Rohan-Soubise**) – Political ambition

April 1770: Rohan welcomed Marie-Antoinette in Strasbourg

1772: Rohan appointed ambassador  
in Vienna



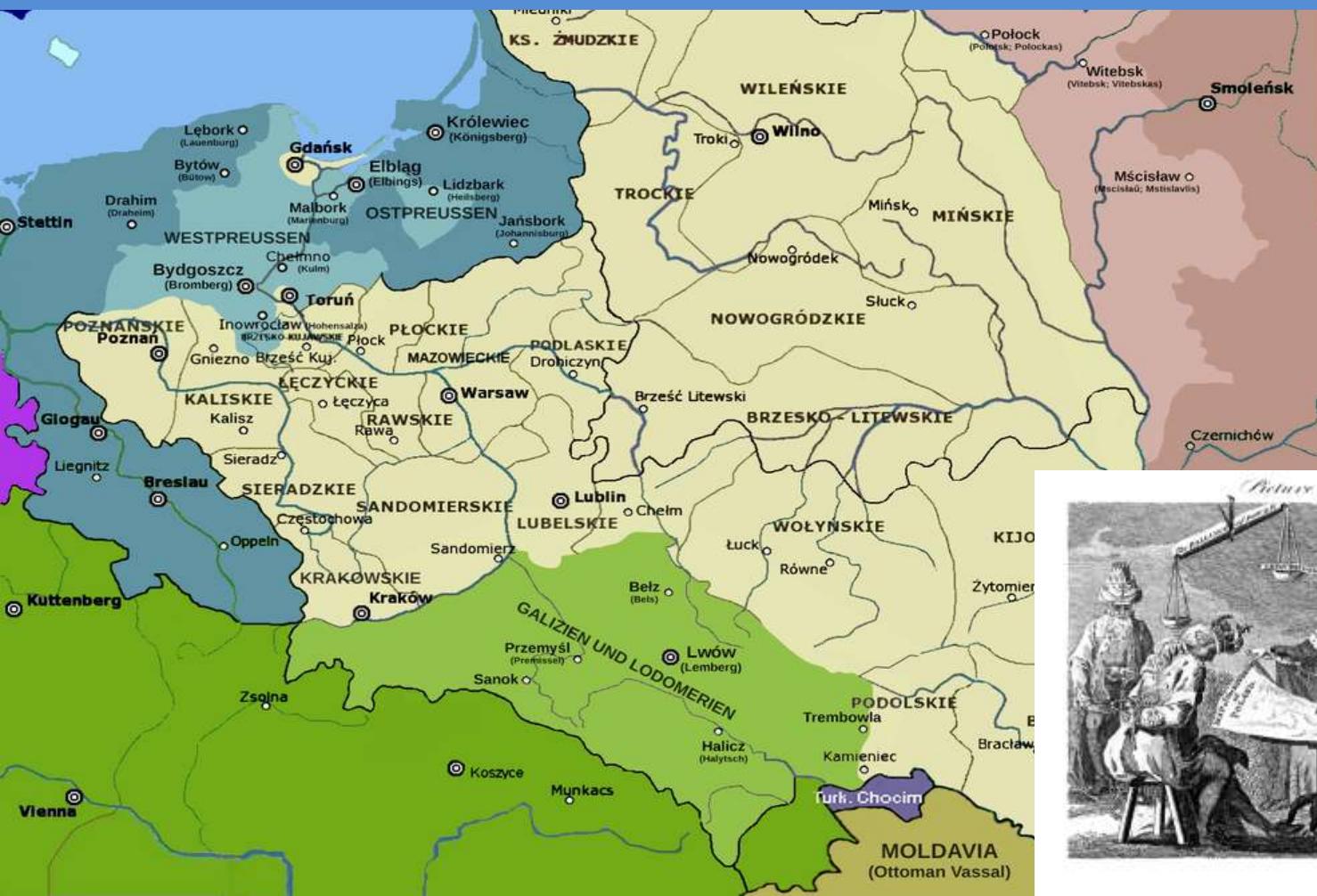
*« All our young and plain women are bewitched by him”*

*“He is stuffed with extremely improper remarks, which ill beseem his position as an ecclesiastic and a Minister”*

# The partition of Poland (1772)

Rohan: his dispatch ridiculing Maria-Theresa leaked

*« I have indeed seen Marie-Theresa cry over the misfortunes of the oppressed, but this princess , experienced in the art of revealing nothing, appeared to me to have tears at her command. In one hand she held a handkerchief to dry her eyes, in the other she seized the sword of negotiation in order to be the third partitioning power. »*



Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth 1773-1789 (since 1768 protectorate of Russian Empire)	
Lighter hue: Partition of 1772	
<span style="background-color: #d9e1f2; border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">■</span>	The Crown and Grand Duchy of Lithuania
<span style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; padding: 2px;">●</span>	Major cities
<span style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; padding: 2px;">○</span>	Other cities and towns
<span style="background-color: #1a237e; border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">■</span>	Prussia
<span style="background-color: #333; border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">■</span>	Sweden
<span style="background-color: #e63399; border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">■</span>	Saxony
<span style="background-color: #7b68ee; border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">■</span>	Ottoman Empire
<span style="background-color: #9acd32; border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">■</span>	Moldavia
<span style="background-color: #c8512e; border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">■</span>	Russian Empire
<span style="background-color: #add8e6; border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">■</span>	Denmark
<span style="background-color: #228b22; border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">■</span>	Habsburg Empire



July 1774: Rohan back at Versailles



Rohan desperate to reconcile with  
the new Queen



*« She treats him very coolly and no longer speaks to him »* (Mercy-Argenteau)

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

Marie-Antoinette sidestepped a request for reconciliation



1777: Rohan as grand almoner of France (most important member of the Church at court)  
Bishop of Strasbourg & Cardinal

Madame, Fille unique du Roi, sur les genoux de sa Gouvernante .

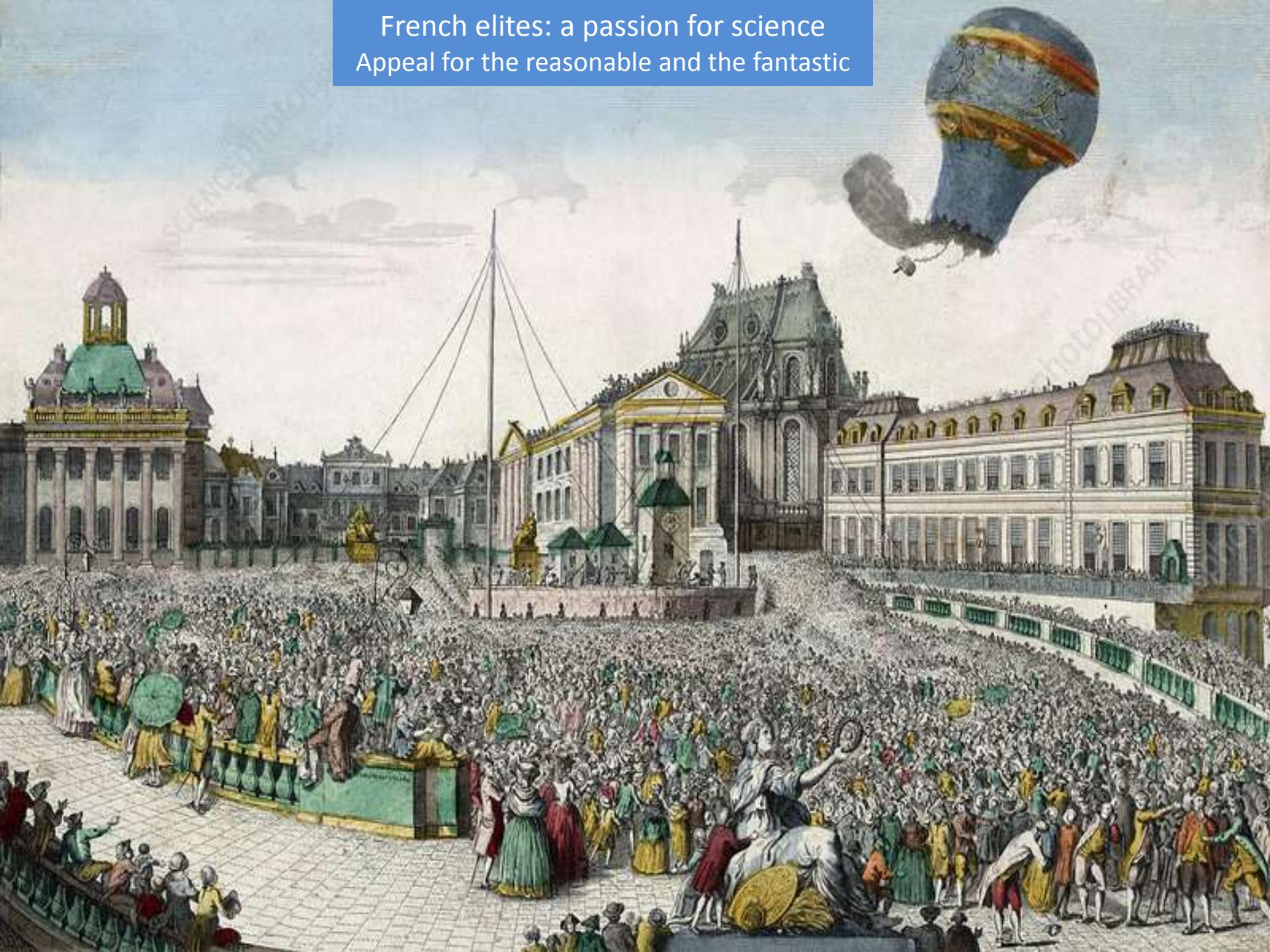
A Paris. Chez Ermant et Rapilly rue St-Jacques à la Ville de Coutances A. P. D.R.

1779: Rohan appointed Prince-Bishop of Strasbourg  
Lavish receptions – Rohan described as a spendthrift



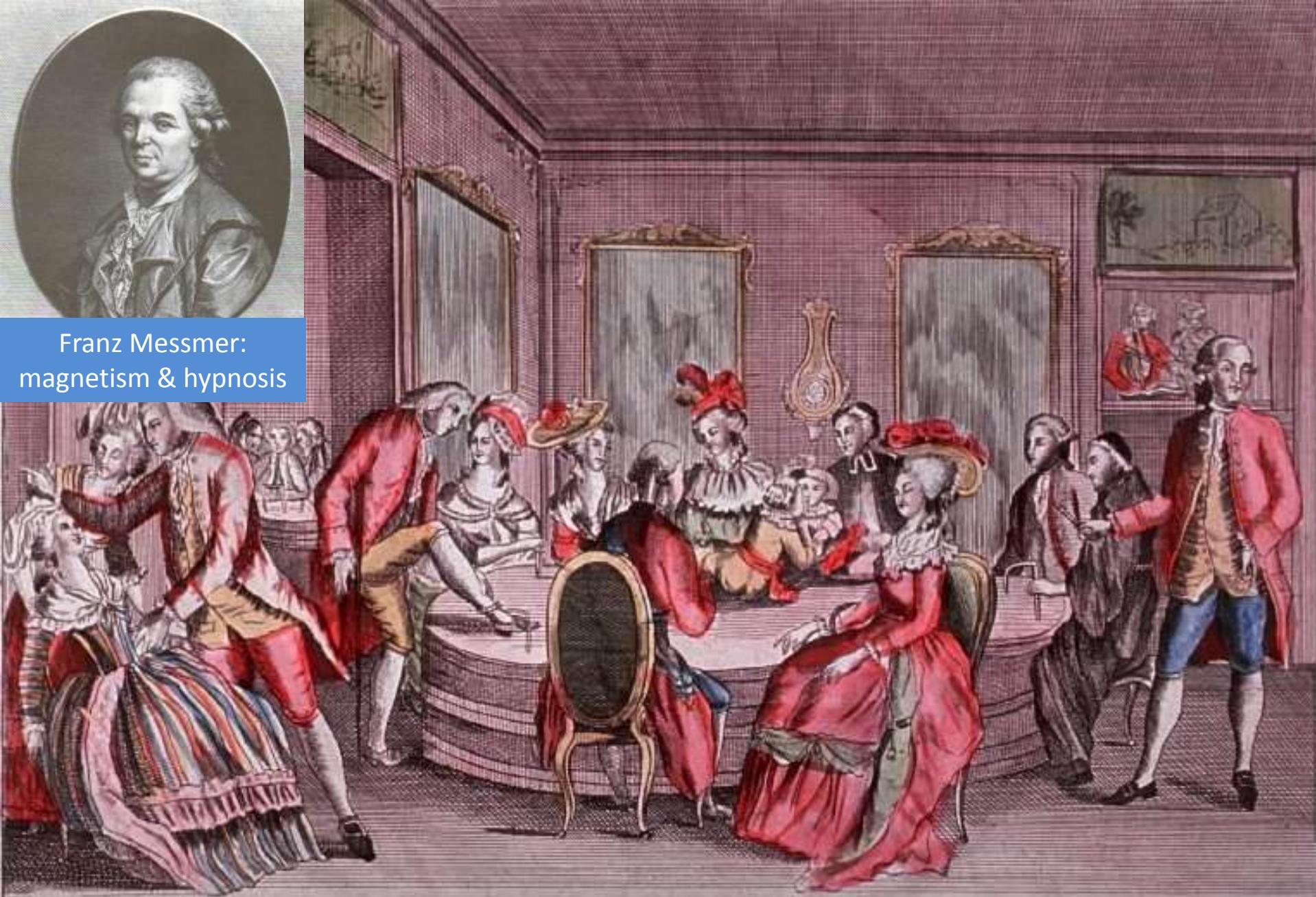
« Comte » de Cagliostro  
Freemason, “healer” & alchemist

French elites: a passion for science  
Appeal for the reasonable and the fantastic





Franz Mesmer:  
magnetism & hypnosis



### LE MAGNETISME ANIMAL

Importante Découverte par M<sup>r</sup> Mesmer Docteur en Medecine de la Faculté de Vienne en Autriche



Jeanne de La Motte-Valois

Euroz



Breteuil to Böhmer: write a memoir but do not mention the name of Mme de La Motte



15 August 1785: Assumption Day & the Queen's feast day  
A highlight of court life





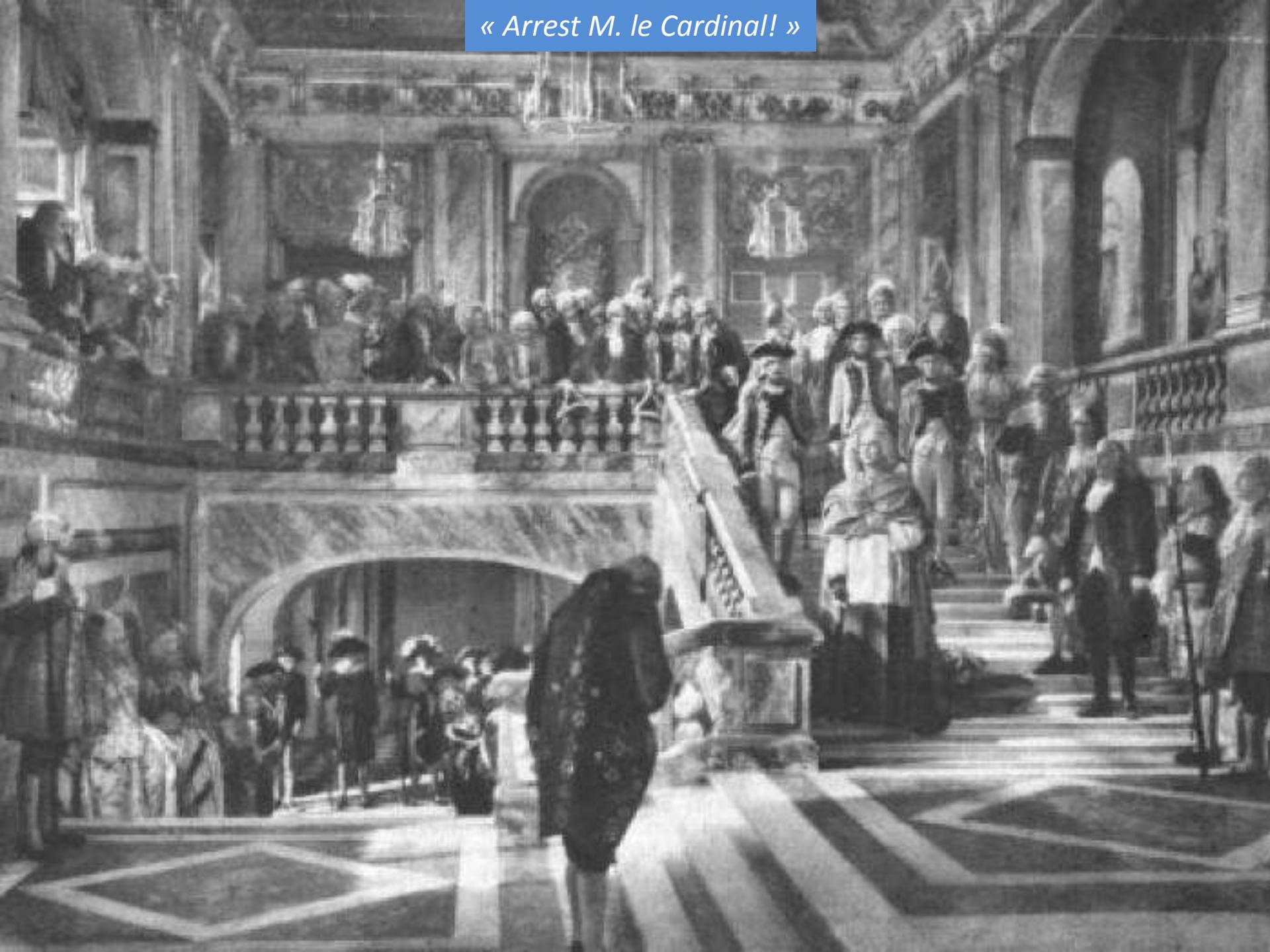
Louis XVI: « *I must warn you that you are to be arrested* »

Miromesnil (Minister of Justice)

*"My opinion about you has been established for a long enough time – You should have known that I would have never given you an order like this"*



*« Arrest M. le Cardinal! »*



Rohan « imprisoned » at the Bastille

Rohan perceived as a victim – Supporters flocked to the Bastille

A new fashion: red & yellow ribbons – *Cardinal on the straw*

Rohan's confession: a secret correspondence with the Queen + a secret meeting in the grove of Venus

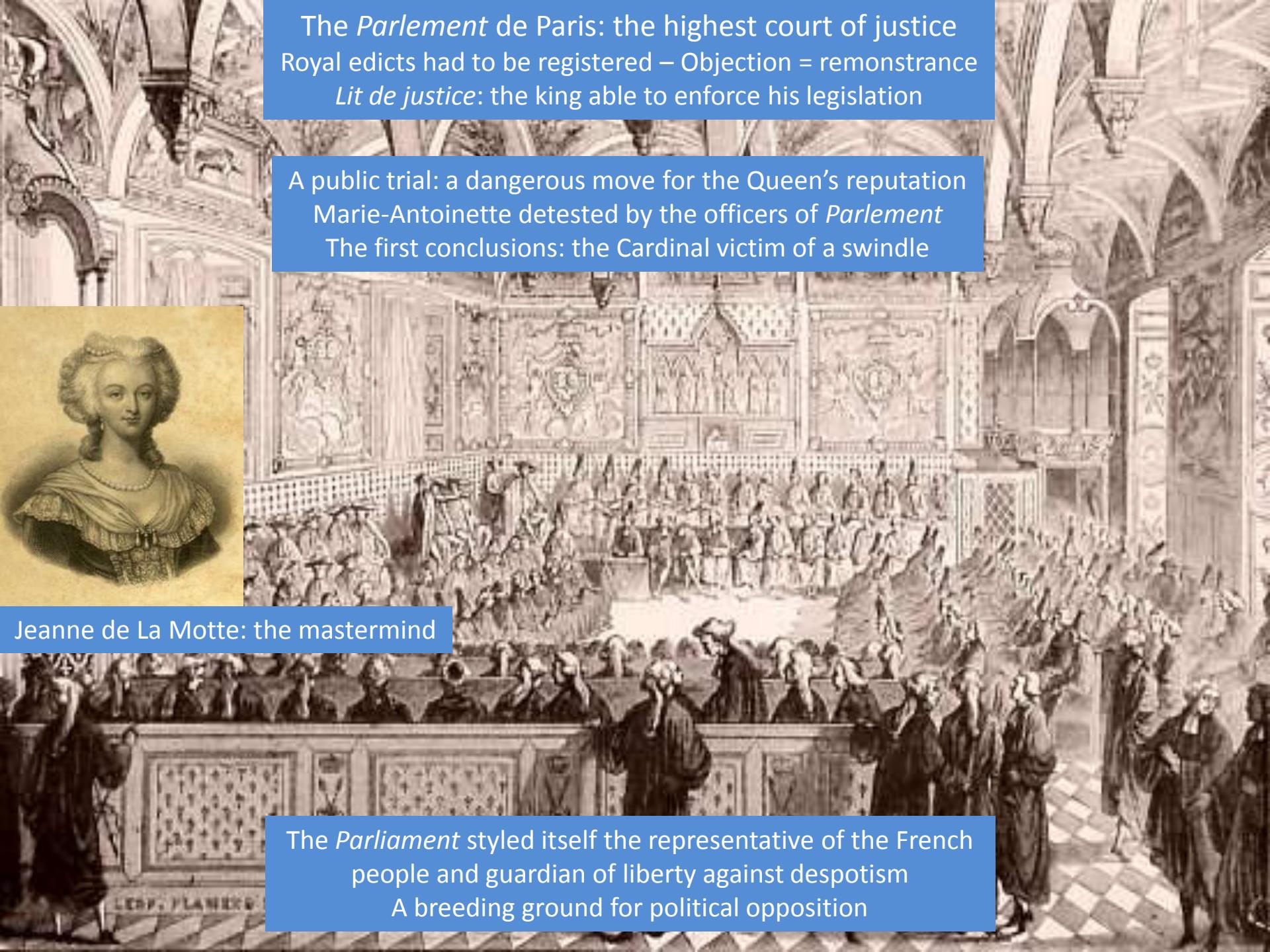


18 August: Mme de La Motte arrested and taken to the Bastille

Nicole Leguay

25 August: « *I want this horror and all its details to be brought into the open before the eyes of the whole world* »  
A public trial (the affair to be sent to the Parliament)  
The Queen convinced of the Cardinal's guilt





The *Parlement* de Paris: the highest court of justice  
Royal edicts had to be registered – Objection = remonstrance  
*Lit de justice*: the king able to enforce his legislation

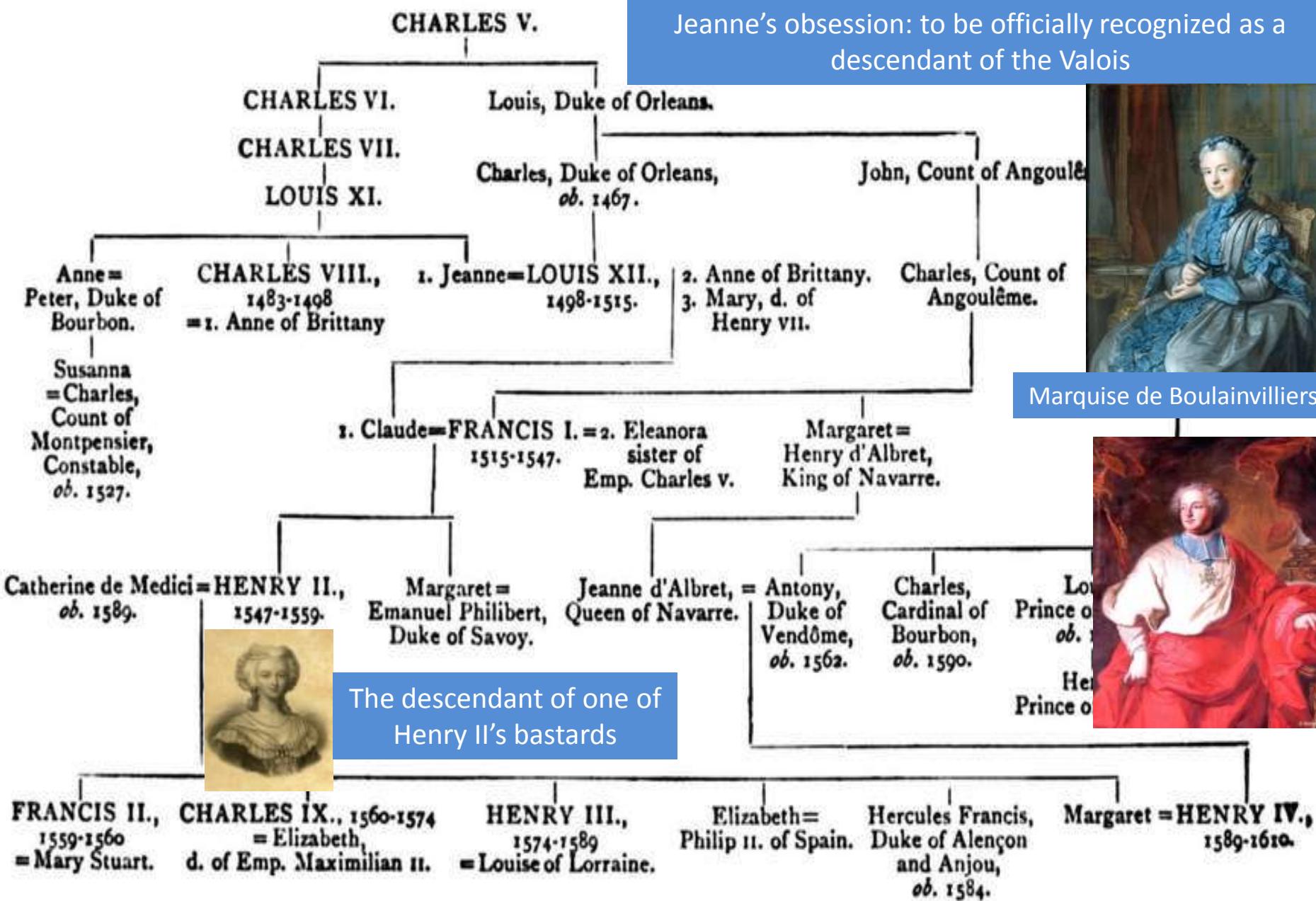
A public trial: a dangerous move for the Queen's reputation  
Marie-Antoinette detested by the officers of *Parlement*  
The first conclusions: the Cardinal victim of a swindle



Jeanne de La Motte: the mastermind

The *Parliament* styled itself the representative of the French people and guardian of liberty against despotism  
A breeding ground for political opposition

# GENEALOGY OF THE HOUSES OF VALOIS AND BOURBON.





Jeanne: Rohan's mistress



Marc Antoine de La Motte: fake « comte » and mediocre officer of the Royal Gendarmerie

## Jeanne brings her claim to Versailles: little success



Madame Elisabeth



Rétaux de Villette (the lover)  
Forged letter from the Queen to Rohan  
Arrested in March 1786



Step 1. Jeanne to Rohan: as a « friend » of Marie-Antoinette, she can help broker a reconciliation



## Step 2: forged letters from Marie-Antoinette asking the Cardinal to lend her money

The Queen's reckless expenditures & debts known by all

A complication: the Cardinal demands to meet the Queen



A new life of luxury for Jeanne

### Step 3: the grove of Venus

Marie-Antoinette and her ladies: night time strolls in the gardens in the summer

Her night walks *“provoked a lot of criticism in Paris”*  
Pamphlet: *Le lever de l'aurore*





Nicole Leguay in a simple white muslin dress (11 August 1784)

The fake Marie-Antoinette to Rohan: a rose & “*You know what this means*”

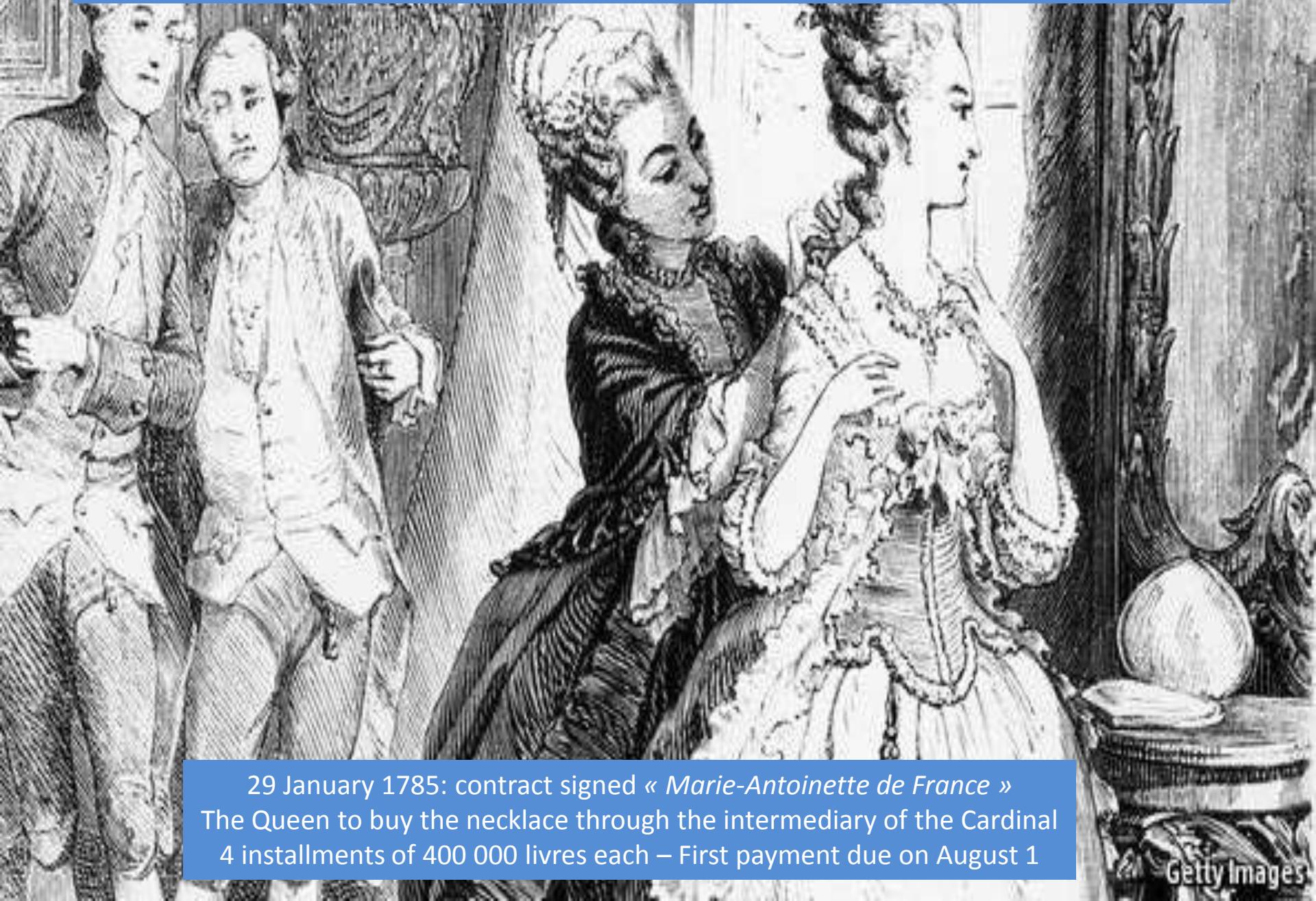
More loans to « the Queen »  
Jeanne's lavish lifestyle





## Step 4: the necklace

Böhmer contacts the “comtesse”: can she talk to “her friend” the Queen about their necklace?



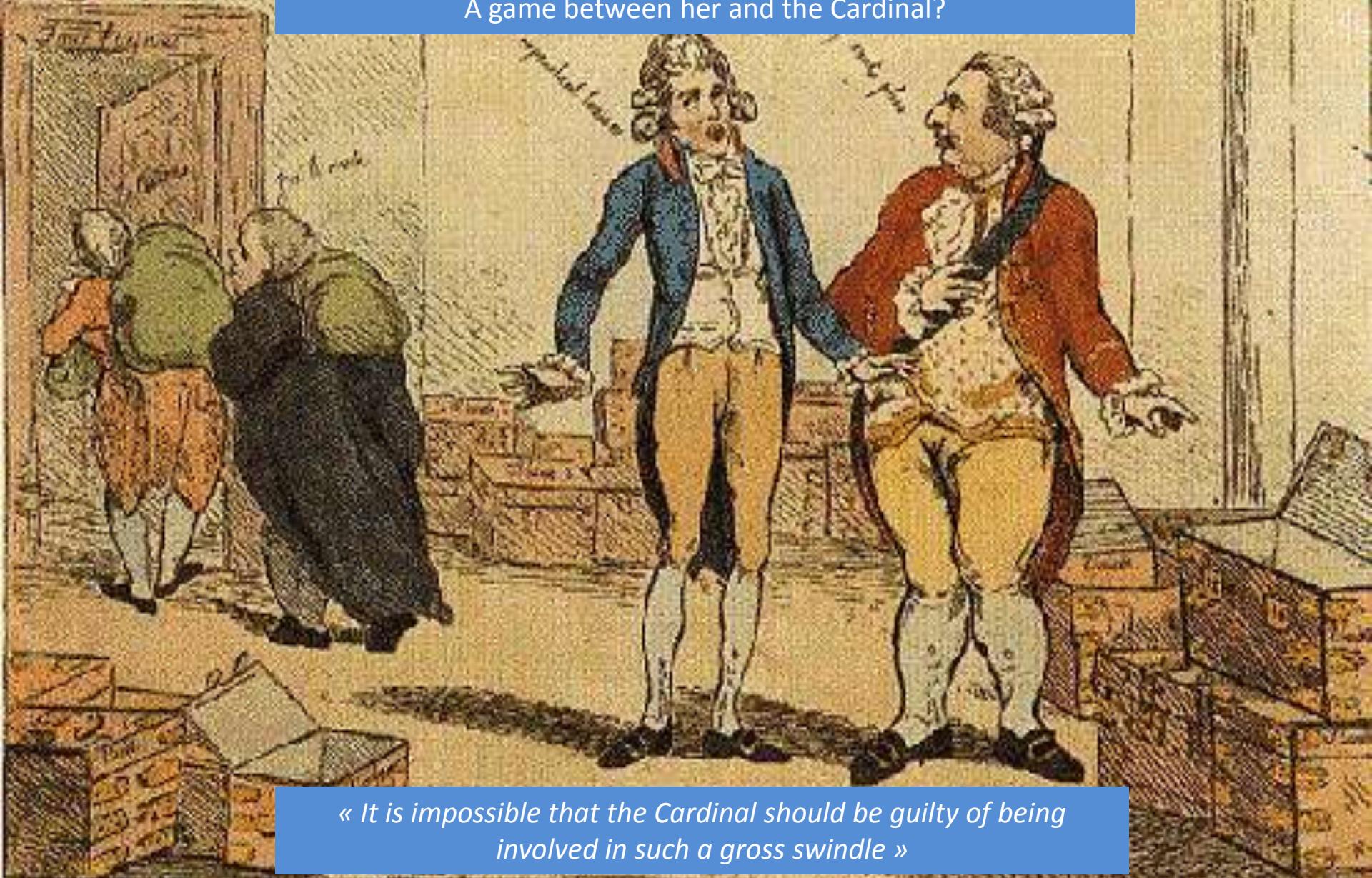
29 January 1785: contract signed « *Marie-Antoinette de France* »  
The Queen to buy the necklace through the intermediary of the Cardinal  
4 installments of 400 000 livres each – First payment due on August 1

1 February: Böhmer delivers the necklace to the Cardinal  
The Cardinal delivers the necklace to the Mme de La Motte



The « comte » de La Motte spotted in London negotiating the sales of damaged stones

Violent pamphlets & pornographic libels against the Queen  
Marie-Antoinette accused of being mixed up in the scandal  
A game between her and the Cardinal?



*« It is impossible that the Cardinal should be guilty of being involved in such a gross swindle »*

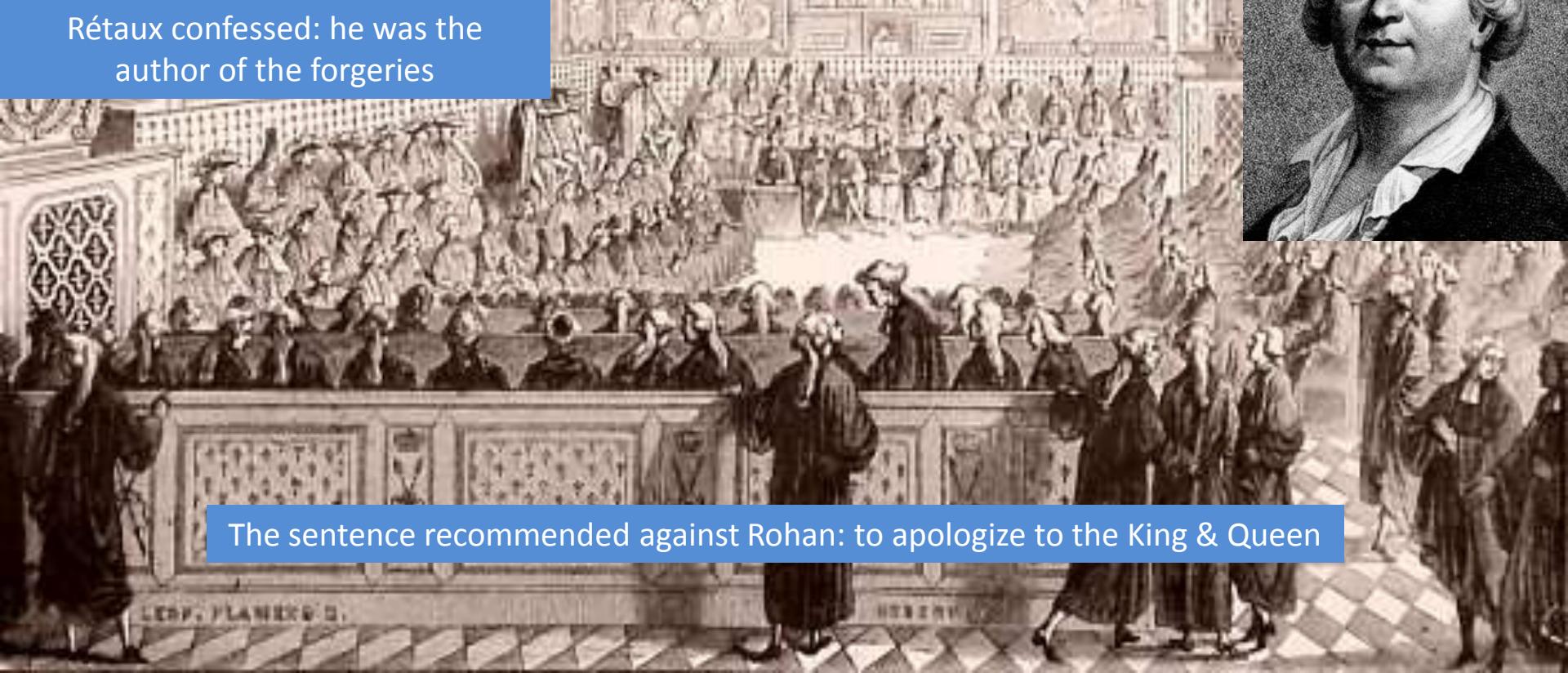
*Le DEFECT'*

22-26 May 1786: the trial



Mme de La Motte denied any wrongdoing  
and accused Cagliostro

Rétaux confessed: he was the  
author of the forgeries





The Verdict  
16 hours of debates: what fate for the Cardinal?

Rétaux banished

Jeanne: life imprisonment + to be flogged & branded on each shoulder with "v" for "voleuse" (thief)  
Rohan completely **absolved**





The Queen's reputation tarnished irreparably



« Madame Deficit »



Louis XVI influenced by an indignant Marie-Antoinette  
The mistake of agreeing to a public trial (transparency)  
Scandal could have been avoided



Goethe: « *the story of the necklace seems to me as frightening as the head of the Medusa* »



« *What a great and fortunate affair! A swindling Cardinal, the Queen involved in an affair of forgery! What mud on the crosier and sceptre! What a triumph for the ideas of liberty!* »  
(A councillor in Parlement)