

Marie Antoinette

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Marie Antoinette (2 Nov. 1755 – 21 Sep. 1793)

(Maria Antonia Josepha Johanna von
Habsburg-Lothringen)

1755 – 1764 - Born in Hofburg

Place, Vienna daughter of Maria Theresa Empress of Austria and Francis I, Holy Roman Emperor.

“Antoine” is her affectionate

nickname. Court protocol had been much relaxed in the later 18c in Vienna allowing

the Imperial children to lead a more “bourgeois” life style within the family

particularly at Schönbrunn Palace. MA will attempt to re-create this

light-hearted, relaxed atmosphere in the Petit Trianon in Versailles. Relaxed supervision meant that the

future Queen’s education left much to be desired. Her mother’s close relationship to her older and bright

sister Maria Christina will lead her to always distrust intelligent women.

1765 – Death of Francis I. Maria Theresa now rules with young son Joseph II.

The empress is anxious to marry off her many daughters in order to cement her

alliances in Europe.

1767 – Smallpox decimates Imperial family. MA’s sisters will die or loose their
looks. This ultimately

leaves 12 year-old Antoine as the only potential bride left in the family for

the 14 year-old Dauphin of France, Louis Auguste.

1770 – April 19 - Marriage by proxy in Church of the Augustine Friars, Vienna –

restyled Marie-Antoinette, Dauphine of France. Before leaving Maria Theresa reminded her of her duty to her

home country; that she shouldn't forget she was Austrian, and thus had to

promote the interests of Austria even as she was to be the future Queen of

France.

7 May - Handed over to her new French entourage on the Rhine. Before

reaching Versailles, she meets her future brothers-in-law, Louis Stanislas Xavier, Comte de Provence, and Charles

Philippe, Comte d'Artois. In Versailles

she will meet the King Louis XV, his unmarried daughters (Mesdames Tantes)

and her younger sister-in-law Madame Elisabeth.

16 May - ceremonial wedding of the Dauphin and Dauphine in Versailles

followed by ritual bedding. The lack, however, of consummation will plague the reputation of both the

Dauphin and Dauphine for seven years.

1772 - After months of continued pressure from her mother and the Austrian minister, the Comte de Mercy-Argenteau, Marie Antoinette grudgingly agrees to speak to the King's Mistress Madame du Barry on New Year's Day 1772.

1773 - First official appearance in Paris on 8 June at Tuileries palace a resounding success, with a reported 50,000 people crying out to see her. A visit to the opera for a court performance was also a success.

At court, however, Mesdames Tantes called Marie Antoinette l'Autrichienne, the "Austrian woman" (on the eve of the Revolution, she acquired the nickname l'Autruchienne, a pun making use of the words autruche "ostrich" and chienne "bitch".) The Dauphine receives constant letters from her mother, who also receives secret reports from Mercy d'Argenteau on her daughter's behavior. She accuses her daughter of being incapable of arousing her husband. To make up for the lack of affection from her husband and the endless criticism of her mother, MA began to spend more on gambling, trips to Paris, new clothing (from Rose Bertin her most famous couturière), shoes, pomade and rouge. MA also began to form deep friendships with various ladies in her retinue. Most noted were the sensitive and "pure" widow, the Princesse de Lamballe, whom she appointed as Superintendent of her Household, and the fun-loving Gabrielle, duchesse de Polignac. These close friendships would later cause accusations of lesbianism to be lodged against MA.

Other close confidants were, the Comte d'Artois, Madame Elisabeth and her sister-in-law, the Comtesse de Provence. In 1774 the premiere of Gluck's (her former music teacher in Vienna) opera Iphigénie en Aulide, secures the Dauphine's position as a patron of the arts. On 27 April Louis XV falls ill. On 4 May the dying king sends the Comtesse du Barry away from Versailles. On May 10, at 3 pm, he died of smallpox at the age of 64.

1775 – 11 June - Louis is crowned King as Louis XVI of France at Rheims Cathedral along with the Queen.
August 6 - MA's sister-in-law, the Comtesse d'Artois, gives birth to a son, the Duc d'Angoulême.

A plethora of graphic satirical pamphlets (the libelles) are released, about the king's impotence and the queen's searching for sexual relief elsewhere (with the Princesse de Lamballe, and her handsome brother-in-law, the Comte d'Artois.) The Queen redoubles her spending and diversions.

27 Aug. – The domain of the Petit Trianon, is given to her as a gift by Louis XVI.

1777 - April - visit

by the Emperor Joseph attempt to find out why the royal marriage had not been consummated. It is suspected that Louis XVI suffers from phimosis and needs corrective surgery. However, after talking to the king himself, Joseph is convinced that the king has "satisfactory" erections but that, upon introducing his "member", doesn't stay long enough to ejaculate. It was due to Joseph's intervention that on August 30, 1777, that the marriage was officially consummated.

1778 – Arrival in court of the handsome Swede diplomat, Count Axel von Fersen.

19 Dec. – Birth of Marie Antoinette's daughter, Marie Thérèse Charlotte (Madame Royale) after a particularly difficult labour. The windows had to be torn out in the Queen's packed room to revive her during labour. The baby's paternity was contested in the libelles and even by the ambitious heir presumptive the Comte de Provence.

1780 - The Queen abolishes heavy make up and institutes simpler fashions in dress as those seen in her famous portraits by Elisabeth Vigée-Le Brun.

29 Nov. - Death of Marie Theresa.

1781 – 22 Oct. Birth of MA's first son Louis Joseph Xavier François (Duc de Bretagne) to the immense relief of the royal couple. News of the British defeat in Yorktown in the American war arrive shortly after the birth.

1782 - Marie Antoinette appoints her favourite, the Duchess de Polignac, to the position of Royal governess and going against tradition spends much time with her children herself.

1783 - Count von Fersen returns from America but leaves again for Sweden where he is appointed captain of the bodyguard of his sovereign, Gustavus III.

1784 - MA launches the creation of a "model village" near the Petit Trianon of a mill and 12 cottages. 6 week visit by Fersen. The Queen is pregnant again. Buys Château de Saint-Cloud from King's cousin the Duc d'Orléans for the great price of 6 million livres with the intention of leaving it to her children. The idea of a French queen owning her own residence independent of the king was deemed shocking.

1785 - March

27- Birth of second son, Louis Charles (Duc de Normandie.) Popular opinion, however is against the queen, and the image of a licentious, spendthrift, empty-headed foreign queen has now taken root in the French psyche. Several months after the birth of Louis Joseph, the queen receives a letter from the famed jewellers Boehmer and Bassenge concerning a certain diamond necklace which the jewellers understood to have been purchased by the queen through the auspices of the Cardinal de Rohan. MA was

shocked as she felt nothing but disdain for Rohan. Nor had she shown any interest towards the diamond necklace itself, an ostentatious piece originally made with the Comtesse du Barry in mind. It turned out that the gullible cardinal, desperate to gain in the Queen's good graces, had been tricked into buying the necklace for the queen by Jeanne de Lamotte-Valois, a con woman. Lamotte-Valois convinced the old cardinal that she was a close friend of the Queen's and that she had been commissioned by her to help get the necklace through him. After the cardinal purchased the necklace, it was given to a "valet", who was in fact Jeanne's husband, who pried the gems from the necklace and sold them to London jewellers. The Cardinal, Lamotte and her husband were arrested and the case brought before the high court of the Paris Parlement. This was the first time in history that a Queen of France found herself involved in a sordid and public court case. The Parlement proceeded to acquit the Cardinal in defiance of Royal wishes. In spite of having never been involved in the purchase of the necklace, the country chose to believe that the queen was lying. Her reputation never recovered from this blow.

1786 - The stress of the affair causes the 30-year old Queen to give premature birth to a 2nd daughter, Sophie Hélène Béatrix on 9 July. As the queen had feared, her health was affected by the pregnancy and she began to complain of shortness of breath soon afterwards.

1787 –

Feb. 22 - An assembly of Notables

(the first in 160 years) called by the King and finance minister Calonne meets to discuss deteriorating financial situation in France. No reforms are voted and King is defied. The Queen now assumes more strongly her maternal role seeking to improve her public image. Her friendship with the spendthrift Polignacs cools. The King's increasingly depressed state also forces her to get more involved in politics. Blamed for the financial crisis MA will be labelled “Madame Déficit” in the summer. Death of youngest child Sophie.

1788 – May – King calls meeting of Estates General (Clergy, Nobility, Commons) for the first time since 1614. MA much more concerned with health of Dauphin suffering from tuberculosis. Despite the new government of the popular Necker bread prices rise in the winter.

1789 – 5 May – Opening of the Estates General in Versailles.

5 June – Death of Dauphin in Meudon is completely ignored by public.

21 June – The Third Estate

(Commons) declares itself a National Assembly (Oath of the Tennis court.)

11 July – Necker dismissed.

14 July – Storming of the Bastille by

Paris mob. Beginning of the émigration by nobility (Comte d’Artois, duchesse de Polignac.)

August – Declaration of the “Rights of Man” by National Assembly, advent of a constitutional monarchy.

5-6 October – Paris market women march unto Versailles and storm the palace in the early morning. Queen’s Swiss guards killed defending her bedroom. MA flees into King’s apartment. Royal family, along with the Comte de Provence, his wife and Madame Elisabeth, are forced to move to Paris. In the city, the King and Queen are installed in the old Tuileries palace.

1791 – 21 June – The royal family disguised escape the palace in an attempt to reach the royalist stronghold of Montmédy in the east. The escape has been organised by the Queen’s favourite Fersen. The royals are recognized and arrested the next day in Varennes and brought back to Paris in a humiliating procession.

1792 – 20 April – France declares war on Austria to MA’s consternation. Her unpopularity reaches a new high. Her husband’s vetoing of measures proclaimed by the assembly causes her new nickname: “Madame Veto.”

10 August – Mob attacks Tuileries palace and massacres Swiss guards. Royals flee for protection to nearby Legislative Assembly. They will be removed to an old medieval fortress in the Marais, the Temple.

September - The Queen’s close friend Princesse de Lamballe was one of the victims of the “September Massacres », savagely killed in prison on September 3, her head was affixed on a pike and marched outside MA’s window. MA fainted upon learning about the gruesome end that had befallen her former companion.

21 Sep. – Monarchy abolished, the Assembly becomes a “National Convention” – advent of first French Republic. The royals are now ordinary citizens and styled “Capet”, the original name of French royal dynasty.

December – Louis XVI tried for treachery is condemned to death.

1793 – 21 Jan. - Louis XVI (aged 38) publicly guillotined on Place de la Révolution (Concorde).

MA’s health rapidly deteriorates, suffers from tuberculosis and possibly uterine cancer suffering from frequent haemorrhages.

3 July – Her surviving son Louis Charles (now Louis XVII) is taken away and placed in the care of a cobbler.

1 Aug. – MA taken to Conciergerie prison at the Palais de Justice on Ile de la Cité. Refuses to consider escape plots.

14 Oct. – Trial of the Queen.

Accused of orchestrating orgies in Versailles, sending millions of livres of treasury money to Austria, plotting to kill the Duc d'Orléans, declaring her son to be the new King of France and orchestrating the massacre of the Swiss Guards in 1792. The most serious charge, however, was that she sexually abused her son. Her fate was sealed by the new Committee of Public Safety and she is condemned to death.

16 Oct. – MA was guillotined at 12:15 pm 2 weeks short of her 38th birthday. Her body was thrown in an unmarked grave in the former Madeleine cemetery (closed in 1794). Both her body and that of Louis XVI were exhumed on January 18, 1815 and re-buried in the necropolis of French Kings at St. Denis.

Artists, sculptors:

Martin Van
Meytens (1695-1770) – Famille impériale 1755

Jean-Etienne Liotard (1702-1789) – archiducs – M.
Elisabeth, Pierre Léopold, M. Josèphe, M. Antoinette 1762

Joseph Ducreux (1735-1802) -
M. Antoinette d'Autriche 1769

Louis Michel Van Loo (1707-1771) – Duc de Berry (Louis XVI)
1769, Cte de Provence 1770, Cte d'Artois 1770

François-Hubert Drouais (1727-1775) -
Louis XV à 63 ans 1773, Ctsse de Provence 1770

Joseph Ducreux (1735-1802) – Ctsse d'Artois c. 1773, Louis
XVI 1792

Jean-Baptiste II Lemoyne (1704-1778) – M. Antoinette
Dauphine de France 1771

Joseph Siffred
Duplessis (1725-1802) - Etude visage M.A. 1771, Louis XVI 1775

Anton von Maron (1731-1808) – Maria-Theresa as widow 1773,
Emperor Joseph II 1775

Elisabeth

Louise Vigée Le Brun (1755-1842)

Louis Auguste Brun
(1758-1815) – M. Antoinette à cheval 1783

Louis-Simon Boizot
(1743-1809) – M. Antoinette Reine de France 1781

Adelaide Labille-Guiard
(1749-1803) – Madame Victoire 1787

Alexandre Kucharski
(1741-1819) – M. Antoinette aux tuileries 1791, MA au Temple 1793

Jacques-Louis David (1748-1825) – M. Antoinette taken to her
execution 16 Oct. 1793

Architects,
cabinet makers, bronziers, jewelers:

Martin Carlin
(c.1730-1785) – coffre à
bijoux 1770

Richard Mique
(1728-1794)

Jean Henri Riesener
(1734-1806)

Adam Weisweiler
(1746-1820) – Table à écrire
1784 (laque)

François
Tousaint Foliot (1748-1808) – fauteuil à la reine 1779

Jean-Baptiste
Claude Sené (1747-1803) – fauteuil gd

cabinet, St
Cloud 1787 - ecran chambre Versailles 1787

George Jacob
(1739-1814) – mobilier

laiterie Rambouillet 1787

Pierre

Philippe Thomire (1751-1843) – pendule « Vestales » 1789

Bohemer and

Bassenge – « collier de la Reine » 1774

Ferdinand Schwerdfeger

– Coffre aux diamants,
1787