



La Grande Mademoiselle at the Court of France: 1627--1693

Vincent J. Pitts

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Anne-Marie-Louise d'Orléans -- a cousin to Louis XIV and known in her time and to posterity as "La Grande Mademoiselle" -- is still remembered in France today for her unconventional life and heroic deeds. A participant in the factional struggles known as the Fronde, which nearly consumed France during the minority of Louis XIV, Mademoiselle ultimately sided with a coalition of princes and great noblemen who sought to depose the king's prime minister, Cardinal Mazarin, and seize control of the state. During the fiercest fighting in Paris, she ordered the cannons of the Bastille to be turned on the king's troops, saving the rebel army -- a deed that cost her five years of internal exile and the lasting mistrust of Louis XIV. Late in her life, she again shocked the court with her attempt to marry an officer of the king's guard, a proposed misalliance that provoked an enormous public outcry and greatly embarrassed the king. In addition, she was a privileged chronicler of court life, a witness to the ministries of Richelieu and Mazarin and to the most successful decades of Louis XIV's reign. Her *Mémoires*, first published in 1718 and initially suppressed in France, remains a major source of information on the period's political and social events as well as a page-turning melodrama of court intrigue. Mademoiselle also left behind a number of other works -- literary portraits of the prominent personalities of her day, letters, satirical short stories, and two essays on religion -- which, together with her memoirs, stand as an unusual achievement for any seventeenth-century woman, let alone one so high-born and wealthy.

In *La Grande Mademoiselle at the Court of France*, Vincent Pitts presents a comprehensive and engaging biography of this remarkable woman which draws upon Mademoiselle's writings and his own impressive command of her times. Viewed through her writings, the events of Mademoiselle's life offer a unique perspective on several aspects of seventeenth-century France: the evolution of the Bourbon monarchy over the course of the century, the dynamics of aristocratic resistance to the centralizing power of the state, and the debate over the role of women in public and private life. As both an active participant in and a keen observer of the great events of her time, La Grande Mademoiselle helped define her age even as she challenged the limitations it placed upon her, as Pitts's rich and rigorous account of her life makes clear.

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