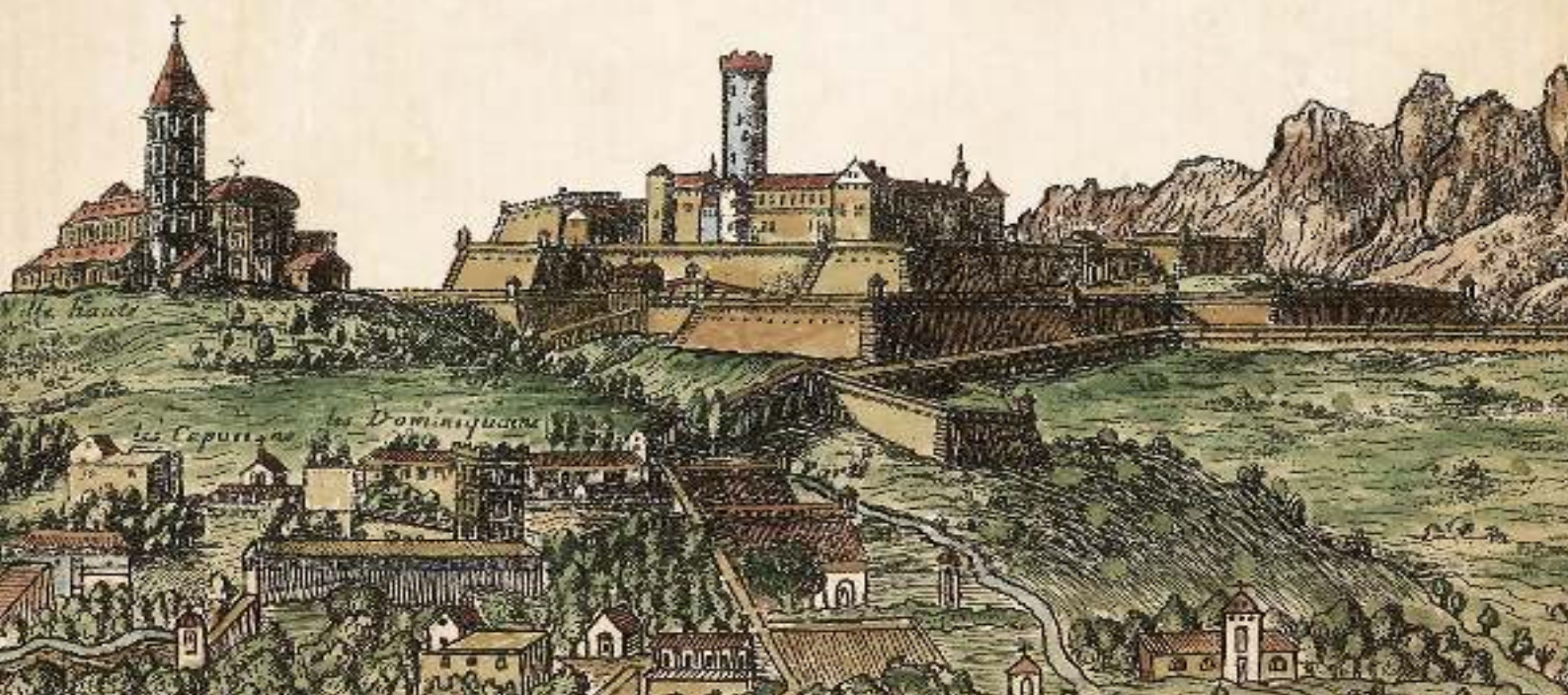


PAUL SONNINO

THE SEARCH FOR THE MAN IN THE IRON MASK

A Historical Detective Story



The Search for the Man in the Iron Mask



The First Composite of Eustache Dauger

The Search for the Man in the Iron Mask

A Historical Detective Story

Paul Sonnino

Rowman & Littlefield

Lanham • Boulder • New York • London

Published by Rowman & Littlefield

A wholly owned subsidiary of The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc.

4501 Forbes Boulevard, Suite 200, Lanham, Maryland 20706

www.rowman.com

Unit A, Whitacre Mews, 26-34 Stannary Street, London SE11 4AB, United Kingdom

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Information Available

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Sonnino, Paul, author.

Title: The search for the Man in the Iron Mask : a historical detective story / Paul Sonnino.

Description: Lanham : Rowman & Littlefield, 2015. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2015035816 | ISBN 9781442253636 (cloth : alk. paper) | ISBN 9781442253643 (electronic)

Subjects: LCSH: Man in the Iron Mask. | France—History—Louis XIV, 1643–1715. | Political prisoners—France—17th century—History.

Classification: LCC DC130.M25 S66 2015 | DDC 944/.033092—dc23 LC record available at <http://lccn.loc.gov/2015035816>



TM The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Science—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992.

Printed in the United States of America



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Principal Characters

(In Order of Appearance)

Eustache Dauger: Man in the iron mask

Nicolas Fouquet: Brilliant and elegant minister of finance, disgraced by Louis XIV, fellow inmate with the iron mask

Saint-Mars: Governor of Pinerolo, Exilles, Sainte-Marguerite, and the Bastille; guardian of Fouquet and the man in the iron mask

Marquis de Louvois: Son of Michel Le Tellier, who succeeded his father as minister of war under Louis XIV

Anne of Austria: Daughter of Philip III of Spain; married at the age of fourteen to Louis XIII of France; mother, according to the legend, of the man in the iron mask

Louis XIII: King of France, cold and distant husband of Anne of Austria

Duchess de Chevreuse: Beautiful and cunning companion of Anne of Austria who survived disgrace and exile, and revolution to become a key participant in the mystery of the iron mask

Cardinal Richelieu: Prime minister of Louis XIII, the nemesis of Anne of Austria

Cardinal Mazarin: Italian adventurer who gained the confidence of Cardinal Richelieu and Louis XIII and, after their death, managed to gain the confidence of Anne of Austria, helping her and her son Louis XIV to emerge victorious over the revolt of the *Fronde*

Cardinal de Retz: Archbishop of Paris who exploited the revolt of the *Fronde* in order to become cardinal and paid the piper after its failure

Claude Roux: Indomitable Protestant from Nîmes who became infuriated at Louis XIV and tried to stir all Europe against him at the height of his power

Jean-Baptiste Colbert: Ambitious bureaucrat who became Mazarin's private secretary and used that position to poison his mind and that of Louis against Fouquet

Henrietta Maria: Sister of Louis XIII, wife of Charles I of England, who had to return to France and live there in extreme poverty

Oliver Cromwell: English gentleman who became a general in the English Civil War and was primarily responsible for the trial and execution of Charles I

The Count de Charost: Captain of the guard of Louis XIV, Governor of Calais, whose son married the daughter of Nicolas Fouquet

Antoine-Hercule Picon, Clerk of Colbert: Treasurer of Cardinal Mazarin, chief clerk of Colbert under Louis XIV

Eustache de La Salle: Guard of Louis XIV in the company of the Count de Charost, who fired his weapon in the vicinity of the king and was suspected of being an accomplice of Claude Roux

Charles II: Eldest son of Charles I and Henrietta Maria, restored to the throne of England in 1660 whose restoration helps to explain the arrest of Eustache Dauger in 1669 and solve the mystery of the iron mask



Chronological Table

1601

Birth of Anne of Austria (September 22)

Birth of Louis (XIII) (September 27)

1602

Birth of Giulio Mazzarino (July 14)

1615

Marriage of Louis XIII and Anne of Austria (November 24)

1617

Arrest and killing of Concini (April 24)

1620

Reconciliation of Louis with his mother

1621

Death of Luynes

1623

Bishop of Luçon becomes Cardinal Richelieu

1624

France moves against Spanish in Switzerland

1625

Buckingham's flirtation with Anne of Austria

1626

Conspiracy in favor of Louis XIII's brother Monsieur

1630

Day of Dupes (November 11)

1631

Louis XIII's mother leaves France

1635

France allies with Dutch and Swedes against Hapsburgs

1638

Birth of Louis (XIV) (September 15)

1641

Mazarin becomes cardinal

1642

Civil war in England; Queen Henrietta Maria, sister of Louis XIII, supports husband Charles I

Death of Richelieu (December 4) succeeded by Mazarin

1643

Death of Louis XIII (May 14)

Anne and Mazarin continue war

1644

1646

Mazarin pushes his luck, scares Dutch allies

1648

Beginning of *Fronde* in France

Dutch make peace with Spain

French sign Peace of Westphalia, but not with Spain

1649

Execution of Charles I in England (January 30)

Court of France abandons Paris

Mazarinades in full swing

Return of court to Paris

1650

Anne and Mazarin arrest Prince de Condé and other princes

1651

Frondeurs, friends of Condé, and Monsieur drive Mazarin into exile

Anne sticks with Mazarin

Rebels fall out among themselves

Return of Mazarin

1652

Battle of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine (July 2)

Condé joins Spanish

Failure of *Fronde*

1653

Mazarin, with help from Colbert and Fouquet, recovers losses

Cromwell turns England into Protectorate

1657

French ally with Cromwell against Spain

1658

French and English take Dunkirk

Death of Cromwell

1659

Peace of Pyrenees with Spain (November 7)

1660

Restoration of Charles II as King of England (May 8)

Marriage of Louis XIV and Maria Theresa (June 9)

1661

Death of Mazarin (March 9)

Personal reign of Louis XIV

Arrest of Fouquet (September 5)

Chamber of Justice (November 15)

1662–1664

Trial of Fouquet

Arrest of Barbès

Prosecution of Desfontaines and Hoyau

Banishment of Fouquet

1665

Saint-Mars in Pinerolo receives Fouquet

1666

Death of Anne of Austria (January 20)

1667–1668

War of Devolution

Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle (May 2, 1668)

Morland informs on Claude Roux

1669

Louis XIV plans war against Dutch

Arrest of Eustache de La Salle (June 16)

Execution of Roux (June 22)

Decision to arrest Eustache Dauger (July 19)

Saint-Mars in Pinerolo receives Dauger

1671

Saint-Mars in Pinerolo receives Lauzun

1672

Louis XIV and Charles II begin Dutch War

1674

Charles II abandons Louis XIV

1675

Dauger becomes valet of Fouquet

1678

Louis ends Dutch War

1680

Death of Fouquet (March 23)

1681

Release of Lauzun (April)

Saint-Mars brings Dauger and La Rivière to Exilles

1683

Death of Colbert

1687

Saint-Mars brings Dauger to Sainte-Marguerite

Death of Mattioli in Sainte-Marguerite

1689–1697

Louis XIV holds off Europe in Nine Years War

1698

Saint-Mars brings Dauger with him to Bastille

1701–1713

Louis XIV barely survives War of the Spanish Succession

1703

Death of Eustache Dauger

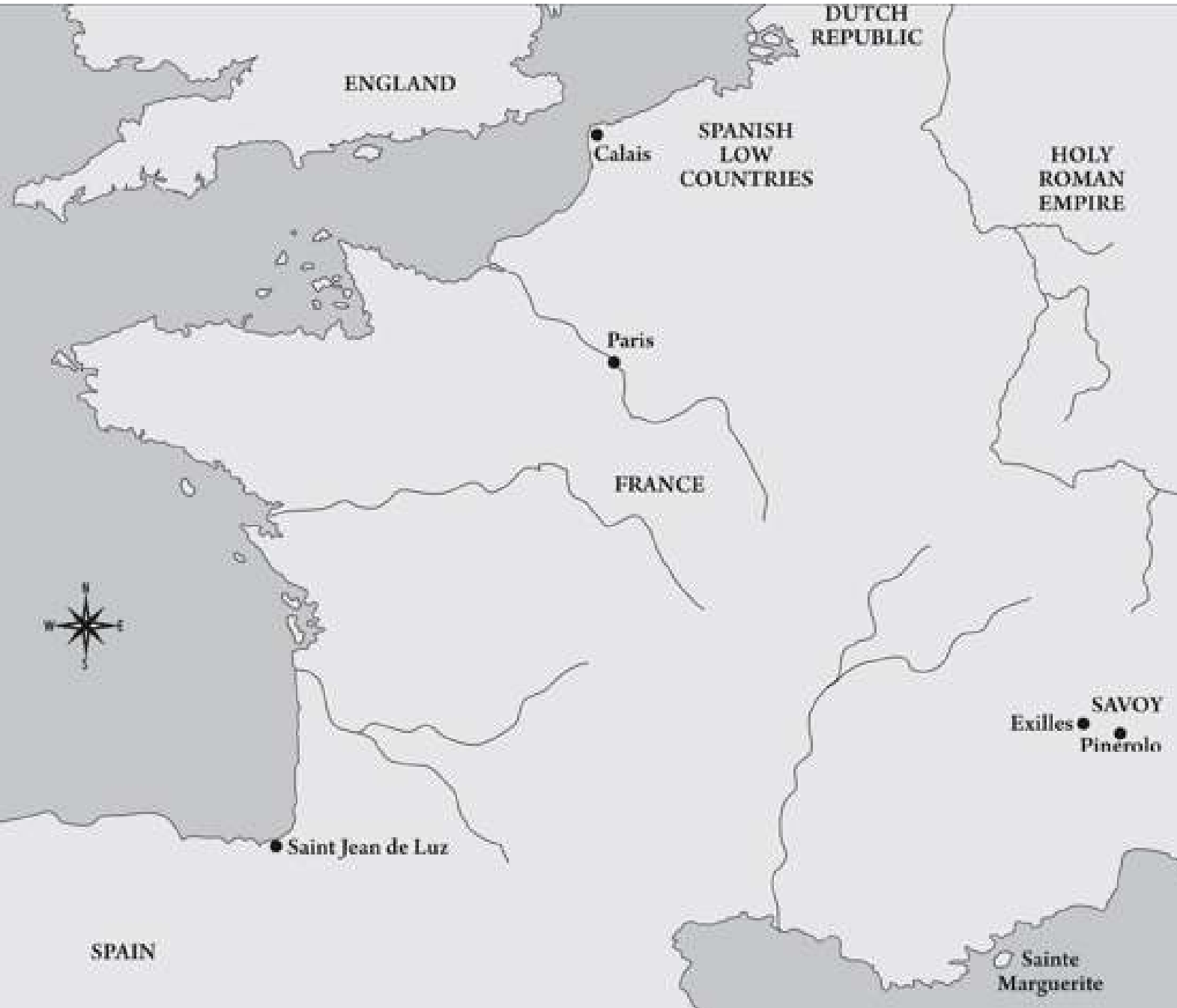
1715

Death of Louis XIV



Map

The World of Eustache Dauger





Introduction

The State of the Question

On or about August 20, 1669, the major of the garrison of Dunkirk, accompanied by three of his soldiers, delivered a prisoner to the citadel of the fortified town of Pinerolo in northern Italy. Pinerolo was an intimidating place. Long a possession of the dukes of Savoy, only twenty-one and a half miles southwest of their capital in Turin, it had intermittently, and since the year 1631, been an outpost of the kings of France. They, in turn, used it for three practical purposes: to keep the dukes in line, as an entry point into Italy, and as a prison. In that last capacity, the *donjon* (or castle) of the citadel was at that moment occupied by the notorious Nicolas Fouquet, one-time superintendant of finances under Louis XIV, whom this king had put on trial for corruption and treason, and banished to Pinerolo under extraordinarily strict guard. The latest prisoner was by no means so notorious. Nevertheless, he had arrived and was kept in such secrecy that within eleven days of his arrival, the governor of the citadel reported with some amusement that he was rumored to be a marshal of France or a presiding judge. The outside world would hear no more about this prisoner until 1687. By that time Fouquet was dead and the author of a handwritten news letter began to spread another rumor. According to him, the governor, whom he referred to as Cinq Mars, had picked up a prisoner *wearing an iron mask* at Pinerolo and transported him to the island of Sainte-Marguerite off the Mediterranean coast. The author, moreover, intimated that this prisoner was Fouquet, who was, therefore, still alive. This was the beginning of the legend of the man in the iron mask.¹

The legend had wings. In January of 1688 from Sainte-Marguerite, the governor reported even more whimsically that people suspected his prisoner to be one of two long-deceased celebrities—either the rabble-rousing Duke de Beaufort or a son of Oliver Cromwell. In 1692 an anti-Louis XIV scandal sheet ostensibly published in Cologne asserted that Cardinal Richelieu, desperate at the infertility of King Louis XIII, had provided a lover for his queen, Anne of Austria, which affair had produced the present usurper to the throne of France, promising to continue the story with the misfortunes of the lover. Evidence of some sort of prisoner, moreover, eventually surfaced. When, in September of 1690, the governor, whose name happened to be *Saint-Mars*, assumed a new position as governor of the Bastille in Paris, he brought the prisoner with him, and this event was broadcast all over Europe by the *Gazette d'Amsterdam*. Nothing about a mask, but the original rumor must have had a life of its own. For in October of 1711, the sister-in-law of Louis XIV repeated it, specifying that the man in the mask was an English lord involved in a plot to assassinate King William III.²

During the reign of Louis XV that followed, the educated public in France and in Europe believed they had become more enlightened. Whether this was the case or not, it had certainly not become less gullible. The enterprising Voltaire took advantage of this. He may have been a great humanitarian and an even greater wit, but his desire to appear omniscient knew no bounds. His conflicting qualities earned him almost a year in the Bastille and an even longer sabbatical in England, after which he

began thinking about writing a history of the age of Louis XIV. In the course of his researches, he talked to whomever he could find—~~Saint-Mars's successor at the Bastille, a former secretary of state for foreign affairs, the flamboyant Marshal de Richelieu, an old doctor~~—picking up any secondhand information that they deigned to pass on to him. Aside from such casual conversations, he relied mainly on published sources, always inclined to jump to conclusions about them. He jotted down his findings in a scrapbook, which further reflects his cavalier approach to scholarship. But he had not failed to pick up the legend of the iron mask. At one point he noted,

Man in the Bastille with an iron mask.

At another point he seems to have either read the Cologne scandal sheet, picked up more rumors, or gotten more creative himself:

Prisoner in the Bastille always wearing an iron mask. Suspected of being the elder brother of Louis XIV.

When he finally got to the first edition of his *Siècle de Louis XIV*, Voltaire did not dare to be so bold. This did not stop him, however, from being inventive. According to him this mysterious prisoner had been taken directly to Sainte-Marguerite shortly after the death of Cardinal Richelieu's successor, Cardinal Mazarin, in 1661. He was tall, handsome, noble, and wore a mask equipped with a flexible iron jaw. Transferred with Saint-Mars to the Bastille in 1690, still masked, but always treated with respect, he lived there in grand style, loved to wear lace, and strummed on the guitar. The old doctor told Voltaire that he had never seen his face, but that he was a fine figure of a man, and never complained about anything. Voltaire completed his account with information garnered from the son-in-law of Michel Chamillart, one-time controller-general of finances and minister of war. When ostensibly begged by his son-in-law to tell him about the man in the iron mask, Chamillart had supposedly replied that it was a secret of state and that he was sworn never to repeat it.³

Voltaire was not the only collector of tall stories. Even as he was writing up his own for his *Siècle de Louis XIV*, he was beaten to the punch by a humorously titled *Mémoires secrets pour servir à l'histoire de Perse*, which was a transparent parody on the recent history of France. Its anonymous author implied that the prisoner in the Bastille was a bastard son of Louis XIV, the Count of Vermandois, who had officially died in 1683. According to this account the young man was put in the hands of the commander of the citadel of *Ormus* (Sainte-Marguerite) with orders to keep him out of the way. He was treated with great respect, but no one was allowed see his face. One day, in desperation, he engraved his name on a plate, which fell into the hands of a slave, who delivered it to the commander. After a number of years at *Ormus*, the prisoner was transferred to the fortress of *Ispahan* (the Bastille), where he was visited by *Ali-Hamajou* (the Duke d'Orléans, regent for the young Louis XV), and throughout his captivity the prisoner wore a mask, even though he treated the commander with great familiarity and was always treated by him with great deference.⁴

By the year 1752 Voltaire too claimed to have heard the story of the plate, now more aristocratically made out of silver, from a certain M^r Riouffe, and Voltaire inserted it in the following editions of his history. Subsequently, he received a letter from one of his admirers in Avignon who had the courage to correct Voltaire by informing him that the mysterious prisoner had begun his imprisonment in Pinerolo. But as much as he had done to improve on the chronology, the admirer contributed even more to the legend, for he claimed to confirm the story of the plate, which he now transmuted into pewter. He had heard it from "several old men of the area," who also claimed to have heard it from the deceased M^r Riouffe, who claimed to have heard it from the very fisherman who had found the plate. Voltaire did not take any note of the correction, as much as he may have appreciated the

confirmations.⁵

While Voltaire and his competitors were thus accumulating their rumors, the Jesuit Henri Griffet, former chaplain of the Bastille, was discovering some more respectable evidence. He had at his disposal the journal of Etienne de Junca, second-in-command of the Bastille from 1690 to 1706, who on September 18, 1698, noted the arrival of Saint-Mars accompanied by an old prisoner who was masked and who had been with Saint-Mars since his days in Pinerolo. We read nothing more in the journal about this prisoner until November 19, 1703, when Junca noted that the prisoner, “who was always masked with a black velvet,” had died and was quickly buried under the name of “Marchioly.” Griffet published these entries in 1769, and they proved two things: such a man was on record, and he had worn a mask. Voltaire seems to have got wind of the book even before it was published and on this occasion he did take note, and in his edition of 1768 he corrected the date of death accordingly. But he persisted in his insinuations. In his *Questions sur l’encyclopédie*, which he wrote between 1770 and 1774, Voltaire suggested that the doctor of the Bastille was not allowed to see the prisoner’s face “for fear of recognizing in his looks too striking a resemblance.”⁶

In the middle of these debates Baron Heiss, a former officer in the regiment of Alsace, came up with an entirely new suspect, sending an article to a periodical published in Liège, claiming that the man behind the iron mask was Ercole Antonio Mattioli (or Matthioli), a minister of the Duke of Mantua. To prove his claim, the baron attached a news letter from Italy disseminated by a French Protestant refugee in Leyden in August of 1687 announcing that Mattioli had been kidnapped on the outskirts of Turin, masked, and imprisoned in Pinerolo for having tried to dissuade his master from selling his “captivity” to Louis XIV. Given the name of Marchioly under which the prisoner had been buried, the account seemed to be much more credible than all the claptrap about the royal brother.⁷

The candidacy of Mattioli may have had some plausibility, but it could not compete with the more exciting legends. During the early days of the French Revolution, when it was open season on the monarchy, the mystery of the iron mask first hit the stage in Paris in the *Théâtre de l’Ambigu Comique*. The play was in pantomime, but the audience, with the aid of a printed program, was merely regaled with the old story about the Count de Vermandois. Theoretically better informed was the Abbot Soulavie. He was a former secretary to Voltaire’s friend, the Marshal de Richelieu, who had himself spent some time in the Bastille. Pressed by Soulavie, Richelieu had once come up with the cryptic statement that “the prisoner was not as important when he died as he had been at the beginning of the personal reign of Louis XIV, when he was arrested for great reasons of state.” Pressed even further the marshal added, “Read what Mister Voltaire has published recently!” The marshal had died in 1788, and after his death Soulavie devoted himself to revising his late employer’s memoirs for publication. In his revision, he has the marshal brag about how he got his mistress, who was the daughter of the Duke d’Orléans (the *Ali-Hamajou* of the Persia parody), to get her father, who was incestuously in love with her, to give her a document containing the secret of the iron mask. The putative donation, which Soulavie inserted into his edition, sounds more like someone who was accumulating all the rumors of the century and adding a few more for good measure, notably that the man in the iron mask was a *twin* brother of Louis XIV, abducted at birth to be raised in Burgundy. It all made perfect sense as the monarchy was heading for its downfall, and Soulavie’s version was quickly integrated into a second play about the iron mask in another Paris theater.⁸

Another side effect of the French Revolution, however, was that it rendered the archives of the old monarchy more accessible. A former general, Pierre Roux-Fazillac, took advantage of this in order to see what they had to offer. In one archive, he found more details on the arrest of Mattioli. It seems that if he had tried to sell the stronghold of Casale (a kind of seventeenth-century Brooklyn Bridge) to the

King of France without authorization from its overlord. In other archives Roux-Fazillac found references to the prisoner of 1669 and how Louvois, the secretary of war, had ordered him to be held so secretly. Roux-Fazillac found this amazing, but not amazing enough to suspect that this prisoner could have been the man in the iron mask. Roux-Fazillac was also able to throw more light on the captivity of another notable prisoner in Pinerolo, the Count de Lauzun, but he could not pin anything on him because he had ultimately been released. Thus, with all his better evidence on the arrest of Mattioli and with the similarity of names between Mattioli and Marchioly, Roux-Fazillac was almost certain that Mattioli was his man.⁹



In the breathing spell after the French Revolution, when the kings of France temporarily regained the throne, the historian Joseph Delort continued to probe the archives and he found even more papers on Saint-Mars. They provided still more details about life in the citadel of Pinerolo and the prisoners who inhabited it. One of the most interesting regarding the one who had arrived in 1669 was that his name was Eustache d'Auger and that, in spite of the extreme secrecy surrounding his imprisonment, the secretary of state for war Louvois had referred to him as "miserable" and indicated that he was a valet. Why such a fuss over a miserable valet? None of this, however, was sufficient to awaken Delort's suspicions. He too had come across the new documents on the arrest of Mattioli and had fallen under their spell. They confirmed him in the opinion that the man that Saint-Mars brought to the Bastille in 1698 was indeed Ercole Antonio Mattioli. It seemed at that point as if Roux-Fazillac and Delort had solved the mystery.¹⁰

They had not. The restoration of the monarchy saw a great revival of popular fascination with history, and on August 3, 1831, at the Odéon theater in Paris, for the third time, the mystery of the man in the iron mask hit the stage. The authors of this play were Auguste Arnould and Narcisse Fournier, and for their story they went right back to the explanations of Voltaire and Soulavie, to which they added their own dramatic twists. For example, they invented a Protestant gentleman who had accidentally learned about the twin birth and who rescued the unfortunate brother from where the evil Cardinal Mazarin was keeping him.¹¹

Little by little, more bits and pieces kept coming out. In 1837 a self-styled book lover, who went by the pen name of Jacob, tried to revive the rumor that the man in the iron mask was Fouquet. He even published a letter that roughly supported the idea. He was up, however, not only against Arnould and Fournier, but also against a more formidable playwright, Alexandre Dumas, who was about to turn his attention to the writing of history. Arnould and Fournier were his collaborators and, in a series of books that they undertook on famous crimes, it fell upon Arnould to write the essay on the iron mask. In his essay, Arnould recapitulated all the theories of the day, including Jacob's, and he came down squarely on the side of Soulavie. "No system," proclaimed Arnould, "is preferable to his nor based on better assumptions." Certainly it was the one that best suited the philosophy of Dumas and his collaborators, whose priority was to intrigue the public.¹²

As the fame of Dumas spread, he advanced from essays on famous crimes to full-fledged novels, the most successful of which, as we all know, was *The Three Musketeers*. He himself was a liberal monarchist at the time, and he delighted in a story in which three musketeers of Louis XIII, aided by their new friend D'Artagnan, helped to cover up the queen's flirtations with the Duke of Buckingham and save her from the machinations of Cardinal Richelieu. The novel came out in installments and the public kept calling for more. Thus Dumas obliged with a sequel which carried the musketeers into the heyday of Cardinal Mazarin, and then another sequel which carried them past the death of Mazarin.

into the personal reign of Louis XIV. It was there that Alexandre Dumas came face-to-face with the man in the iron mask.¹³

I can state categorically that if Voltaire begat Soulavie, and Soulavie begat Arnould, it was Arnould who begat Dumas, who then begat every film about the iron mask that has ever been made. Dumas took the Protestant gentleman and transformed him into Aramis, one of the three musketeers, who had come to the conclusion that the current Louis XIV was up to no good. Dumas also resuscitated the reputation of Fouquet, who, after Aramis had ingeniously managed to substitute the lovable twin brother for the current king, faithfully retrieved the original and consigned his double to an iron mask. It was a bit of a stretch, I have always felt, for an even a less than perfect Louis XIV to reward such a loyal minister by banishing him to Pinerolo, but I suspect that under the pressure of deadlines, that was the best that Dumas could do.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, France kept on changing governments while the scholars kept on debating just as inconclusively. On the one hand you had Jules Loiseleur, who was a good archivist, but he could only come up with a perplexing proposal which satisfied nobody. On the other hand there was Marius Topin, who found a fascinating letter that seemed to eliminate Mattioli and seemed to point the finger at two “jailbirds” and “gentlemen of the lower tower,” yet kept on insisting that Mattioli was the man. Then there was another general, Théodore Jung, the first historian to gain access to the archives of the ministry of war. He came up with more documents about the prisoner whose name he found spelled as Eustache *Dauger*, *Danger*, or *D’Angers*, but other than that he could do no better than a hypothesis that was even more far-fetched than that of Loiseleur. There was never any shortage of candidates. By 1872 there were at least nineteen different theories about the man in the iron mask, each one more preposterous than the other.¹⁴

In the midst of all this darkness, there were occasional flashes of light. In 1868, among the offerings of a multivolumed collection flamboyantly marketed as the *Archives de la Bastille*, François Ravaisson published a previously undiscovered letter from the Archives of War in which Louvois asked Fouquet in Pinerolo whether Eustache had revealed to another valet “what he has seen,” “what he was employed at doing,” or anything about “his past life.” That should have told somebody something, but no one seemed to notice. Then, thirty-two years later, Jules Lair published an excellent biography of Nicolas Fouquet, which was extremely sympathetic to the disgraced superintendant. Lair too did not pick up on the remarkable letter, but unlike all the pundits who had preceded him, he did pick up on Eustache, whom he dubbed “Dauger.” Who was this person, Lair wondered? He was French, Catholic, and a valet. He must have been employed at something sordid. Lair also noted a significant detail, namely, that Eustache had been used as a valet to Fouquet, but carefully kept away from the Count de Lauzun.¹⁵

These nuggets of truth, however, found few listeners, as the number of implausible suggestions kept proliferating. The highly reputable Franz Funk-Brentano remained loyal to Mattioli. The Englishman Andrew Lang came up with the suggestion that Eustache Dauger was the valet of Roux de Marsilly, a diehard Protestant out to turn Europe against Louis XIV. The fact that Eustache was clearly a Catholic and that Roux’s valet was last heard of refusing to leave England, did not deter Lang or the supporters of his thesis. Then there was Andrew Stapylton Barnes, who published a letter strongly suggesting that Mattioli had died at Sainte-Marguerite in 1694, while claiming that the man in the iron mask was an Italian handicapper of English horse races. Likewise unlikely was the discovery by Maurice Duvivier of a certain Eustache d’Oger de Cavoie, dissolute nobleman, who, however, was ultimately discovered vegetating in a Paris insane asylum. It was not until 1952 that a very sober historian, Georges Mongrédien, not only concluded that the obscure valet was the one and only man in the mask, but also

republished the “curious” letter about him. Still he did not comment on it, and it was not until 1971 that another very sober historian Jean-Christian Petitfils, observed that “Danger,” as Petitfils insists on spelling his name, must have committed a crime that Fouquet may have been aware of.¹⁶

In 1986 as I was getting my manuscript *Louis XIV and the Origins of the Dutch War* into press, my former student Ron Martin drove up to Santa Barbara and asked me, “Since you have just finished covering the years 1667 to 1672, do you have any idea of why, in the middle of his preparations for the war, the king would have wanted to arrest a mysterious nobody and keep him in an iron mask for the rest of his life?” My first thoughts, not surprisingly, were of Roux de Marsilly or Mattioli but, in 1987, while I was visiting relatives in Naples, I stumbled across the evidence that I recount in chapter 2 of this book, which led me into my first brush with death on the Boulevard de Sébastopol. Ron however, would not let me off that easily, and subsequently, during another visit to Santa Barbara, he pulled the Mongrédien book out of his briefcase and read the eye-opening letter to me. This little encounter, which I shall never forget, also produced his own indispensable insight. Since both Nicolò Fouquet and Eustache Dauger shared the same secret, he deduced, it followed necessarily that the secret of the iron mask referred to something that had happened *prior* to Fouquet’s arrest on September 5, 1661. This was still far from a solution, but it opened the possibility that the irrepressible Voltaire had accidentally guessed right, and that the secret of the iron mask went back to the time of Cardinal Mazarin.



It has taken me twenty-six years to follow up on this insight, and one might wonder why I have even bothered. In the long run, what does it matter? In the long run, of course, we will all be dead. Still, I would suggest that we can talk all we want about *longues durées*, discourses, and representations, we can create all sorts of models, paradigms, and structures, but we don’t know very much about the age of Louis XIV until we can liberate ourselves from the mystery of the man in the iron mask. I shall try in the nine chapters that follow, to do so.

Paul Sonnino
Santa Barbara, California



The Sex Life of Anne of Austria

The first thing I would like to do in attempting to solve the mystery of the man in the iron mask is deal with the persistent rumor that identifies him as an offspring of Anne of Austria, a rumor to which the character of Anne of Austria and her relationship to the men in her life gives a certain respectability.

Anne of Austria was the eldest daughter of King Philip III of Spain, and she had been raised with all the affection and respect that she could possibly desire. But at the age of fourteen, in the interest of reconciliation between the two leading Catholic monarchies, she had been married to Louis XIII of France, a king who was, to put it mildly, bizarre. Thus it is hardly surprising if she found few emotional incentives either for discarding her partiality to her native land or for loving her incomprehensible husband. She enjoyed admiration; she enjoyed finery. The only quality she shared with her husband, who was five days younger than she, was their age. Everything else about them was different. He had been neglected by his intimidating father, the oversexed Henry IV, who was taken from Louis before he was ten by an assassin's knife, and a self-indulgent mother, the distant Marie de Medici, who preferred consorting with her Italian favorites, Concino Concini and his wife, Leonora, becoming a bulwark for a bewildered boy. From his childhood Louis found his primary pleasure in falconry and other forms of hunting. He knew he was king, but his primary goal in that capacity seemed to be to defend his status inconsistently and sporadically: he had no loftier goal or vision for his state. He seemed to crave the company of he-men, developing a particular dependence on the Sieur de Luynes, who indulged him in a passion for blood sports, without, however, attempting to mold him in any particular direction.¹

It's not that Louis XIII was impotent, and it's questionable that he was gay. We have a very reliable record of his sexual activities from his doctor, Jean Héroard, covering—with some unfortunate gaps—the years 1615 to 1628. It results from the doctor's journal that Louis, in spite of some initial jitters, claimed to have consummated his marriage with Anne on their wedding night, November 25, 1615, after which Héroard, on the conventional wisdom that it was unhealthy for fourteen-year-old boys to engage in too much sex, discouraged him from further relations with his wife until he and she became more mature. This was not much of an imposition, since the young king much preferred to stick to his hunting, falconry, and Luynes, who himself must have had very mixed feelings about the potential influence of a strong wife on the malleable personality of his prize. The queen mother had similar reasons for keeping the young queen isolated. She therefore found herself very much a spectator, surrounded by her Spanish ladies-in-waiting, who managed to make themselves unpopular. She watched in silence on April 24, 1617, as the impulsive king, with Luynes assisting, engaged in his first great act of self-assertion by ordering the arrest of Concini, who did not go down without a fight, and whose wife was subsequently beheaded as a witch, while one of Marie de Medici's principal advisers, Armand du Plessis, the Bishop of Luçon, fell into disgrace. The furious queen mother then withdrew to Blois, where she attempted to stir up as much trouble for her son as she could. But if the elimination of an evil mother-in-law had its advantages for Anne, the king's shyness became less of

virtue as time went on, since he displayed no libidinal tendencies of any kind. On the contrary, he exhibited great timidity, covered by a mantle of piety, much to the dismay of his subjects, his court, the court of Spain, and the Holy See, and to the satisfaction of whatever Huguenots or other Protestants who did not want the marriage to produce a new era of collaboration between the two Catholic monarchies.²

Freed from Marie de Medici, Anne still had to cope with Luynes, who attempted to control her by means of his own new bride, the teenage Marie de Rohan, who was on the way to becoming one of the most beautiful, brilliant, and conniving women of all time. In 1618 Luynes got Louis to put her in charge of the queen's household. Anne was initially very indignant, but not for long. The two women became fast friends. Marie set an example of infidelity—she quickly took on a lover—which Anne was reluctant to follow, but they shared, I would suspect, a comforting sense of superiority toward their respective husbands. Marie's friendship helped Anne to compensate for another assertive action by Louis XIII, the sending of her Spanish ladies back to their native land. As for Luynes, he had much more reason now to be eager for the king to reproduce, especially since Luynes had no control at all over the king's brother and heir apparent, the Duke d'Orléans, Monsieur, as he was called. Luynes was a timid soul, but on this occasion he acted. On the evening of January 25, 1619, he grabbed Louis XIII by the scruff of the neck and dragged him into the queen's bedroom. The action worked. Louis XIII came out, and his doctor recorded two ejaculations. The news went out like a trumpet blast all over Europe. The king, moreover, seemed to be getting the hang of it. From February 3 to March 18, he and the queen had sex (often twice) on six separate occasions. As the celebration abated, however, there was no sign of a pregnancy and, under this last date, the doctor began to worry: "For all her charms he jotted down in Latin, "nothing comes of it."³

Anne's friendship with Mme de Luynes, however, was all the more useful, since her husband was consolidating his position as the royal favorite. In August of 1619 Louis XIII promoted him to the rank of Duke and Peer, and from this lofty perch, Luynes went on to place one of his creatures, the Marshal d'Ornano, as governor of the king's brother Monsieur, a vital precaution in case of Louis's untimely death. But Luynes, as I have suggested, was rather timid. His wife was unfaithful: he did nothing about it; Louis ridiculed him for it; he took it in silence; and after a little armed skirmish with the queen mother's supporters, in which they were roundly defeated, he preferred to negotiate a peace with the Bishop of Luçon, which paved the way for her return to court and for her favorite bishop to become a cardinal. The reemergence of Marie de Medici was not good news for Anne, and it was made even worse by the fact that, in the course of an unsuccessful siege against some Huguenot rebels, the Duke de Luynes came down with scarlet fever and died suddenly on December 15, 1621. Within six weeks of his death the queen mother reentered the council. The barren queen now had only Luynes's widow, who quickly married one of her lovers, the Duke de Chevreuse, as an ally against the resurgent mother-in-law for the attentions of a conscripted lover.⁴

These continued, such as they were, and early in 1622 there were even signs of a pregnancy, but after a girlish romp around the Louvre with the new Duchess de Chevreuse, in which Anne suffered a fall, she miscarried, the sole evidence for which was some semblance of an embryo identified by the doctors. On this occasion Louis behaved like a compassionate husband and let the blame fall on the much too impetuous duchess, but soon thereafter he went off on another campaign against the Huguenots. Throughout this campaign, Louis's correspondence sounds less accommodating to his wife than to his mother, and as it drew to a close, her agent, the Bishop of Luçon, received his cardinal's hat, assuming the name of Cardinal Richelieu. All this time the prospects for the marriage of Louis and Anne to produce an heir were dimming, and by March of 1623 the queen mother did not

fail to take advantage of the king's good graces. She began to press for the quick marriage of her younger son, the Duke d'Orléans, to a rich French heiress, Mademoiselle de Montpensier. That was the last thing Anne wanted, fearing to become even more of an outcast, and that was the last thing Monsieur wanted, preferring a marriage to a foreign princess which would provide him with a connection to an independent dynasty.⁵

As time went on, however, the most dangerous consequence of the reconciliation of the queen and her mother was the emergence of the man who had arranged it. Working behind the scenes, whether by conviction or by strategy, and probably out of both, he advised the queen mother to support in the council an increasingly hostile policy toward Spain, now ruled by Anne's brother, Philip IV. Richelieu may well have been thinking of Marie de Medici's interest in getting along with her son, but that strategy was also the key to his own success. He had hit upon the very quality in Louis XIII that the Duke of Luynes had been too timid to channel, namely, the king's impetuous urges to defend his supremacy. Before long, Richelieu, too, entered the council, and the new cardinal convinced the king to send French troops into the Val Telline in order to expel the Spanish troops that had occupied this important passage between Italy and the Holy Roman Empire. Still another uprising of the Huguenots in France forced Richelieu to give up the enterprise, but he had shown his hand. Anne of Austria now found herself contending for her husband's love not merely with a meddling mother-in-law but with an enemy of her house and of her native land.⁶

What was an attractive, lusty, and reasonably intelligent young woman in her midtwenties to do? Well, she could flirt. First, there had been Henry II, Duke de Montmorency, a twenty-three-year-old charmer, then the sixty-year-old Duke de Bellegarde, who made a fool of himself, but the most egregious flirtation came up in 1625 when the court of France succeeded in arranging a marriage between Louis XIII's younger sister, Henrietta Maria, and the Prince of Wales, soon to be Charles I of England. In preparation for the marriage, and in order to bring his new bride back to England, Charles, now king, sent his late father's and his own favorite, the dashing Duke of Buckingham, to the court in France. His specialty was the seduction of beautiful women, the higher on the social scale the better, and he immediately set his sights on Anne of Austria. Louis XIII planned to accompany his sister as far as Amiens, the queen mother and the queen even farther, but on the way to Amiens, he fell ill. The Duchess de Chevreuse advised Anne to remain with her ailing husband. So did Henri de Loménie, the later Count de Brienne, who was fond of the queen and who considered Buckingham a boorish fop. But Anne preferred to listen to another lady in her entourage, a certain Madame de Vervet, and she accompanied the procession to Amiens, where the queen mother also fell ill and took to her bed. The scene was set for the memorable incident, which took place in a garden, sometime between June 7 and June 16, 1625. Anne and the Duke of Buckingham were strolling. For a period of time—it is not clear how long—they fell out of sight of their attendants. There were sounds of a scuffle, and a woman's cry was heard. The attendants came running, and Buckingham disappeared. It would seem as if on the following day the queen referred to him as a brute and expressed fears that she was pregnant, which makes some sense given that he himself was later to brag that in the course of his life he had made love to three queens and had browbeaten them all. The attendants did their best to cover up the incident but, like so many cover-ups, it only added fuel to the fire. And Buckingham made matters worse by coming back from Calais, where he, the Chevreuses, Loménie, and others had gone in order to accompany Henrietta Maria back to England, for an impromptu visit at the bedsides of the queen mother and the queen.⁷

The Duchess de Chevreuse and Loménie had spoken wisely. In a hereditary monarchy, there was even more reason than in the Roman republic for Caesar's wife to be above reproach, because an

uncertainty about the legitimacy of the succession could be used in order to overthrow the ruler, and the more so if his predecessor's capacity to reproduce was in question. And Louis, who was an insouciant husband but not a permissive one, was enraged. He dismissed Mme de Vervet, but not the Duchess de Chevreuse, who had managed to cover herself, and whose husband was one of Louis's favorites.



The emergence of Richelieu, moreover, had created a new state of affairs at the court of France. He was very much an authoritarian, and he seemed to dominate Louis XIII more thoroughly than Luynes ever did. The remnants of the Luynes party, the Duchess de Chevreuse and the Marshal d'Ornano began to conspire. They seemed to want to get Monsieur into the council, which they succeeded in doing, or even, in order to prevent his marriage to the heiress, out of the country. Richelieu got wind of the plot, and Louis ordered Ornano's arrest at Fontainebleau on May 4, 1626. The conspiracy, however, had spread to other great nobles such as Louis's illegitimate half brothers, César, Duke of Vendôme, and Alexander, the Grand Prior, who began to talk of killing Richelieu and maybe even the king. Richelieu, after managing to assure himself of Louis's cousin, the Prince de Condé, who was next in line to the succession after Monsieur, proceeded to arrest the half brothers. Another member of the conspiracy was de Henri de Talleyrand-Périgord, Count de Chalais, a handsome young man in his late twenties and madly in love with the Duchess de Chevreuse. The court having moved to Nantes, he was arrested there on July 8 and, upon being interrogated, he panicked and spilled even more than he was sure of, relating the plans of the conspirators, and especially the Duchess de Chevreuse, to marry the queen to Monsieur, who himself confessed that he had heard the same thing. He got away by agreeing to marry the rich heiress, who provided him with a daughter before making him a widower. Chalais retracted his statements about the "ladies" before his decapitation, but the scene was set for an interrogation of Anne before the council. There she denied all charges, and made a statement that did not reflect too flatteringly on either her husband or his potential successor. "I would have gained *little*," she said, "in the exchange." That proved to be good enough, for the queen mother and for the husband. Anne cried, and they all embraced. The Duke de Chevreuse softened the blow for his wife, by getting her exiled to Lorraine. She was furious at the inconvenience, and took her revenge by becoming the mistress of its duke, in whose company she fomented an international coalition against France, forcing Louis and Richelieu to think better of her exile and allow her return to her *château* at Dampierre, near Paris. She repaid his concession by holding secret meetings with Anne in the convent of Val-de-Grâce and seducing one of the king's principal advisers, the fifty-year-old Marquis of Châteauneuf. Other conspirators did not get off that easily. Ornano and the Grand Prior died in prison. The Duke de Vendôme, who lacked the courtesy to die and whose royal blood made it embarrassing to decapitate, remained in prison until 1630, from where Louis and Richelieu sent him into exile.⁸

Anne, however, gradually found an unexpected ally in her struggles against the cardinal. Marie de Medici, much to her own surprise, discovered that the loyal servant whom she had inserted into the council was slipping away from her. And to make matters worse, Richelieu was embarking the king on an ever more confrontational policy against Spain for, in 1629, he led his army into Italy in order to assist Charles I, Gonzaga, the new Duke of Mantua, against the Spanish and the Duke of Savoie. Between June and September of 1630 the queen mother, with the support of her daughter-in-law, took the occasion of an illness which brought Louis to the brink of death in order to terrify him into dismissing the cardinal. It seemed as if they would succeed, but the king regained his health and on November 11 he staged the famous "Day of Dupes" from which Richelieu emerged in triumph, which

Monsieur escaped to Lorraine, where he secretly married the sister of its troublemaking duke, and Marie de Medici took refuge in the Spanish Low Countries. Monsieur then staged his own little invasion of France, which failed miserably and for which he once more escaped with a slap on the wrists, while his aristocratic supporters, including Anne's early admirer, the Duke de Montmorency, paid with their heads. This left Anne as the sole rallying point of the anti-Richelieu party. Her little court became a crossroad between Richelieu's spies and his diehard enemies. Her mail was intercepted and her husband, who could have had found a thousand willing mistresses anywhere on the continent, compounded her humiliation by developing an open passion for two of her ladies-in-waiting: first for the befuddled fourteen-year-old Mlle de Hautefort, then for the older and more pious Mlle de La Fayette, who could not even escape his attentions by entering into a convent. As to the Duchess de Chevreuse, both the king and Richelieu became exasperated with her continued intrigues and forced her to abandon Dampierre for the more distant Château of Milly near Tours. One of Anne's few aspiring champions at this time was the young Prince de Marcillac, the later Duke de I Rochefoucauld, who hated Richelieu even more than she did and was prepared to do anything for her and her ladies in his chivalrous dreams.⁹

Enter Giulio Mazzarino, Mazarini, or Mazarin, as the name evolved. He came at best from the squirearchy of the Abruzzi, in the service of the very noble house of Colonna, but he quickly became convinced that his own charm, intelligence, and skill could carry him to great heights. He accompanied one of his patrons on a mission to Spain, where he learned the language and almost found himself a wife, but he was suddenly called back to Italy by his father's bankruptcy, and then entered the service of another eminent house, the Barberini, which had ascended to the papacy in the person of Urban VIII. In this capacity Mazarin became a diplomat, attempting to execute the policy of the Holy See, which was to keep the French and Spanish monarchies from staging their wars on Italian soil, and it was therefore as a peacemaker, in January of 1630 in Lyon, that he entered into the life of Anne of Austria. When Cardinal Richelieu introduced him to her, the cardinal maliciously jibed, "You will like him madame, he resembles the Duke of Buckingham!" Richelieu may have been malicious but he was certainly correct. Here was a man who had come to advance the cause of peace between France and Spain, and a charming, handsome man to boot. They barely saw each other during their stay, but she did not forget him. Moreover, Mazarin gained a certain amount of international fame later the same year, when he managed to arrange a truce between a French and Spanish army which were preparing to give each other battle in front of the fortress of Casale. But, in the course of his diplomatic activity, his allegiance, guided by his ambition, shifted. In spite of the fact that he continued to act as a papal agent, Mazarin directed his efforts at furthering the policy of Cardinal Richelieu, achieving a notable success in this direction when, in 1631, he helped to negotiate the Treaty of Cherasco, which transferred the Savoyard stronghold of Pinerolo, future home of the man in the iron mask, to French control. Needless to say, Cardinal Richelieu loved him and made his best efforts to pressure the pope into appointing Mazarin as papal nuncio to France, where Anne got to see him a bit more often between 1634 and 1636.¹⁰

As Anne and Louis XIII continued to go their separate ways, she found some comfort, whenever she could get to Paris, in the quiet confines of the convent of Val-de-Grâce, where she could be at her ease and correspond more privately, but such independence became more dangerous in 1635, when the king, with a little urging from Richelieu, decided to enter openly on the side of the Calvinist Dutch and the Lutheran Swedes into their separate wars against the Spanish and Austrian Hapsburgs. Suddenly, her loyalty to her family and to her native land came into open conflict with her obligations to her husband, and whatever correspondence she was maintaining with her family took on the

appearance of treason. Early in 1637 Richelieu received further evidence of it and decided to act. He arrested La Porte, Anne's cloak bearer, and questioned him. Richelieu's agents also questioned the abbess of Val-de-Grâce. They found out very little, but Anne and her friend Mlle de Hautefort, in panic, went so far as to approach their admirer, the Prince de Marcillac, about helping them to flee to the Spanish Low Countries. Interrogated, on August 17, Anne made a full and humiliating confession while in Tours; her old friend, the Duchess de Chevreuse, also panicked and took refuge in Spain from where she moved to England, and finally took up residence in the Spanish Low Countries. Louis spent the next four months without even speaking to his wife, much less sleeping with her, but early in December, while she was in Paris and he was hunting his merry way from Versailles to Saint-Maur, he stopped in Paris at the convent of the daughters of Saint Mary to converse, across a grating, with his beloved Mlle de la Fayette. After their conversation, however, a rain and wind storm came up which, along with the darkness, prevented him from continuing on his way. Louis was furious, but the captain of his guards had the gumption to suggest that he invite himself to dine and sleep with the queen. Louis resisted for as long as he could, but he had no choice, and it was that night that he and the queen conceived a child. He was born in Saint-Germain-en-Laye on September 5, 1638, in the midst of an assembly that could not doubt of the event, named Louis, and nicknamed by an incredulous nation "the gift of God."¹¹

The miraculous birth of the dauphin, however, was attended by a second miracle, of no less moment. Anne, who had never developed enough affection for her husband to overcome her allegiance to the house of Austria, now discovered in her affection for her son enough of a motive to transfer her allegiance to the house of Bourbon. But if she had undergone such a miraculous transformation, Louis and Richelieu were not prepared to believe it. One more example of the king's spite occurred in 1637 when he exiled two of her favorite ladies-in-waiting, the Marquise de Senecey and Mlle (now Mme) de Hautefort, whom he himself had initially imposed upon the queen. Two years after the first miracle, the birth of a second son did not improve his disposition toward his wife. But Louis XIII, though still in his late thirties, was in declining health. Richelieu, in his midfifties, was doing even worse, and grooming the now Cardinal Giulio Mazarini as his successor. Indeed, when Richelieu died in 1642, Louis immediately made Mazarin his chief minister. As the king saw his own death approaching, it became his primary concern and that of his ministers to avoid another regency similar to that of Marie de Medici, in which the independence of the monarchy to which he had devoted his life would be jeopardized. They could not avoid making Anne regent and placing Monsieur as well as the Prince de Condé in the council. All they could do was for Louis to insert a provision in his testament which would also admit Mazarin and enough of the old ministers to give them a majority vote. This was a dubious undertaking. A healthy and mature king of France could do almost anything. A dead one was subject to the laws of succession, and Louis XIII became a dead king of France on May 14, 1643.¹²

Thus, after twenty-eight years of embarrassment and humiliations, Anne of Austria finally came into her own. How was she going to handle it? Her friends who had supported her through the years of suffering, not to speak of everyone in France who was sick of executions, taxes, and wars, now glimpsed the possibility of a return of what must have seemed like the good old days. Anne, however, moved cautiously and, for the moment, she kept the old ministers, including Mazarin, in place, but she did not hesitate to go behind their backs to unite with Monsieur and the Prince de Condé, neither of whom wished to be constrained by the terms of Louis XIII's will. They therefore took their case before the highest court in the land, the *parlement* of Paris, which jumped at the opportunity to declare the terms of the testament unconstitutional and confirm her, Monsieur, and the prince as the sole

decision makers in the council. Anne also recalled her exiled ladies-in-waiting, Mmes de Senecey and Hautefort, and, notably, the Duchess de Chevreuse. Mazarin was furious at being circumvented and threatened to return to Italy. Anne had to consider. Her closest friends, with the possible exception of the Duchess de Chevreuse's old lover, the Marquis de Châteauneuf, were not very capable of directing a country in the middle of a war. Each of her associates in the regency had his own record of pursuing his own agenda. And there, threatening to leave her at their mercy, was a man who reminded her of the Duke of Buckingham. But whatever libidinal impulse may have driven her in his direction, she also had her reasons. He spoke Spanish. He had the experience of running the government. He was offering, if she would only give him her confidence, to belong entirely to her. Brienne, the old friend who had never abandoned her, read her mind clearly and recommended that she ask him to stay on as her principal minister.¹³

It was very fortunate for Anne that she had become a French woman because Mazarin would not have it any other way. He had no intention of ending up like Concino Concini, a self-serving toady of a pro-Spanish mother and a sacrificial scapegoat to an alienated son. Did Anne, however, have other plans for Mazarin? I believe that she did, because shortly after asking him to stay on she approached him, by his own testimony, with the most suggestive of all questions, namely, whether there was any way to make him happy. To this very explicit invitation, Mazarin might have replied that he loved her too—which he undoubtedly did in his own way—but that if they surrendered to their passions, they would eventually become apparent and, given the less-than-impressive masculinity of the late Louis XIII, jeopardize the entire succession to the monarchy. The problem, however, was that somewhere in the course of the previous half decade Mazarin, too, had undergone a considerable transformation—he had jettisoned his youthful charm and replaced it with an overwhelming sense of his own worth, and there was no place in the new Mazarin for the amenities of a graceful sensitivity. Thus he feigned not to understand her proposition and turned it into an opportunity to take full possession, not of her body but of her soul. He told her how sad he was to see how everybody was taking advantage of his kindness and launched into a pompous diatribe against “those who do not do their duty towards her,” that is to say, her old favorites. What is remarkable is that she accepted the admonishment with good grace, in the interest of self-preservation, reason of state, and Christian piety. That seems to have been the destiny of Anne of Austria, going from one lover who browbeat her to another, and ending up with a lover who insisted on browbeating her platonically.¹⁴

Anne's choice of Mazarin to the apparent exclusion of her old favorites was not at all what they expected as a reward for their years of fidelity. The Duchess de Chevreuse, who would have been happy to corrupt him and could not imagine that any man would resist her, began, by Mazarin's own account, to spread the rumor that he was impotent. Other disappointed aristocrats somewhat inconsistently began to spread the rumor, against all visible evidence, that he was having an affair with the queen. Thus the malcontents, who quickly acquired the nickname of “Importants,” found themselves in the ironic position of trying to play on Anne's emotions against Mazarin in the same way that the queen mother and Anne had tried to play on Louis XIII's emotions against Richelieu. The result was the same. On September 2 the Duke de Beaufort was arrested; his father, the Duke of Vendôme (a relic from the Chalais conspiracy), and Vendôme's eldest son, the Duke de Mercoeur, were relegated to their estates. Mesdames de Senecey and Hautefort were quickly sent packing. The Duchess de Chevreuse took it upon herself to withdraw, ending up once more in the Spanish Low Countries, where she resumed her intrigues against the French monarchy.¹⁵

Anne was not a complete slave to Mazarin. Those friends and supporters who acquiesced to the dominance of Cardinal Mazarin found themselves in secure positions. Indeed she placed her own

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