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Love and Louis XIV

The Women in the Life of the Sun King

Antonia Fraser

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LOVE *and* LOUIS XIV



Antonia Fraser

Since 1969 Antonia Fraser has written many acclaimed historical works that have been international bestsellers. She is the recipient of numerous literary awards, including the Wolfson Prize for History, the Saint Louis Literary Award, and the 2000 Norton Medlicott Medal of Britain's Historical Association. Her works include the biographies *Mary Queen of Scots*, *Cromwell, the Lord Protector*, and *Royal Charles: Charles II and the Restoration*. Four highly praised books focus on women in history: *The Weaker Vessel*, *The Warrior Queens*, *The Six Wives of Henry VIII*, and, most recently, *Marie Antoinette: The Journey*. She is editor of *The Lives of the Kings and Queens of England*. Antonia Fraser is married to Harold Pinter and lives in London.

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ANTHOLOGIES

Scottish Love Poems

Love Letters

LOVE *and*
LOUIS XIV

The Women in the Life of
the Sun King



Antonia Fraser

The Sun, by the light which it shines on those
other stars which surround it like a court, is most assuredly
the most vigorous and the most splendid image
of a great monarch.

Louis XIV, *Memoirs for the Instruction
of the Dauphin*, 1662



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Louis XIV, 1701, by Hyacinthe Rigaud. Musée du Louvre, Paris (© Photo RMN/Gérard Blot).

AUTHOR'S NOTE

‘Magnificence and gallantry were the soul of this court’: in writing about Louis XIV and his women, this is the contemporary verdict that I have borne in mind. Certainly I have hoped to convey magnificence in this book. How else could one write about the man who created Versailles in the early part of his personal rule and made it his official seat in 1682? There is extravagance inside and out; feasts to which only the King with his Gargantuan appetite could do justice, huge flower beds with every plant changed daily, multitudinous orange trees – the King's favourites – in silver pots, terraces where the court was driven indoors at night by the dominant perfume of a thousand tuberoses, money flowing forth like the fountains the King was so fond of commissioning, so that ornamental water itself became a symbol of power ... There are wildly obsequious courtiers such as the Duc d'Antin, who cut down his own avenue overnight because it impeded the view from the visiting monarch's bedroom, or the Abbé Melchior de Polignac, thoroughly drenched in his court costume, who assured the King that the rain at Marly did not wet.

And I have certainly depicted gallantry in all the many contemporary senses of the word, from friendship shading to love, the subtle art of courtship, the more frivolous and even dangerous pursuit of flirtation, down to sensual libertinage ending in sex. It is easy to understand why seventeenth-century France was popularly supposed to be a paradise for its women, who enjoyed ‘a thousand freedoms, a thousand pleasures’. But if gallantry – or sex – is one of my themes, then religion is another. It is in the connection between the two that I believe the fascination of Louis XIV's relationships with his mistresses properly lies. This was the century in which penitent Magdalen was the favourite saint in France: symbolically his mistresses were painted, loose hair flowing, as Magdalen in their prime, while flouting the rules of the Church in the most flagrant manner possible; their attempts to incarnate the saint's own penitence would come later. Thus the Catholic Church's struggles for the salvation of the King's soul strike a sombre note in the celebratory music of Versailles from the King's youth onwards and cannot be silenced. Lully is there with his graceful allegorical Court Ballets in which the King (and his ladies) danced; but he is also there with his themes of lamentation for the King to mourn.

My study is not however entirely limited to the mistresses of Louis XIV: possibly Marie Mancini, principally Louise de La Vallière and Athénaïs de Montespan as well as the enigmatic, puritanical Madame de Maintenon, whose precise status was doubtful. I had once intended this before my researches led me on to the richer story of his relationships with women in general. These include his mother Anne of Austria, his two sisters-in-law, Henriette-Anne and Liselotte, who were Duchesses d'Orléans in succession, his wayward illegitimate daughters, and lastly Adelaide, the beloved child-wife of his grandson. Inevitably, therefore, the story also reflects something of the condition of women of a certain sort in seventeenth-century France. What were their choices and how far were they, mistresses and wives, mothers and daughters, in control of their own destinies?

A portrait will, I trust, emerge of Louis XIV himself, the Sun King and like the sun the centre of his universe. But as the title and subtitle indicate, this is not a full study of the reign, so fruitfully dealt with elsewhere, in studies both ancient and modern, to all of which I acknowledge my deep gratitude. It was Voltaire, in the first brilliant study of ‘*le grand siècle*’, published twenty-odd years after the King's death, who wrote: ‘It must not be expected to meet here with a minute detail of the wars carried on in this age. Everything that happens is not worthy of the record.’ This is a sentiment which one can only humbly echo.

Let the King's sister-in-law Liselotte, Duchesse d'Orléans, have the last word, the copious correspondent whose

outspoken comments cannot help making her my favourite among the abundant female sources of the period, despite the presence of the incomparable letter-writer Madame de Sévigné. 'I believe that the histories which will be written about this court after we are all gone,' she wrote, 'will be better and more entertaining than any novel, and I am afraid that those who come after us will not be able to believe them and will think that they are just fairy tales.' I have hoped to present the 'fairy tale' in such a way that it can be believed.

There are many people whose help was invaluable during the five years I spent researching and writing this book. First of all, I must thank Alan Palmer for his Chronological Political Summary. Professor Felipe Fernandez-Armesto also read the book at an early stage, as did my eagle-eyed daughter Rebecca Fraser Fitzgerald. Dr Mark Bryant allowed me to read his (2001) thesis on Madame de Maintenon in advance of his own published work on the subject; Professor Edward Corp drew my attention to important references; Alastair Macaulay advised me on the art he loves; Col. Jean-Joseph Milhiet gave me information concerning the remains of Madame de Maintenon; the late Professor Bruno Neveu was an inspiration; Sabine de La Rochefoucauld arranged illuminating visits to both Versailles and the Louvre; M. Jean Raindre was an enlightening and generous host at the Château de Maintenon, as were Cristina and Patrice de Vogüé at Vaux-le-Vicomte; Dr Blythe Alice Raviola, University of Turin, crucially assisted me over manuscripts, as did M. Thierry Sarmant, at the Archives Historiques de la Guerre, Vincennes. Niall MacKenzie provided translations of Gaelic poetry as well as advice; Renata Propper interpreted Liselotte's often ribald German; Lord (Hugh) Thomas of Swynnerton translated from the Spanish for the Mexican memorial service of Louis XIV, the text of which was kindly acquired for me by my daughter-in-law Paloma Porraz de Fraser.

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My editors on both sides of the Atlantic, Nan Talese of Doubleday and Alan Samson of Weidenfeld & Nicolson, were enormously supportive. I thank Steve Cox and Helen Smith for the copy-editing and Index respectively. My PA Linda Peskin, who put the book on disk, must at times have felt like an extra lady-in-waiting at the court of the Sun King. My French family, the four Cavassonis, made visits to Paris an extra pleasure. Lastly, this book is justly dedicated to my husband, as ever the first reader.

Antonia Fraser
Feast of St Catherine, 2004–Lady Day, 2006

Note There are three perennial problems writing historical narrative for this period, to which I have offered the following solutions. First, names and titles, so often very similar, can be extremely confusing. For the reader's sake, I

have tried to be clear rather than consistent; the list of Principal Characters, awarding one (slightly different) name to each person, is intended as a guide. Second, dates in England, Old Style (OS), lagged behind those on the Continent until 1752; I have used the French New Style (NS) unless otherwise indicated. Third, where money is concerned, I have included rough comparisons to the present day, again for the reader's sake, although these can never be more than approximate.

CHRONOLOGICAL POLITICAL SUMMARY

- 1610 Accession of nine-year-old Louis XIII as King of France following the assassination of his father, Henri IV. Regency of his mother, Marie de Médicis.
- 1615 Double royal marriage: Louis XIII weds Anne of Austria, daughter of Philip III of Spain; his sister, Elisabeth, weds Anne's brother, who accedes as Philip IV of Spain in 1621.
- 1617 Louis XIII assumes power, after countenancing murder of his mother's unpopular favourite, Concini.
- 1618 Thirty Years War begins in Prague with a Protestant revolt against the anti-national Catholic policy of the Habsburg Emperor in Vienna. In 1621 the war spreads to the Rhineland Palatinate and gradually involves all Europe.
- 1624 Cardinal Richelieu becomes King's chief minister. Over the next eighteen years his ruthless policies impose the autocratic authority of a centralised monarchy, destroying the last fortified strongholds of the French Protestant Huguenots and curbing the rights of the nobility. In foreign affairs he challenges Habsburg hegemony on France's eastern and southern frontiers.
- 1625 Charles I ascends the English throne; marries Louis XIII's sister Henrietta Maria.
- 1626 Richelieu subsidises Protestant Sweden's entry into Thirty Years War against the Emperor and Spain. He authorises the Company of the Hundred Associates to control New France and develop trade along the St Lawrence valley and regions explored by Champlain (who founded Quebec in 1608).
- 1635 France enters the Thirty Years War, grouped with Sweden, Savoy and the Dutch against the Spanish and Austrians.
- 1638 Birth of Dauphin Louis, future Louis XIV.
- 1640 Birth of his brother Philippe, to be known as Monsieur.

- 1642 Richelieu dies: the Italian-born Cardinal Mazarin, a favourite of Anne of Austria, succeeds him as chief minister. Start of English Civil War.
- 1643 Death of Louis XIII: accession of Louis XIV under Regency of Anne of Austria. French, led by future Prince de Condé (aged 22), defeat Spanish at Rocroi.
- 1648 Peace of Westphalia ends Thirty Years War: France gains southern Alsace and eastern frontier fortresses including Verdun, Toul and Metz but remains at war with Spain. The first Fronde: mob rioters (*frondeurs* = stone slingers) support protest of the Parlement de Paris (supreme court) against taxation and force royal family and Mazarin to flee Paris for eight months.
- 1649 Execution of Charles I; accession of Charles II (in exile). Second Fronde begins in Paris, primarily a conflict between rival nobles.
- 1650 Condé, his brother the Prince de Conti and brother-in-law Duc de Longueville, leading Frondeur nobles, arrested by Mazarin.
- 1651 Under threat of mob revolt in Paris, Anne of Austria releases Frondeur princes. Mazarin goes into temporary exile at Cologne. Louis XIV comes of age officially but Anne of Austria remains his chief counsellor. Condé leads Frondeur army in two years of civil war; opposed by Marshal Turenne, loyal to Louis.
- 1653 Mazarin returns. End of Fronde; Condé flees to Spanish Netherlands (pardoned by Louis XIV in 1659 and commands armies in later campaigns). Fouquet becomes finance minister; building up a fortune through speculation. Cromwellian Protectorate in England.
- 1658 Alliance between France and Cromwell's England; joint armies defeat Spanish at battle of the Dunes (June). Cromwell acquires Dunkirk but dies (September).
- 1659 Peace of Pyrenees ends war between France and Spain. France gains foothold on border of Spanish Netherlands and in Roussillon, on the eastern Pyrenees.
- 1660 Louis XIV marries Marie-Thérèse, daughter of Philip IV of Spain and his first

- 1661 Mazarin dies. Louis XIV takes power, never again appointing a chief minister. The corrupt Fouquet is replaced by Colbert, who reforms the financial system and undertakes a vigorous public works programme, later also becoming Minister of Marine and creating a navy. Marriage of Monsieur to Charles II's sister, Henriette-Anne.
- 1662 French defensive alliance with the Dutch, promising support if they are attacked by another country. Charles II sells Dunkirk to France.
- 1663 Colbert organises New France as a crown colony, with Quebec as capital.
- 1664 Colbert promotes trade by abolishing internal tariff duties.
- 1665 Philip IV of Spain dies; succeeded by Carlos II, son by his second marriage (to Maria Anna of Austria), half-brother to Queen Marie-Thérèse.
- 1666 Louis XIV declares war on England in support of the Dutch but no fighting ensues. Louvois appointed Minister of War. Anne of Austria dies.
- 1667 War of Devolution. Louis XIV claims that legally Spanish Netherlands 'devolved' on Marie-Thérèse at Philip IV's death; he sends Turenne's army into Flanders to enforce his claim.
- 1668 (January) English, Dutch and Swedes make alliance to compel Louis to end War of Devolution; peace comes in May with Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle giving France twelve towns in Flanders and Artois, including Lille, but Louis does not withdraw claim to Spanish Netherlands.
- 1669 Colbert encourages founding of first French trading port in India.
- 1670 Secret Treaty of Dover made by Charles II and his sister Henriette-Anne: Louis XIV promises Charles subsidies: Charles agrees to declare himself a Catholic at a suitable moment and to support France if Louis attacks Holland. Henriette-Anne dies thirty-nine days after making the treaty.
- 1671 Widowed Monsieur marries Liselotte, possible heiress to the Palatinate.
- 1672 England and France declare war on the Dutch. Louis invades Holland but meets strong resistance from newly elected Dutch Stadtholder William of Orange, son of Charles II's sister Mary. Frontenac begins ten-year term as Governor of New France establishing forts as far south as Lake Ontario.

- 1673–5 Successful campaigns by Louis's armies in the Palatinate and Flanders.
-
- 1677 William of Orange marries his cousin Mary, daughter of James, Duke of York and second in line of succession to English and Scottish crown.
- 1678 Peace of Nijmegen ends French war with Dutch and Spanish. Louis XIV gains fourteen towns in Spanish Netherlands, enabling Vauban to build fortresses eventually running from Dunkirk on the coast to Dinant on the river Meuse.
- 1679 Louis XIV sets up a *Chambre Ardente* ('Burning Chamber'), a special commission to investigate accusations of murder, witchcraft and Black Masses in the 'Affair of the Poisons'. Several leading personages in the kingdom implicated. In next three years *Chambre* conducts more than 200 interrogations: at least twenty-four executed; several more die under torture; others sent to the galleys or imprisoned.
- 1680 Highest council of Paris Parlement formally gives Louis XIV title of 'the Great'. 'Chambers of Reunion' set up in which jurists support Louis XIV's claims to Upper and Lower Alsace. Olympe, Comtesse de Soissons, Mistress of the Robes, flees France to avoid summons to *Chambre Ardente*. Her son, Prince Eugene of Savoy, refused military commission by Louis XIV, offers his services to Emperor Leopold I.
- 1681 Dragonnades, soldiers billeted by Louvois in Huguenot communities to enforce conversions to Catholicism. Mass migration of Huguenot craftsmen begins. Canal du Midi completed, enabling barges to convey goods from Bay of Biscay to the Mediterranean.
- 1682 (April) Louis XIV abruptly closes *Chambre Ardente* with 100 cases still pending. (May) He moves the Court and government to Versailles. La Salle leads expedition down Mississippi, claims the region for France and names it Louisiana.
- 1683 Marie-Thérèse and Colbert die. Emperor Leopold I and Carlos II join Dutch and Swedes in anti-French coalition. Vienna besieged by Turks.
- 1684 Turkish threat induces Emperor to conclude Truce of Ratisbon with Louis XIV allowing France to retain all towns assigned by Chambers of Reunion.

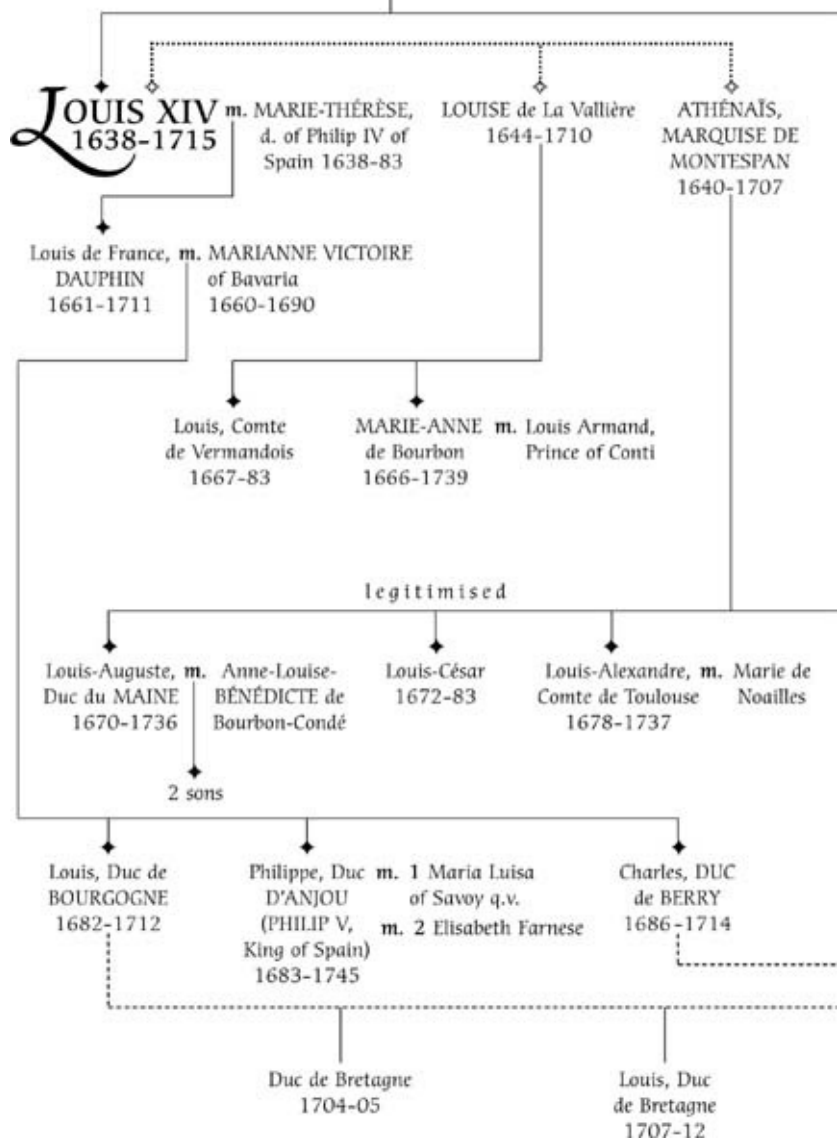
Charles II dies, succeeded by Catholic brother, James (II) Duke of York.

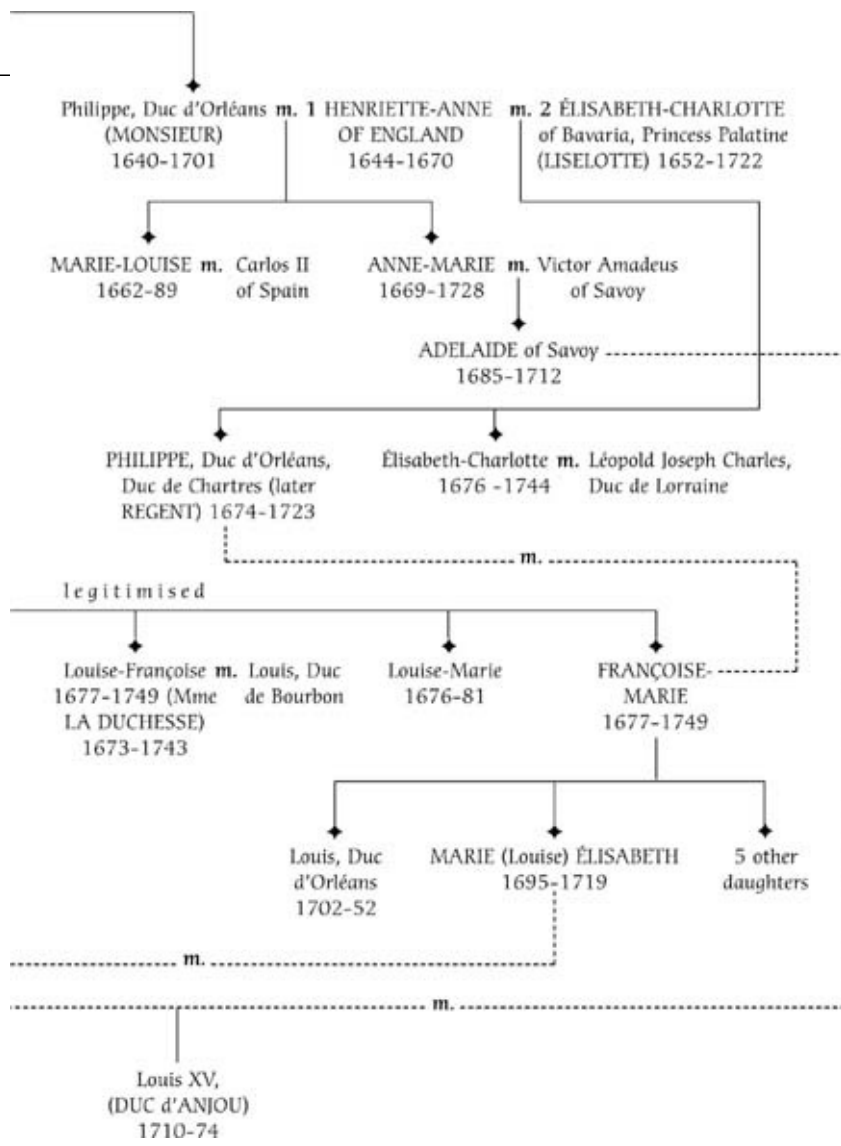
- 1685 Louis XIV revokes Edict of Nantes, finally denying Huguenots religious and civil rights guaranteed them by Henri IV. Dragonnades brutally enforce conversion to Catholicism. Several hundred Huguenot officers join the migration and enlist in Protestant armies abroad.
- 1686 Emperor Leopold and rulers of Spain, Sweden, Saxony, the Palatinate and Brandenburg form League of Augsburg, an alliance to check further French expansion.
- 1687 Fort Niagara built to prevent English colonists encroaching on New France. War of League of Augsburg begins: Louis XIV invades Palatinate supporting claim of Liselotte as successor to her brother, opposed by League alliance,
- 1688 now joined by Duke of Saxony. William of Orange accepts invitation from Whig lords to save English Protestantism, lands in Torbay and marches on London; James II escapes to France on Christmas Day.
- 1689 William of Orange and his wife proclaimed joint rulers as William III and Mary II in London. Mary Beatrice, wife of James II, settles at St Germain with her son James Edward (born June 1688). England and Holland join League of Augsburg, now known as the Grand Alliance. France declares war on England. James II crosses to Ireland to rally Catholics against William and Mary.
- 1690 Battle of the Boyne: William III defeats James, who returns to St Germain.
- 1691 Many Irish Catholics flee to France and enter Louis XIV's army.
- 1692 English naval victory at La Hogue removes threat of French invasion.
- 1693 Louis XIV fails to capture Liège and never again joins his troops in the field.
- 1694 Mary II dies, leaving William III as sole ruler. French invade Spain.
- 1695 William III captures Namur.
- 1696 Treaty of Turin: Duke of Savoy abandons Grand Alliance and changes sides in the war; his daughter Adelaide betrothed to the Duc de Bourgogne, Louis's grandson.
- Peace of Ryswick ends War of the League of Augsburg. Louis XIV implicitly recognises William III as king in England, Scotland and Ireland, with his

- 1697 niece Anne as heiress presumptive. Mutual restoration of all conquests since Peace of Nijmegen (1678), France surrendering right bank of the Rhine and Lorraine. Louis agrees that Dutch shall garrison chief fortresses in Spanish Netherlands.
- 1698 English, French and Dutch diplomats meet in London to discuss partition of Spain, seeking to prevent war when Carlos II dies.
- 1699 English and Dutch sign partition treaty with France but it is subsequently rejected by Emperor in Vienna and by Carlos II.
- 1700 Carlos II dies, having declared Duc d'Anjou (Louis's grandson and third in line of succession to French throne) as his heir; he accedes as Philip V. War of Spanish Succession begins: French troops enter Spanish Netherlands on behalf of Philip V. England, Holland and Empire (fearing future dual kingdom of France and Spain) form Grand Alliance against Louis, recognising Austrian archduke as Charles III of Spain. James II dies; Louis XIV acknowledges his son James Edward ('Old Pretender') as James III. New France: Antoine Cadillac founds Fort Pontchartrain du Détroit on the straits of Lake Erie.
- 1702 William III dies; Anne, daughter of James II, accedes; England and Holland cease to have common ruler.
- 1703 Savoy and Portugal join Grand Alliance against France.
- 1704 Duke of Marlborough leads army 250 miles from lower Rhine to upper Danube, linking up with Emperor's troops under Prince Eugene to win major victory over French and Bavarians at Blenheim in Bavaria.
- 1705 English navy takes Barcelona and Austrian 'Charles III' is recognised as King in Catalonia and Aragon.
- 1706 Marlborough defeats French at Ramillies and occupies Brussels and Antwerp. Eugene defeats French outside Turin and drives them from northern Italy.
- 1707 Act of Union unites England and Scotland as Great Britain.
- 1708 Marlborough and Eugene jointly defeat French at Oudenarde under Vendôme and capture Ghent and Bruges. Winter of 1708–9 is coldest on

record in France.

- 1709 Malplaquet: final joint victory of Marlborough and Eugene but with heavy casualties: 24,000 dead or wounded, twice as many as French.
- 1711 Emperor Joseph I dies; succeeded in Vienna by his brother 'Charles III' who becomes Emperor Charles VI.
- Peace of Utrecht ends War of Spanish Succession: Spain and France never to be united under one ruler. Philip V recognised as King of Spain. Louis XIV accepts Protestant Succession in Britain and requires Pretender James
- 1713 Edward to leave France. French make concessions in North America, ceding Newfoundland and Nova Scotia. Holland occupies Spanish Netherlands, which are to be ceded to Emperor once Dutch have established barrier fortresses to prevent a French return.
- Queen Anne dies: succeeded by her cousin George I, Elector of Hanover.
- 1714 Peace of Rastatt concludes Utrecht negotiations, finally ends conflict with France, taking possession from the Dutch of Austrian Netherlands.
- Louis XIV dies. Accession of his five-year-old great-grandson as Louis XV, under the regency of his nephew Philippe, Duc d'Orléans, son of Monsieur and Liselotte.
- 1715





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