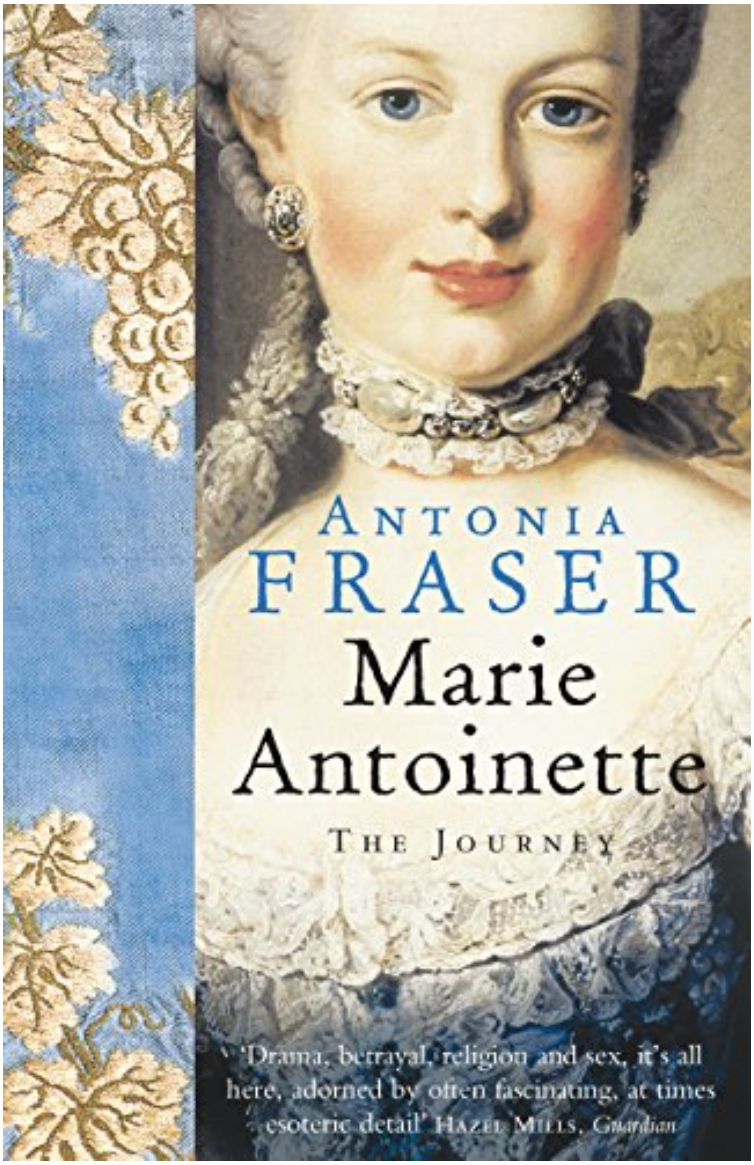
Marie Antoinette (English Edition)



Par Antonia Fraser
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[Download] Marie Antoinette (English Edition)

Par Antonia Fraser : Marie Antoinette (English Edition) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Marie Antoinette (English Edition):

Description :

Prsentation de l'diteur'Drama, betrayal, religion and sex, it's all here ... Fascinating' GUARDIAN'Beautifully paced, impeccably written ... Don't miss it' INDEPENDENT'Fraser is at her best here, lucid, authoritative and compassionate' SUNDAY TIMES 'Superbly researched ... the definitive work on the ill-fated queen' CATHOLIC HERALDMarie Antoinette's dramatic life-story continues to arouse mixed emotions. To many people, she is still 'la reine mchante', whose extravagance and frivolity helped to bring down the French monarchy; her indifference to popular suffering epitomised by the (apocryphal) words: 'let them eat cake'. Others are equally passionate in her defence: to them, she is a victim of misogyny.Antonia Fraser examines her influence over the king, Louis XVI, the accusations and sexual slurs made against her, her patronage of

the arts which enhanced French cultural life, her imprisonment, the death threats made against her, rumours of lesbian affairs, her trial (during which her young son was forced to testify to sexual abuse by his mother) and her eventual execution by guillotine in 1793..comIn the past, Antonia Fraser's bestselling histories and biographies have focused on people and events in her native England, from Mary Queen of Scots to Faith and Treason: The Story of the Gunpowder Plot. Now she crosses the Channel to limn the life of France's unhappiest queen, bringing along her gift for fluent storytelling, vivid characterization, and evocative historical background. Marie Antoinette (1755-93) emerges in Fraser's sympathetic portrait as a goodhearted girl woefully undereducated and poorly prepared for the dynastic political intrigues into which she was thrust at age 14, when her mother, Empress Maria Theresa, married her off to the future Louis XVI to further Austria's interests in France. Far from being the licentious monster later depicted by the radicals who sent her to the guillotine at the height of the French Revolution, young Marie Antoinette was quite prudish, as well as thoroughly humiliated by her husband's widely known failure to have complete intercourse with her for seven long years (the gory details were reported to any number of concerned royal parties, including her mother and brother). She compensated by spending lavishly on clothes and palaces, but Fraser points out that this hardly made her unique among 18th-century royalty, and in any case the causes of the Revolution went far beyond one woman's frivolities. The moving final chapters show Marie Antoinette gaining in dignity and courage as the Revolution stripped her of everything, subjected her to horrific brutalities (a mob paraded the head of her closest female friend on a pike below her window), and eventually took her life. Fraser makes no attempt to hide the queen's shortcomings, in particular her poor political skills, but focuses on her personal warmth and noble bearing during her final ordeal. It's another fine piece of popular historical biography to add to Fraser's already impressive bibliography. --Wendy Smith Extraitchapter oneA Small Archduchess"Her Majesty has been very happily delivered of a small, but completely healthy Archduchess."Count Khevenhuller, Court Chamberlain, 1755On 2 November 1755 the Queen-Empress was in labour all day with her fifteenth child. Since the experience of childbirth was no novelty, and since Maria Teresa, Queen of Hungary by inheritance, Empress of the Holy Roman Empire by marriage, hated to waste time, she also laboured in another way at her papers. For the responsibilities of government were not to be lightly cast aside; in her own words: "My subjects are my first children." Finally, at about half past eight in the evening in her apartments at the Hofburg Palace in Vienna, Maria Teresa gave birth. It was a girl. Or, as the Court Chamberlain, Count Khevenhuller, described the event in his diary: "Her Majesty has been happily delivered of a small, but completely healthy Archduchess." As soon as was practical, Maria Teresa returned to work, signing papers from her bed.The announcement was made by the Emperor Francis Stephen. He left his wife's bedroom, after the usual Te Deum and Benediction had been said. In the Mirror Room next door the ladies and gentlemen of the court who had the Rights of Entry were waiting. Maria Teresa had firmly ended the practice, so distasteful to the mother in labour (but still in place at the court of Versailles), by which these courtiers were actually present in the delivery room. As it was they had to content themselves with congratulating the happy father. It was not until four days later that those ladies of the court who by etiquette would formerly have been in the bedchamber were allowed to kiss the Empress. Other courtiers, including Khevenhuller, were permitted the privilege on 8 November, and a further set the next day. Perhaps it was the small size of the baby, perhaps it was the therapeutic effect of working at her papers throughout the day, but Maria Teresa had never looked so well after a delivery. The Empress's suite of apartments was on the first floor of the so-called Leopoldine wing of the extensive and rambling Hofburg complex. The Habsburgs had lived in the Hofburg since the late thirteenth century, but this wing had originally been constructed by the Emperor Leopold I in 1660. It was rebuilt following a fire, then greatly renovated by Maria Teresa herself. It lay south-west of the internal courtyard known as In Der Burg. Swiss Guards, that doughty international force that protects royalty, gave their name to the adjacent courtyard and gate, the Schweizerhof and the Schweizertor. The next stage in the new baby's life was routine. She was handed over to an official wet-nurse. Great ladies did not nurse their own children. For one thing, breastfeeding was considered to ruin the shape of the bosom, made so visible by eighteenth-century fashions. The philandering Louis XV openly disliked the practice for this reason. The traditional prohibition against husbands sleeping with their wives during this period probably counted for more with Maria Teresa, an enthusiast for the marital double-bed and the conception--if not the nursing--of ever increasing numbers of babies. As the Empress said of herself, she was insatiable on the subject of children. Marie Antoinette was put into the care of Constance Weber, wife of a magistrate. Constance, according to her son Joseph Weber, who later wrote his memoirs, was famed for her beautiful figure and an even greater beauty of soul. She had been nursing

little Joseph for three months when she took over the baby Archduchess, and it was understood in the family that Constance's appointment would improve all their fortunes. As the foster-brother of an archduchess, Joseph Weber benefited all his life; there were pensions for Constance as well as his other brothers and sisters. During Marie Antoinette's childhood, Maria Teresa took her to visit the Weber household; there she showered gifts upon the children and, according to Joseph, admonished Constance: "Good Weber, have a care for your son." Maria Teresa was thirty-eight years old and since her marriage nearly twenty years earlier, she had produced four Archdukes as well as ten Archduchesses (of whom seven were living in 1755). The extraordinarily high survival rate of the imperial family--by the standards of infant mortality of the time--meant that there was no urgent pressure upon the Queen-Empress to produce a fifth son. In any case it seems that Maria Teresa had expected a daughter. One of her courtiers, Count Dietrichstein, wagered against her that the new baby would be a boy. When the appearance of a girl, said to be as like her mother as two drops of water, meant that he lost the bet, the Count had a small porcelain figure made of himself, on his knees, proffering verses by Metastasio to Maria Teresa. He may have lost his wager but if the new-born augusta figlia resembled her mother, then all the world would have gained. If the birth of an eighth surviving daughter was not in itself a disappointment, was there not perhaps something inauspicious about the date itself, 2 November? This, the Feast of All Souls, was the great Catholic Day of the Dead, when the departed were solemnly commemorated in a series of requiem Masses, in churches and chapels heavily draped in black. What this actually meant during the childhood of Marie Antoinette was that her birthday was generally celebrated on its eve, the Feast of All Saints, a day of white and gold. Besides which, 13 June, the feast of her patron saint St. Antony, tended to be regarded as Marie Antoinette's personal day of celebration, just as the feast of St. Teresa of Avila on 15 October was the name-day of her mother. If one looks to influences, the baby born on the sombre Day of the Dead must have been conceived on or around a far more cheerful feast of the church: 2 February, the traditionally candle-lit celebration of the Purification of the Virgin Mary. An episode during the Empress's pregnancy could also be seen as significant. In April, Christoph Willibald Gluck was engaged by Maria Teresa to compose "theatrical and chamber music" in exchange for an official salary; this followed his successes in Italy and England as well as in Vienna. A court ball at the palace of Laxenburg, fifteen miles from Vienna, on 5 May 1755, marked his inauguration in this role. Two tastes that would impress themselves upon Marie Antoinette--a love of the "holiday" palace of Laxenburg and a love of the music of Gluck--could literally be said to have been inculcated in her mother's womb. In contrast, the fact that a colossal earthquake took place in Lisbon on 2 November, with 30,000 killed, was not at the time seen as relevant. This was an age of poor European communications and news of the disaster did not reach Vienna until some time afterwards. It was true that the King of Portugal and his wife had been engaged to stand as the coming baby's godparents; the unfortunate royal couple had to flee from their capital at about the time Marie Antoinette was born. But, once again, this was not known at the time. In any case, royalties were not expected to be present at the event; according to custom, proxies were appointed in their absence: the baby's eldest brother, Joseph, and her eldest sister, Marianne, aged fourteen and seventeen respectively. The baptism took place at noon on 3 November (baptisms were always held speedily and in the absence of the mother, who was allowed to recover from her ordeal). The Emperor went with a cortege to the Church of the Augustine Friars, the traditional church used by the court, and heard Mass, including the sermon. After that, at twelve o'clock, as Count Khevenhuller noted in his meticulous diary, which is an important source for our knowledge of events in Maria Teresa's family, the baptism was held in "the new and beautiful Anticamera" and performed by "our Archbishop," since the new Papal Nuncio had not yet made a formal appearance at court. The imperial family sat in a row on a long bench. Two galas were ordered: a great gala for the day of the baptism, and a lesser gala for the day after. On 5 and 6 November there were two more spectacles that were shown to the public for free, and on those days there was no charge to the public for entry at the city gates. It was all a very well established ritual. The baby in whose honour these celebrations were held was given the names Maria Antonia Josepha Joanna. The prefix of Maria had been established for all Habsburg princesses in the days of the baby's great-grandfather, the Emperor Leopold I and his third wife Eleanora of Neuburg; it was intended to signify the special veneration of the Habsburg family for the Virgin Mary. Obviously in a bevy of eight sisters (and a mother) all enjoying the same hallowed prefix, it was not going to be used for everyone all the time. In fact the new baby would be called Antoine in the family.The French diminutive of the baptismal name, Antoine, was significant. Viennese society was multilingual, people being able to make themselves easily understood in Italian and Spanish as well as in German and French. But it was French, acknowledged as the language of civilization,

that was the universal language of courts throughout Europe; Frederick II of Prussia, Maria Teresa's great rival, for example, preferred his beloved French to German. It was French that was used in diplomatic despatches to the Habsburgs. Maria Teresa spoke French, although with a strong German accent (she also spoke the Viennese dialect), but the Emperor Francis Stephen spoke French all his life, not caring to learn German. In this way, both in the family circle and outside it, Maria Antonia was quickly transmogrified into Antoine, the name she also used to sign her letters. To courtiers, the latest archduchess was to be known as Madame Antoine. Charming, sophisticated, lazy and pleasure-loving, an inveterate womanizer who adored his wife and family, Francis Stephen of Lorraine handed on to Marie Antoinette a strong dose of French blood. His mother Elisabeth Charlotte d'Orleans had been a French royal princess and a granddaughter of Louis XIII. Her brother, the Duc d'Orleans, had acted as Regent during the childhood of Louis XV. As for Francis Stephen himself, although he had Habsburg blood on his father's side and was adopted into the Viennese court in 1723 at the age of fourteen, it was important to him that he was by birth a Lorrainer. From 1729, when his father died, he was hereditary Duke of Lorraine, a title that stretched back to the time of Charlemagne. This notional Lorrainer inheritance would also feature in the consciousness of Marie Antoinette, even though Francis Stephen was obliged to surrender the actual duchy in 1735. It was part of a complicated European deal whereby Louis XV's father-in-law, who had been dispossessed as King of Poland, received the Duchy of Lorraine for the duration of his lifetime; it then became part of the kingdom of France. In return Francis Stephen was awarded the Duchy of Tuscany. The renunciation of his family heritage in order to soothe France was presented to Francis Stephen as part of a package that would enable him to marry Maria Teresa. On her side, it was a passionate love match. The British ambassador to Vienna reported that the young Archduchess "sighs and pines all night for her Duke of Lorraine. If she sleeps, it is only to dream of him. If she wakes, it is but to talk of him to the lady-in-waiting." Wilfully, in a way that would be in striking contradiction to the precepts she preached as a mother, Maria Teresa set her heart against a far grander suitor, the heir to the Spanish throne. The medal struck for the wedding bore the inscription (in Latin): "Having at length the fruit of our desires." The desires in question, however, did not include the bridegroom's continued enjoyment of his hereditary possessions. As his future father-in-law Charles VI crudely put it: "No renunciation, no Archduchess." Maria Teresa of course believed in total wifely submission, at least in theory, another doctrine that she would expound assiduously to her daughters. Her solution was to tolerate and even encourage her husband's Lorrainer relations at court, as well as a multitude of Lorrainer hangers-on.The marriage of Maria Teresa's sister Marianna to Francis Stephen's younger brother Charles of Lorraine strengthened these ties; Marianna's early death left Maria Teresa with a sentimental devotion to her widower. Then there was Francis Stephen's attachment to his unmarried sister Princess Charlotte, Abbess of Remiremont, who was a frequent visitor. She shared her brother's taste for shooting parties, in which she personally participated. In the year of Marie Antoinette's birth, a party of twenty-three, three of them ladies, killed nearly 50,000 head of game and wild deer. Princess Charlotte fired over 9000 shots, nearly as many as the Emperor. This strong-minded woman was so devoted to her native Lorraine that she once said she was prepared to travel there barefoot. Thus Marie Antoinette was brought up to think of herself as "de Lorraine" as well as "d'Autriche et de Hongrie." In the meantime Lorraine had become a foreign principality attached to France, so that princes of Lorraine who made their lives in France had the status of "foreign princes" only and were not accorded the respect due to foreign royalties nor that due to French dukes. This ambiguous status was one from which the foreign princes ever sought to escape, while those of superior birth in French courtly terms sought to hold them down. A seemingly small point of French etiquette--small at least to outsiders--was to be of considerable significance in the future of Francis Stephen's daughter. This was an age of multiple intermarriage where royal houses were concerned. Insofar as one can simplify it purely in terms of her four grandparents, Marie Antoinette had the blood of the Bourbons--the Orleans branch--and of Lorraine on her father's side. More remotely, her Orleans great-grandmother, a Palatine princess known as Liselotte, brought her the blood of Mary Queen of Scots via Elizabeth of Bohemia--but this was to go back 200 years. On the maternal side, Marie Antoinette inherited German blood from her grandmother Elizabeth Christina of Brunswick-Wolfbuttel, once described as "the most beautiful queen on earth." Her appearance at the age of fourteen enchanted her husband Charles VI: "Now that I have seen her, everything that has been said about her is but a shadow devoured by the light of the sun." However, if exceptional beauty was to be found in the pool of genes that Marie Antoinette might inherit, it was also true that the lovely Empress became immensely large and dropsical in later years.From

the Hardcover edition.