



To the Scaffold: The Life of Marie Antoinette

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One of history's most misunderstood figures, Marie Antoinette represents the extravagance and the decadence of pre-Revolution France. Yet there was an innocence about Antoinette, thrust as a child into the chillingly formal French court.

Married to the maladroit, ill-mannered Dauphin, Antoinette found pleasure in costly entertainments and garments. She spent lavishly while her overtaxed and increasingly hostile subjects blamed her for France's plight. In time Antoinette matured into a courageous Queen, and when their enemies finally closed in, Antoinette followed her inept husband to the guillotine in one last act of bravery.

In *To the Scaffold*, Carolly Erickson provides an estimation of a lost Queen that is psychologically acute, richly detailed, and deeply moving.

To the Scaffold: The Life of Marie Antoinette Details

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From Reader Review To the Scaffold: The Life of Marie Antoinette for online ebook

Ann says

This is one of the most riveting biographies I've read. After reading the biography of Napoleon Bonaparte, I picked it up AGAIN (this is my third time reading it) in order to refresh my memory of what layed the groundwork in France for the French Revolution and the rise of Napoleon. Undisciplined, LAVISH spending by Marie Antoinette and the royal family and courtiers during a time in France when their economy was on the verge of bankruptcy, led to wide protest and unrest. Burdensome taxes were draining the hard earned resources from the common people already suffering from hunger and privation following natural disasters that had nearly wiped out the wheat crops. Jealous and intriguing courtiers were spreading wild and mostly unfounded rumors that the Queen was behind the deprivation ... that she had orchestrated the famine ... that she was trying to ruin France. Marie Antoinette and Louise became the scape goats of all that was desperately wrong with France. While there was a desperate need for reform in the government, the people did not allow the political process to come up with a way to reasonably address the problems. The result was a populace that became inflamed to revolution ... a populace that while on the one hand demanded that the king recognize the individual rights and liberties of the individual, also demanded blood and revenge for what they perceived as the crimes committed by the rich aristocracy. The general populace went wildly out of control indiscriminately rioting and pillaging and accusing many people of crimes they did not commit and ultimately sentencing thousands to be executed. The unbridled blood lust and violence unleashed during the French Revolution was horrifying ... the description of the rise of the guillotine grisly ... the last days of the king and queen and their children were heartbreaking. When they came and took away the king to be beheaded my heart ached but the last days of the queen were filled with unconscionable suffering. The revolutionaries took her young son away from her (the heir to the throne) and put him in the care of an especially repugnant revolutionary who was to re-educate him and erase from his head all thoughts of his royal heritage. The mother in me grieved with Marie Antoinette as she suffered this last and final horror before she was tried and a judge finally read a list of some of the most grievous and far fetched charges against her ... sealing her fate and leading to her execution. May God save us from ever repeating the mistakes of this period of history.

Jessica says

Things I learned from this book:

- 1)King Louis had a medical condition known as phimosis that made is excruciatingly painful to ejaculate. It required a painful surgery to correct, and it was until 7 years into their marriage he finally opted for this surgery. Ouch.
- 2)Marie Antoinette never left France after she arrived as a young bride.
- 3)The guillotine was a new execution method invented during the revolution. It was actually a political statement meant to grant all levels of society an equal method of execution. Prior to this only nobles were granted the "privilege" of beheading. Commoners had only torturous methods of execution available to them.
- 4)At the beginning of Louis and Antoinette's imprisonment, they were allowed servants, a clothing allowance, 6 course meals etc.

5) King Louis, commoner last name was Capet.

6) Versailles Palace was filthy and open to almost anyone in the realm. People urinated and defecated in stairwells, brought and dumped their garbage in the gardens, those that lived in the palace simply tossed their refuse out the windows. It smelled so fetid in the palace that Marie Antoinette kept dozens of fresh cut flowers in her quarters in an attempt to mask the odor.

7) While I knew she never uttered "Let them eat cake" what I didn't know is that same phrase had been attributed to at least 2 other French monarchs, but for some reason it stuck with her.

8) She and King Louis would have survived the revolution had Louis agreed to flee sooner. In fact when they did decide to flee, they would have made it to safety had the carriage Marie Antoinette had chosen been less luxurious in nature and more hardy in nature. As it was, one of the carriages broke down, and had to be repaired delaying the party. The hussars who had been tasked with escorting the party to safety were dismissed because it appeared the king and queen weren't coming after all. When the royal party did arrive, the guards were either nowhere to be found or too drunk to escort them. Their cover was blown and they were turned back.

9) The accounts of their extravagant spending have been in no way exaggerated throughout history. In fact once you read this book and the accounts of their spending it's quite overwhelming. It's also interesting to note that, the revolution started out not unlike today's credit crisis. Everyone was in debt. In fact the more in debt someone was, the richer they were considered to be. The house of cards economy slowed started to collapse when a single large debtor's debt was called and couldn't be covered. Panic arose, debts were called and defaulted upon, the price of bread rose to astronomical prices, the money was devalued because there was nothing to back it's worth. For a while I was certain I was reading a modern time account.

An excellent account of the life of Marie Antoinette and King Louis. I would encourage anyone who is interested in this era to read this book.

Sa Schmidt says

It is a good read. I would agree that she had been mistreated historically. Her and her King were not well prepared at all for royal duties prior to their coronation. And the Kings who was to do that was not an effective or good king at all. He is as much to blame in if not more, in my view, for this financial fiasco as the royal family that paid with their lives. His incessant preoccupation with Madam Du Barry who was not a lady. And her antics helped France nothing and invested in its future not a damn thing.

Antoinette, who did go overboard with spending with a country that didn't have it to give, I found to be a loving and good mother and wife. And both monarchs definitely loved their citizens.

There is a lot more I could say about the things that sealed their fate, but in my view the jist of this mess starts with the aforementioned and it is a treacherous uphill climb from there because of it.

Michelle Davila says

It is by no means the best chronicle of this woman. It talks endlessly about the queens growing up and life,

but not much about the trial. So the title is misleading

Jessica Harn says

The life of Marie Antoinette really comes to life, making her death even more tragic in the French Revolution

Megan says

3.5 stars.

Read for a uni assignment on the French Revolution.

Paige says

This is a good crash course on the life of Marie Antoinette and the circumstances that led to her death. Erickson is a highly sympathetic author, but she doesn't whitewash the monarchy's absurd extravagance (she notes in one chapter that the cost of maintaining the royal household was, at one time, fully a sixth of the national budget). On the whole, she does an excellent job telling the story of how the French monarchy refused to change with the world around it. It doesn't read like fiction, but she moves along at a good clip. If you're interested at all in Marie Antoinette and the French Revolution, this is a good place to start.

Kiesha ~ 1Cheekyllass says

I think that the first sentence in the book description... "One of the most misunderstood." I'm not saying she wasn't frivolous or empty headed in some regards but she didn't seem to be a hateful or mean person. What was done to this family was brutal.

Page Wench says

A more informal feel to this than other Marie Antoinette biographies I've read. I appreciated the footnotes and kept my bookmark at the appropriate place to easily flip back to refer to them for each chapter. A good mixture of personal and court details and the broader political picture of a troubled France. Recommended to anyone interested in the French Revolution or Antoinette, even if you've read other biographies.

M.M. Strawberry Reviews says

I read this back in highschool - this book was a chance discovery as I wandered among the shelves at my school library, looking for something to read. This book looked interesting, so I picked it up, and I was not

disappointed. Not only does Ms. Erickson offer a glimpse into Marie Antoinette's life, but she also gives a background of French history (which is vital to understanding the French Revolution and the circumstances that stripped the royal family of their powers and led to Louis and Marie's deaths)

I found this book to be wonderful. I love history and am a sucker for these books. I found this book (and the few other books of hers that I read) well-researched, and Ms. Erickson makes it interesting, instead of some boring, dry old account. So many people liked to detract Marie and slam her and blame France's problems on her (much like historians liked to slam the infamous Empress Dowager Cixi [1835-1908] and blame China's problems on her when in reality China and the Qing Dynasty had been struggling for long before she became the Emperor's concubine), but this book shows that France's problems ran more deeply and that Marie was a scapegoat. Sure, she wasn't perfect, but she was more of a victim of circumstance than her detractors would say, and this book is very eye-opening. Overall a informative and enjoyable read.

Emily Ross says

This book was okay. Its not the best biography of Marie Antoinette ever written, but at least it is pretty readable. Its good for people who know nothing about her and want to learn.

The title is pretty misleading, because its titled To The Scaffold, and the trial and the lead up to the scaffolding is the most rushed and vague part of the book. It was incredibly brief. It focused much more on her childhood than anything else.

My major gripe about this book was that it read more like fiction than a biography. All the people were cast into molds, ie. Louis XVI was a lazy slob, Madame Du Barry was a pretentious prostitute who relied on men, the Lamballes and Polignac's were golddiggers, and the suthor wrote as if they never deviated from these. Marie Antoinette's supposed affair with Axel Fersen is taken as 100% fact, and this casts doubt on the accuracy of the rest of the book.

Jodi says

To the Scaffold: The Life of Marie Antoinette was the best work I have read of Carolly Erickson. It was well-written, thoroughly researched, and readable. Erickson, like any author of Marie Antoinette does spend time speculating on the relationship between the Queen and the Swedish officer, Axel von Fersen, it is not blown out of proportion. Erickson focuses on the politics of the era, the Queen's inability to recognize the danger she is in (due to the great dislike the people of Paris have towards her) and her life, as can be reconstructed, in imprisonment.

Dolores Marconi says

Great read; well researched story. Marie Antoinette was nothing like she has been generally portrayed; her famous quote "Let them eat cake", in this account, meant to allow them what she herself could eat. The teen aged King and Queen were untrained in business but good hearted.

Jana says

I enjoyed this author's style of writing. I especially liked the beginning of the book. It was interesting to read about Marie Antoinette's background, and then read about her experiences at first in the palace. Of course, in the end it takes a dark turn, and the political parts of the book were a little hard to follow. It's definitely written with a bias for Marie Antoinette, but that's OK by me, because I think she gets a bad rap that she doesn't necessarily deserve. I wish there had been some kind of epilogue, or something at the end to tell us what happened with her children, and some of the other people who were a big part of her life. The end was very abrupt, which I guess maybe was the point. But, still, I would have liked a little follow up.

Hazel Hyacinth says

Very well-researched. Erickson's writing SHINES in historical biographies. Her writing is gentle, so observant, meticulous, and beautiful, as though she sees and captures beauty and mystery and intrigue and even sorrow and misery beneath the fabric of a royal monarchy, that most of us miss. It's a pleasant surprise because her historical novel "The Hidden Diary of Marie Antoinette" significantly pales in comparison; as I think she has articulated events following the French Revolution in the biography more effectively.
