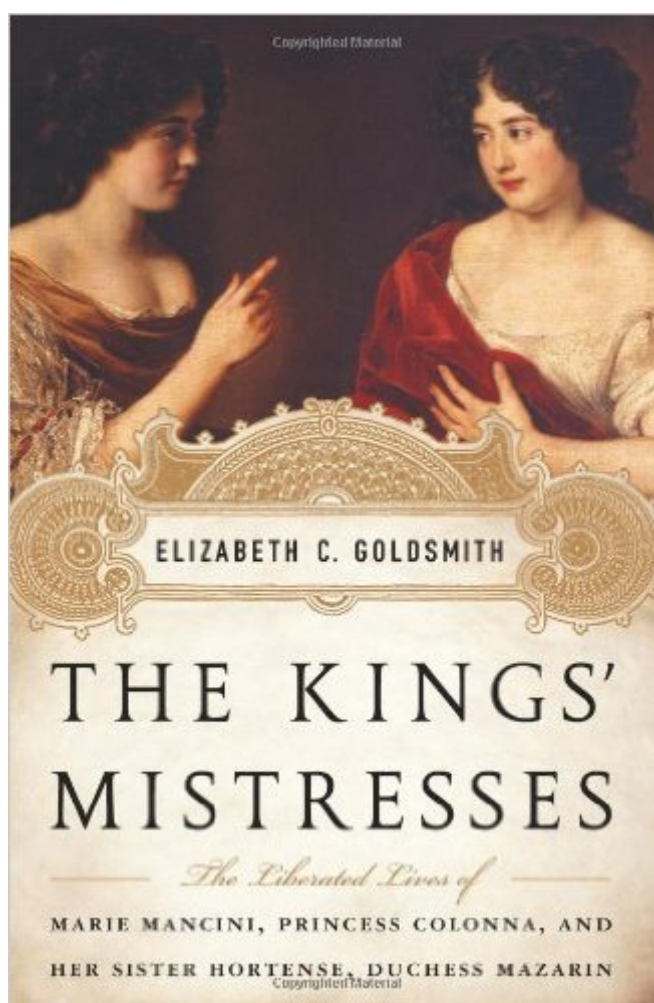


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The Kings' Mistresses: The Liberated Lives Of Marie Mancini, Princess Colonna, And Her Sister Hortense, Duchess Mazarin



Synopsis

The Mancini Sisters, Marie and Hortense, were born in Rome, brought to the court of Louis XIV of France, and strategically married off by their uncle, Cardinal Mazarin, to secure his political power base. Such was the life of many young women of the age: they had no independent status under the law and were entirely a part of their husband's property once married. Marie and Hortense, however, had other ambitions in mind altogether. Miserable in their marriages and determined to live independently, they abandoned their husbands in secret and began lives of extraordinary daring on the run and in the public eye. The beguiling sisters quickly won the affections of noblemen and kings alike. Their flight became popular fodder for salon conversation and tabloids, and was closely followed by seventeenth-century European society. The Countess of Grignan remarked that they were traveling like two heroines out of a novel. Others gossiped that they were roaming the countryside in pursuit of wandering lovers. Their scandalous behavior—disguising themselves as men, gambling, and publicly disputing with their husbands—served as more than just entertainment. It sparked discussions across Europe concerning the legal rights of husbands over their wives. Elizabeth Goldsmith's vibrant biography of the Mancini sisters—drawn from personal papers of the players involved and the tabloids of the time—illuminates the lives of two pioneering free spirits who were feminists long before the word existed.

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Customer Reviews

I got this book from a friend who got it as part of a book giveaway. So they didn't pay for it and I

didn't either. Apparently this is an important point. Now let's get down to the book. It's about two Sisters, Hortense and Marie Mancini, from a rich family. The riches were built by their Uncle who amassed wealth as he supported King Louis XIV of France. He invited his sisters and their children to join him in France to consolidate his power. If you are thinking arranged marriages you are on the right track. At the time Hortense and Marie went to France they were aged 13 and 6. Prim and proper could not be attributed to their spirit and at one point Marie was sent to a convent basically to get rid of her. What follows in the book is the adventures of these two sisters as they reeked social havoc through France and Italy and England and Spain. They didn't play by the rules, they couldn't be manipulated by their uncle or their mothers, they flaunted social conventions, they basically were way ahead of a modern day women. As we follow the wrack and ruin that surrounds them the author cleverly educates us on what was happening in these countries during the 17th century.

SNEAKY Overall I found this a highly entertaining book and if you are looking for a historical based book on independent women you don't need to go any further than this book. Highly recommended.

In the 17th-century, sisters Marie and Hortense Mancini married into wealth and nobility, but they soon discovered themselves desperately unhappy with their abusive husbands. Divorce at the time, was available, but extremely difficult, if not impossible, to acquire and fraught with scandal. Left with little choice, the two women fled, at times in each other's company, and other times alone. From Italy, France, and England, the women travelled and lived the high life, visiting and finding refuge in some of Europe's most elite families. They found love in the arms of kings. They indulged themselves in love affairs, gambling, hunting, and art collecting, much to the gossiping delight of the world that could not help but be fascinated with the wild freedom of these two women. But as they moved from home to home, or castle to castle, their husbands tracked them, thrusting impediments and threats in their path, forcing them into convents or withdrawing all money, or entering into negotiations to force them into submission. Somehow, they managed to dodge the courts and their husband's attempts to squash their seized independence. The author did an impeccable job of researching and tracking the travels of these two fascinating women. The book takes us on a journey with them from country to country, court to court, and home to home. However, it is quite academic in nature and brushes too briefly over their actual escapades. What I mean by that, is I got a wonderful picture of their actual travels, but very little about what truly made them notorious, where they flaunted societal standards, and why the world was so enchanted by their mischief. Nevertheless, this was a fabulous book that takes the reader into the courts of kings for a first hand glimpse of the world in 17th century Europe.

Ms. Goldsmith does true justice in bringing to life the stories of two women who had the courage to pursue their own independence and freedom at a time when wives were considered property of their husbands. She helps the reader to understand the historical, political and social context of the day so that the reader gains full appreciation for the sacrifices and obstacles these women overcame. We come to admire their sheer guts and willingness to go against social norms of the day, and they do so with vitality, cunning and no shame. These two were true pioneers of the feminist movement - kudos to Ms. Goldsmith for not letting these incredible women become minor footnotes in history! It is important to note that this is not a historical novel, but rather a well-organized dissertation of Marie and Hortense Mancini as might be expected of a university professor author.

The Kings' Mistresses is a very entertaining account of sisters Marie and Hortense Mancini who caroused their way across Louis XIV's Europe at a time when that was just not done. Their uncle, a powerful cardinal in France, tried to insure his legacy by arranging prestigious matches for his nieces before he died, but he made his decisions too hastily because both men soon became controlling and abusive. Defying the standards of the time Marie and Hortense escaped, fleeing their husbands and setting off on adventures separately and together, causing them to become media sensations. This was the very early years of journalism and coverage of their exploits gave a boost to the circulation of the nascent gazettes of the time. Hortense became the first non-royal noble woman in France to publish a memoir under her own name, and Marie did the same one year later. Their pleasure seeking lives and their arguments about their right to autonomy without their husbands became examples to early free-thinkers in England and France. I received a copy of this book for possible review from the publisher. I was under no obligation and the opinions are mine.

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