



Revolt in Prerevolutionary France: The Prince de Conti's Conspiracy against Louis, 1775-1757

Professor John D. Woodbridge

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On the eve of the Seven Years' War, the prince de Conti--cousin and confidant of King Louis XV--turned renegade and masterminded a plot to topple the king from his throne. Although the event is pivotal for the political and religious history of eighteenth-century France, the details of the conspiracy have long been shrouded in mystery. In *Revolt in Prerevolutionary France*, historian John Woodbridge draws on ten years' research to solve the mystery and throw new light on questions that ultimately led to the French Revolution and the downfall of the monarchy.

Woodbridge explores the ways in which the prince de Conti's involvement of French Huguenots--and, tangentially, English troops--in a Fronde-like conspiracy challenged Louis XV's ideology and rocked his government to its foundations. He describes the links between the Conti conspiracy and the Jansenist parliamentary victory of 1757. And he discusses the effects of the conspiracy on Louis XV himself, who was described by one well-placed English spy as being so "melancholic" as to have considered abdication.

Woodbridge also shows how understanding the conspiracy illuminates previously obscure actions of such figures as Louis XV, Madame de Pompadour, William Pitt the Elder, George II, and the prince de Conti himself. He demonstrates how Louis XV's gratitude toward those Protestants who had remained loyal to him led to a de facto toleration that further undermined the king's position, which recognized only Roman Catholics as legitimate citizens or subjects. By the time of the French Revolution, Woodbridge concludes, it had become clear to many Frenchmen that other criteria for establishing national unity and defining citizenship would have to be sought.

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