

Combining Scopes

A study of the early reign of Louis XV through a combination of national and international French political perspectives.

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Table of Content

Introduction	7
Chapter 1: From the Regency to the War of the Polish Succession	15
1.1: International Politics: Diplomacy of Ambiguity	15
Prologue	15
The French involvement in the War of the Polish Succession 1733-1735	16
The aftermath: Reaching an Agreement 1735-1738	20
Belle-Isle during the War of the Polish Succession	22
1.2: Court politics: The Rise of the Factions	23
Cultural Changes	23
The Four Bases of Power in France	28
‘Le Feu Roi et le Roi Timide’: the King	29
The First Minister and the Ministry	30
The <i>Parlement</i>	31
The Royal Court	32
Belle-Isle’s rise at Court	34
Conclusion	38
Chapter 2: The War of the Austrian Succession	41
2.1: The Short Peace 1738-1740	41
Prologue	41
International Diplomacy	41
The Court	43
Belle-Isle at Court	45
The Preliminaries of War	46
2.2: The War Years 1740-1743	53
Fighting the War	53
The French Court during the War	60
Conclusion	65
Conclusion	69
Epilogue	76

Illustrations	78
Bibliography	81
Sources	84

Maps

Map 1: Europe in 1730	14
Map 2: Europe in 1740	40
Map 3: The Assault on Austria 1741-1742	54
Map 4: The War of the Austrian Succession	68

Introduction

During the summer of 1742 around 200.000 French soldiers were fighting in the Holy Roman Empire, in a war that France never had to get militarily involved in.¹ The War of the Austrian Succession (1740-1748) was to become the end of an era for France, with changes occurring in both its internal and external politics. Internally the death of first minister André-Hercule de Fleury (1653 -1743), last of the four great cardinal-ministers, and the subsequent choice made by King Louis XV (1710-1774) to rule without a *premier ministre*, marked the end of the age of first ministers. At the same time it meant the rise of the court factions, forever struggling for the favor of the King. Externally, the international status of France was greatly damaged by the war. The careful diplomacy with which Fleury had successfully increased the international standing of France during the 1730's would come undone in less than a year.

In short, France's participation in the War of the Austrian Succession proved to be a strong catalyst for the changes that occurred in France during the decades leading up to the revolution; a catalyst that is regrettably too often overlooked and forgotten. Only very rarely has the French involvement in the War of the Austrian Succession come under scrutiny of historians, the most recent contributions to the political impact of the War of the Austrian Succession on France being *Power and Politics in Old Regime France 1720-1745* by Peter Campbell and Jeremy Black's article 'French Foreign Policy in the Age of Fleury Reassessed'.² The third work worth mentioning here is *French Foreign Policy during the Administration of Cardinal Fleury 1726-1743* by Arthur Wilson. Though written in 1936, it still holds some very interesting insights and is perhaps still the most important work about the foreign policy of Fleury.³

Though all of these valuable contributions add greatly to our understanding of the impact that the War of the Austrian Succession had on French history, all of them look only at part of the picture. Campbell's work is mostly occupied with the internal political developments in France during the age of Fleury, whereas Black's article mainly looks at the international diplomacy of France before, during and after the war. Wilson does connect both international and national developments, but is too forcefully writing towards his own conclusions and is too occupied with Fleury as an individual. I believe that this interesting period in French history deserves a new historical study, which I shall try to provide with this paper.

The overarching aim of the paper will be to show that internal and external political developments of France in the period between Louis XV ascension to the throne in 1726 and the death of Fleury in 1743 are interwoven and should not be seen separately. The internal power struggles before and during the war have greatly influenced France's external policy. For lack of a better term, I have called this study of the links between these internal and external political developments 'combining scopes'. To examine this combination of scopes, I have chosen the period of roughly 1726-1743 as an

¹ Butler, R., *Choiseul Volume I: Father and Son 1719-1754*, Oxford 1980, 276.

² Black, J., 'French Foreign Policy in the Age of Fleury Reassessed' in *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 103, issue 407 (April 1988), pp. 359-384 & Campbell, P., *Power and Politics in Old Regime France, 1720-1745*, London 1996.

³ Wilson, A., *French Foreign Policy during the administration of Cardinal Fleury 1726-1743: A Study in Diplomacy and Commercial Development*, Harvard 1936.

example. I'm acutely aware that the choice to look at a combination of national and international political levels, the choice to mark both the beginning and ending of this paper's study with a date in time, as well as the choice to look at French developments specifically, limits me, the researcher, in a profound way.

Firstly, the period I have chosen encompasses a scant twenty years, which is not by any means a long stretch of time. Secondly, even though other early-modern European states will feature in this paper with varying degrees of importance, the main focus will firmly be on France. At first glance this may seem to contradict with the promised 'international scope'. However, within the context of this paper, the 'international scope' mainly refers to international politics from a *French* perspective, not from that of other European states. Though on occasion some exceptions are made, as with Prussia, the 'scopes' of this paper thus refer to the national and international perspectives and developments of French politics, not European. Finally, this will be a paper on political history. Though some important cultural and social developments in France during the late 17th and early 18th century are described, this by no means is, nor does it claim to be, a socio-economic or cultural paper. The broad social and cultural developments outlined in this paper all contribute to its political narrative. The influences of these large scale social and cultural changes have been profound, but they are not the subject of this paper in their own right. As a result some developments are worked out more fully than others, though in almost all cases only their general outlines are given.

Thus I am fully aware of the shortcomings of this paper. Despite these, however, there are of course good reasons for making such demarcations. The years under scrutiny here encompass exactly the period that will need to be analyzed to fulfill the methodological aim of this paper, which is to show that combining the study of national and international political developments can lead to interesting new results. To state it simply: this paper is a case study. It begins slightly before 1730 because of the necessity to look into the developments of the War of the Polish Succession, as the political ramifications of this war would play an important role in the War of the Austrian Succession. It ends in 1743 because it is my belief that with the military defeat in the Empire, the death of Fleury and the start of the personal reign of Louis XV, this year marks a change in the political landscape of France. Taking a larger time span would only procrastinate and would unnecessarily divert from the aim of this paper.

Furthermore, I have chosen this particular period because the reign of Louis XV, especially his early reign, has often been overlooked by historians in favor of the reigns of Louis XIV and Louis XVI. With this paper I hope to inspire other historians to take a closer look at this interesting period. Also, though the overarching methodological aim has proven to be a strong motivation for writing this paper in its own right, I believe that this paper will also benefit from a biographic element to back up my arguments. Therefore, the focus throughout the paper will be on the actions and struggles of two of the most prominent figures in France at the time: cardinal Fleury and marshal Belle-Isle. Again, this was not an arbitrary choice. These two important figures have not received the scholarly attention they deserve. Fleury has only occasionally been the subject of historical research, while Belle-Isle's career has never before been the subject of a historical study. This is surprising, as both these men played important roles in French politics during the 1730's and 1740's. Furthermore, where French international politics during the War of the Austrian Succession are concerned, historians have had the tendency to attribute the disorderly conduct of France's war effort to the antagonistic relationship between Fleury and Belle-Isle. Wilson already came to this conclusion in 1736 and further studies have done little to alter or amend it. However, over the course of this paper I will show why believe that this conclusion should be considerably nuanced.

As these two men are important to this paper, I believe that introductions are in order. The first is first minister Fleury. Already at the advanced age of 73 in 1726, André-Hercule de Fleury had reached the pinnacle of his unusual and remarkable career. He was born in 1653 in Lodève as the scion of the Fleury family, a noble house of Robe-aristocrats of ancient but modest standing. His father, Jean de Fleury, was a collector of ecclesiastical revenues. It was therefore not surprising that Fleury began his long career in the church. The young Fleury was possessed of keen mind and prudent disposition. Working his way up through the church hierarchy to become bishop of the diocese of Fréjus-Toulon in 1698, Fleury's boundless ambition was, for the time being, satisfied. For seventeen years he expanded his circle of friends, clients and patrons at court, until in 1715 he was appointed as tutor to the *dauphin*. The *dauphin* Louis XV took an immediate liking to Fleury, whom he saw as a surrogate father in the absence of parental love. Though devoted to his duty, Fleury managed to exploit his position during the *Régence* (1715-1723) and became a minister of state in 1723. After first minister Louis Henri de Bourbon, duke de Bourbon (1692-1740), was exiled in 1726 Fleury took his place, becoming cardinal along the way. Fleury, who had come from such a humble background, had ascended over all others. Prudent, shrewd and cunning, he was a consummate statesman, favoring careful political maneuvering and diplomacy over bold and rash actions. For the following seventeen years he would practically rule France by himself, never distributing his power and making all the decisions. The nobles at court, aware of the unwavering favor that Fleury received from the King, as well as of his advanced age, were for the time being content to wait and make preparations for the imminent event of Fleury's death. The start of his own career a good example of the workings of factions and patronage, it is only fitting that Fleury's career and life ended during a time of great factional unrest.

The second figure that will feature prominently in this paper was a much different character than Fleury, both in background and personality. Charles Louis Auguste Fouquet, duke de Belle-Isle (1684-1761), was born into a once-mighty noble family. His grandfather was Nicolas Fouquet (1615-1680), who was *Surintendant des finances* under Louis XIV until his exile in 1665. Determined to regain the prominent position that his family had held at court before its fall from grace and possessed of a boisterous disposition, Belle-Isle entered the army at an early age. Distinguishing himself during the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1714), he was a keen and popular officer and rose to the rank of brigadier in 1708 at the age of 24. From the time of the *Régence*, when coming into middle age, Belle-Isle became more involved in court politics. During the War of the Spanish Succession he had acquired the patronage of two powerful court nobles, Louis Francois, *maréchal* de Boufflers (1644-1711), and Cardinal Armand de Rohan (1674-1749). Charming, cunning and charismatic, Belle-Isle over time became a powerful courtier in his own right. Though he was initially not much in favor with Fleury, who was suspicious of him, Belle-Isle was presented to Louis XV by the King's governess, Mme de Ventadour (1654-1744), who was married into the Rohan-family. Because of his growing reputation he was promoted to lieutenant-general in 1731. Two years before, in 1729, he had married Marie-Therese de Béthune (1709-1755). Through this marriage he became related to the Wittelsbach-family, one of the great noble houses of the Holy Roman Empire, and a cousin of Charles-Albert, Elector of Bavaria (1697-1745). From around 1730 Belle-Isle's influence and power was on the rise, his political reputation and standing at court increasing. Often consulted by the government on military and diplomatic matters, it is not surprising that Belle-Isle would play an important role during the War of the Polish Succession. However, it was during the years that followed the War of the Polish Succession and the subsequent French military intervention in the

Empire during the War of the Austrian Succession that Belle-Isle's influence would reach its zenith. Eventually the French military intervention in the Empire turned out to be a disaster that eventually brought down not only Belle-Isle's own prestige, but that of France as a whole.

In the events that occurred during the military intervention in the Empire between 1741 and 1743, the close bond between internal court politics and external policy and diplomacy will become apparent. However, as both levels of French politics during this time were very complicated, it is necessary to give a solid background of both before going deeper into the military conflict in the Empire during the early 1740's. The first chapter will therefore concentrate on the international political developments up to 1738, paying special attention to the War of the Polish Succession. At the same time it focuses on the internal political developments during this period, describing the different bases of power in France during the first decades of the eighteenth century and the effect that important social and cultural developments had on French politics.

The second chapter will detail both the international and national political and military developments during the years 1738-1743. The focus of the chapter will be on the French involvement in the war fought in the Empire between 1740 and 1743, the part of the War of the Austrian Succession known as the First Silesian War. The outcome of this paper will suggest, much like Arthur Wilson did, that the fast, strong military intervention that Belle-Isle opted for would have probably worked, if only that plan had been fully and whole-heartedly implemented.⁴ However, this would not be the case. Even though Belle-Isle initially had both the support from King Louis XV and most of the nobles at court, Fleury, though in the end often inclined to oblige Belle-Isle, remained skeptical. Furthermore, even if Belle-Isle could initially count on the support of most courtiers he still had some imposing enemies, including the powerful Noailles-family and some important members of Fleury's ministry. This chapter will clearly show that Belle-Isle, for a number different of reasons, could not put his plans into practice the way that he had intended to.

But this paper will go further than this and suggest that the time of factions, which historians normally set to begin with the death of Fleury in 1743, was already taking center stage during the years before his death. The struggle that eventually erupted between Belle-Isle and his colleague marshal Broglie during the years 1742 and 1743, which will be discussed at length, was not just fought between these two individuals but between different factions at court, between ministers and within the ranks of the army. In this light I will argue that the humiliating outcome of the war for France was the product of those same faction struggles that would become more apparent after the death of Fleury. The reason that the struggle for power amongst the different factions did not show itself properly and overtly in the years preceding his death was because the old first minister jealously tried to guard his power. However, in his shadow the court struggled over his succession. This struggle became more intense during the years 1742/43, as Fleury's health deteriorated and the war in the Empire took a turn for the worse.

For court nobles in a 'culture of merit', as Jay Smith calls it, where prestige and the appearances of personal standing are so closely linked to offices of power and military achievement, the late 1730's must have been near unbearable.⁵ Not only did Fleury remain very much alive for nearly two decades after his rise to power in 1726, but he also remained unwilling to share his power. This was not what the nobility at court had expected when Fleury became first minister. He

⁴ Wilson, *French Foreign Policy*, 327-34.

⁵ Smith, J., *The Culture of Merit: Nobility, Royal Service, and the Making of Absolute Monarchy in France 1600-1789*, Michigan 1997.

was already 73 at the time and was not expected to live as long as he did. The frustration over Fleury's continuing good health became greater as time progressed.

Not being able to exert any form of executive power, the other way that court nobles could try to further their own standing was by distinguishing themselves in war. But, from 1738 to 1740, Fleury was not at all looking to start a war. Quite the opposite in fact: as we will see he was trying to restore the equilibrium of power in Europe through careful diplomacy. Though taking the safer, more prudent approach might have been fruitful in the long run, it did not sit well with many of the nobles at court. By taking away the two ways through which the court nobility could increase their standing, Fleury must have felt more pressure on him than ever before. Old and physically deteriorating, it was only a matter of time before he would be forced to share at least some of the power which he had so jealously guarded for fifteen years. When eventually he did share it, by making Belle-Isle French ambassador in the Holy Roman Empire, trouble began. Belle-Isle had by that time not only become a powerful faction leader at court, but he was also a fervent advocate of a more militaristic foreign policy. Himself part of the court nobility, Belle-Isle's whole life had been dedicated to increasing his family's standing at court; a goal that became reality through his distinguished military career. Being part of the court nobility meant that Belle-Isle was, like most court nobles, quite frustrated with the longevity and pacifism of Fleury. Himself a soldier, he strongly disliked Fleury's more defensive approach to foreign affairs. His foreign policy was therefore aimed at further personal aggrandizement through warfare, a policy eagerly supported by many members of the court nobility that finally saw an opportunity to further their own cause after being held in stasis by the hegemony of Fleury for so many years.

By appointing Belle-Isle, Fleury showed that the road to power was no longer as closed as it once had been, and the factions that for years had been content to wait and scheme in the background were suddenly coming to the surface in full force. Interestingly enough it was Belle-Isle himself, who had given the court nobility a way out of their social straightjacket and who was first to feel the effects of the resurgent power of the factions. The failure in the Empire and Belle-Isle's eventual downfall will show that the faction struggles at the court in Paris had a profound influence on the war and on international politics. After the death of Fleury and the disgrace of Belle-Isle after 1743, the route to power was, for the first time in nearly twenty years, open to the different factions and their leaders. They would take immediate advantage of this opportunity by trying to influence the King; thus the time of the factions had begun.

In closing I would like to make some comments on sources. Though the career of the duke de Belle-Isle will be an integral part of this paper, he never wrote a coherent set of memoirs. He wrote some diaries and letters, but these are for the most part incoherent. He also wrote his political testament, but this was published two decades after the events that form the subject of this paper by a much older Belle-Isle.

I will refer to political correspondences and letters, but the most important sources of information used for this paper are memoirs. Though memoirs have the distinct advantage of documenting the ideas and feelings of the person who wrote them, this also has some negative consequences. Memoirs are very subjective and display the truth as seen through the eyes of the writer. It therefore seems useful to note the most important memoirs used in this paper and explain their prejudices and shortcomings.

First are the memoirs of Charles Philippe d'Albert de Luynes, duke de Luynes (1695-1758). As the duke de Luynes was a close relation of Belle-Isle and they were both members of the anti-Austria faction at court, the duke tends to be very discrete when his writing concerns Belle-Isle. He flatters him whenever he is presented an opportunity to do so. However, despite its shortcomings, this source will be perhaps the most valuable source for this paper. There are three main reasons for this. Firstly, of the sources mentioned here, the memoirs of the duke de Luynes cover the period assessed in this paper in the greatest detail. Secondly, he was an influential nobleman at court who kept informed about all developments both at the court in France and internationally, and presents a lengthy description of the struggle between marshals Broglie and Belle-Isle. Thirdly, as his son was commander of the dragoons during the War of the Austrian Succession, he got extremely well informed about the different developments at the front. This makes his memoirs both the most detailed and engrossing, and the most compromised source for this paper.

The second Memoirs are those of René-Louis de Voyer de Paulmy, marquis d'Argenson (1694-1757). Due to the difficult relationship between Belle-Isle and the Argenson-family, the marquis d'Argenson tends to show disdain and hostility towards Belle-Isle in his memoirs. The greatest problem with his memoirs, however, is that he sometimes makes mistakes when writing about some individuals and events. This is something that the reader has to be aware of and take into account.

The third of the important memoirs used in this paper were written by Louis de Rouvroy, Duke de Saint-Simon (1675-1755). His memoirs are particularly useful in relating the events of Belle-Isle's early career and as such will mostly be referred to in the earlier parts of the paper. Saint-Simon's writing about events is also very biased: he was very hostile towards Jesuits and strongly favored the Jansenists. Furthermore, he sometimes writes in a gossip-like style that sometimes makes it hard to see when he is deliberately making things more or less important than they really were. Though these three memoirs all have their own deficiencies, they can nonetheless be valuable sources when these deficiencies are acknowledged and taken into account.

The last source I want to mention here is not French, but German in origin. The memoirs and correspondence of Frederick the Great of Prussia (1712-1786) are referred to on multiple occasions through this paper. The most important reason for this is that he writes often openly about his dealings with France during this period, which were extensive. In doing so, he provides a contrast with the other memoirs used here, that were all written from the perspective of French courtiers. However, this does not mean that Frederick is unprejudiced, and he is prone to show his likes and dislikes with little regard for subtlety.

I will often refer to these four memoirs throughout my paper. However, as I have already addressed and acknowledged their most important characteristics and shortcomings here, I will only sparsely make further comments on their deficiencies within the context of my paper. On occasion I will give specific mentions about certain events of the War of the Austrian Succession from these memoirs, mostly from De Luynes, prevalence over the more general information in books written about the war, such as Matthew Anderson's *The War of the Austrian Succession 1740-1748*.⁶ The reason for this is that I believe that it is preferable to make use of first hand information, even if that hand is stained, so long as one continues to remember the stains, than to use the information compiled in a historical study.

⁶ Anderson, M., *The War of the Austrian Succession 1740-1748*, Harlow 1995.

As I find that quotes that have been translated into English from their original language lose some of their original meaning and punctuation in the translation, I have opted to present the quotes in this paper in their original French form. Though I am aware that this might present some difficulty for those who are unaccustomed to reading French, I believe that the benefits from presenting quotes in their original form and language far outweigh this inconvenience.

Chapter 1: From the Regency to the War of the Polish Succession

1.1 International Politics: Diplomacy of Ambiguity

Prologue

International politics were complicated during the second and third decade of the eighteenth century. Constantly changing alliances and rivalries created a complex and ever-shifting board on which players had to tread very carefully if they were to achieve their goals. For France, that after the wars of Louis XIV was looked at with great suspicion by the other European states, this general observation was all too true. Before taking a closer look at diplomatic developments in Europe up to 1738, one needs to be aware of the two great alliances that lasted throughout the years that this paper encompasses.

The first was the Central-European alliance between Russia and Austria. Austria was ruled by the Habsburgs, the archenemies of the Bourbon Kings of France. From the time of Charles V France had been wedged in between the two Habsburg-ruled states Spain and Austria. After the war of the Spanish Succession in the first years of the eighteenth century, the Habsburg Kings of Spain, France's long time rivals, were replaced by the French house of Bourbon. This proved to be a great boon for France, as under Bourbon-rule Spain no longer remained the threat that it had been in the past. Afterwards France's focus shifted to that other Habsburg-ruled country, Austria.

The Eastern European powerhouse Russia had long standing relations with the Holy Roman Empire in general and the Austrian Habsburgs in particular, as they both had trouble with the Ottoman Turks. The ties between the two countries became closer during the eighteenth century because of their mutual distrust of France, which retained friendly relations with both their shared Ottoman enemy and Russia's enemy Sweden. Though Russia is often viewed as a political loner, the treaties signed by both countries between 1726 and 1739 meant that, for the period of this paper, Russia would firmly support Austria.⁷ The allies' lingering suspicion of France became even stronger after Louis XV married Marie Leszczyńska (1703-1768), the daughter of the King of Poland.⁸ United by their mutual distrust of France, the alliance between Austria and Russia would last for most of the eighteenth century.

The other alliance was between France, Spain and Sweden. As mentioned before, after the War of the Spanish Succession had ended in 1714 a scion of the house of Bourbon was on the throne of Spain. Even though the peace agreement that had ended that war dictated that the crowns of France and Spain could never be worn by the same person, it was plain for all to see that the two countries now formed a close bond. For Sweden, the reasons for forging an alliance with France were quite different. The Swedes were in a constant struggle with Russia over supremacy over the Baltic

⁷ Browning, R., *The War of the Austrian Succession*, London 1995, 26.

⁸ Butler, *Choiseul*, 72-73, 87; Poland had long been seen as weak state by both Russia and the Austrian Habsburgs, and both established a vested interest in it.

Sea area. Since Russia was also one of France's main rivals, it was only logical that Sweden and France would become allies.⁹

The two most obvious absentees from these alliances are Great Britain and Brandenburg-Prussia, called Prussia for short. Great Britain had long been a rival and occasional enemy of France, and remained its great rival during the eighteenth century. That rivalry was most clearly expressed through naval affairs, with both countries striving to become the dominant maritime power in Europe in wake of the diminished former superior maritime power, the Dutch Republic.¹⁰ Though they were more focused on expanding their maritime empire, the English Kings did have one pressing interest on the continent: the Electorate of Hanover. The new Royal House of England, which had only ascended to the throne in 1714, descended from the German royal dynasty of the House of Hanover and as a consequence the Kings of England were dukes of Brunswick-Lüneberg and Prince-Electors of the Empire as well. As a result they were generally inclined to support Austria in its struggle against England's rival France. To protect their continental possessions, George I (r. 1714-1727) and George II (r. 1727-1760) tried to exert more influence on mainland Europe during the 1720's and 30's in the wake of the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1714). England's grasp for power eventually led to an outbreak of hostilities between Britain and Spain in 1721. Escalation was prevented thanks to the good working relationship between Fleury and Robert Walpole (1676-1745), who was Britain's Prime Minister from 1721 to 1742.¹¹ Although this incident could be stopped before it truly began, the interest of Britain in mainland Europe combined with its naval ambitions would continually bring it into conflict with France throughout the 1730's.

The other missing political entity, Prussia, was not inclined to commit itself to an alliance and preferred to stay neutral. Though its interests were usually similar to those of the Austrian-Russian alliance, during the first decades of the eighteenth century it was mainly focused on its own internal growth. Though its role in the War of the Polish Succession was rather small, we shall see that it would play a pivotal role in the First Silesian War.

This was the broad political situation in Europe around 1730 at the beginning of the War of the Polish Succession. As the events and outcome of the War of the Polish Succession had an immediate influence on the years that followed, as well as on the outbreak of the War of the Austrian Succession, it is important to look at France's involvement in it in more detail.

The French Involvement in the War of the Polish Succession 1733-1735

Ever since the marriage of Louis XV with Marie Leszczyńska, the (secret) policy of France had been to get her father, Stanisław Leszczyński, back on the throne of Poland after he had been forced to resign his crown in favor of the Elector of Saxony Augustus II the Strong (1670-1733) in 1709.¹² When Augustus died in 1733 elections were held to choose a new King, as the Polish royal title was not hereditary but electoral in nature. The French saw this as the perfect opportunity to finally put Stanisław back on the throne. Through the secret scheming that was exemplary for the foreign policy under Fleury, France tried to influence the Polish Diet that was held to elect the new King. The ways in which it tried to do so were twofold. Firstly, campaign money was sent to Poland to support

⁹ Wilson, *French Foreign Policy*, 10-11, 18, 110.

¹⁰ Wilson, *French Foreign Policy*, 47-52, 140-142.

¹¹ Baillon, Comte de, *Lord Walpole à la cour de France, 1723-1730, d'après ses mémoires et sa correspondance*, Paris, 1868.

¹² Antoine, M., *Louis XV*, Paris 1989, 153-159.

Stanisław's candidacy. Secondly, France tried to prevent other foreign powers from influencing the elections.¹³ It was thought that with a well-supported campaign and without further outside intervention, the Poles would vote Stanisław back on the throne. As it was, Austria had its own ideas concerning the Polish elections. Charles VI (1685-1740), Holy Roman Emperor and archduke of Austria, sent troops into Silesia with the clear intention to intimidate the Polish Diet into choosing his candidate for the crown of Poland.¹⁴ Charles supported the claims of Augustus III (1696-1763), the son of former King Augustus II, who had become Elector of Saxony on the event of his father's death. Both Fleury and the French secretary of state for foreign affairs Germain Louis Chauvelin (1685-1762) did not take the threatening behavior of Charles VI and Augustus III kindly and on May 20 1733 it was decided that war would be declared on the Emperor.¹⁵ Remarkably, nothing seemed to have happened during the months that followed the declaration of war. This is remarkable because secretary of foreign affairs Chauvelin was, as we will see later on, a powerful member of the pro-war faction at court. There were two reasons for this lack of action.

The first reason was the reluctant character of Fleury. Fleury was a patient schemer and was usually in favor of a more peaceful and diplomatic course of affairs. He could eventually be persuaded to start a war, but only as a last resort: to him war was the final solution after all other options of finding peace through other means had failed.¹⁶ Fleury would display the same hesitance to warfare during the beginning of the War of the Austrian Succession. By then, however, it would have less of an impact on the proceedings of the war due to the fact that his weakening health had forced him to share his power and had diminished his forcefulness. The second reason is that by 1733 France simply did not yet have the allies it needed to fight a war against Austria and that it had not secured the neutrality of Great Britain and Holland. This deserves some elaboration.

During the early 1730's France had quite a hard time finding allies to secure its own position in the conflict. As such it found it exceedingly difficult to secure Stanisław's election, which it had initially hoped to procure without further international intervention. First of all, it was of the utmost importance to neutralize Great Britain. Britain was, as noted above, perhaps France's greatest rival and through its King had an important stake in the Holy Roman Empire. As a fellow Elector, King George II (1683-1760) was far more inclined to support the claims of Augustus III to the Polish throne than those of Stanisław. Therefore the neutrality of Britain in a war between France and Austria became a necessity, but not something that could easily be obtained or relied upon. This uncertainty about the role of Great Britain must have made Chauvelin and Fleury hesitant to go to war.

Another problem for France lay in southern Europe. As Stanisław was making his way to the Polish Diet at Warsaw to be elected as King of Poland between August and September of 1733, Fleury and Chauvelin were engaged with plans to form a coalition that could fight the Emperor in Italy. With Charles VI focused on Poland this seemed the perfect opportunity to invade his Imperial possessions in Italy. To achieve this goal a treaty was signed between France and Sardinia. The treaty held that Sardinia would lend its support to France's claims in exchange for control of Milan and Mantua, as well as French subsidies and French military support.¹⁷ However, for this treaty to work it was essential that Spain, the obvious third ally, would agree with Sardinia's share in the spoils.

¹³ Wilson, *French Foreign Policy*, 240-241.

¹⁴ Antoine, *Louis XV*, 289-292.

¹⁵ Wilson, *French Foreign Policy*, 242.

¹⁶ Le Roy Ladurie, E., *The Ancien Régime: A History of France 1610-1774*, Oxford 1996, 345.

¹⁷ Wilson, *French Foreign Policy*, 244.

Spain, however, had long coveted Mantua. As Mantua was an unconditional part of the treaty for Sardinia, this caused an unsolvable animosity between the two.¹⁸ A strong, lasting alliance between the three countries therefore became an impossibility, which further complicated the diplomatic situation for France.

In the north Sweden, France's ally, chose to remain neutral. Where France would normally have been able to stir up the Swedes against their arch-rival Russia, they did not succeed in doing so during this war.¹⁹ Though initially the Swedes had been the prime actors in supplanting Augustus II for Stanisław between 1704 and 1709 and would have been more than willing to support Stanisław's claim to the throne once again, they felt threatened by the Russians and feared Russian interference in their own monarchical succession, as their crown had only recently passed to a new family.²⁰ Sweden therefore preferred safety and chose not to interfere in the conflict.

Though France had a hard time forging alliances, which made it difficult to orchestrate an *offensive* military intervention, its *defensive* diplomacy during the years of the War of the Polish Succession was quite successful. A good example of this is France's dealings with the Dutch. The Dutch, who by this time were allied to Great Britain, formed another factor of insecurity for France. They therefore, just like Great Britain, had to be persuaded into neutrality before starting a war with the Emperor. To its great fortune, France managed to reach an agreement with the Dutch before Great Britain did. This was a loss for Britain that complicated its effort to play a role of importance in the upcoming conflict and as a result was a victory for France.²¹

The final link in France's diplomacy was Bavaria. Bavaria had long been viewed as a possibly valuable ally and in 1727 a secret treaty had been signed between Bavaria and France.²² Its close proximity to Austria, combined with the imperial ambitions of its Electors, made it a region of great interest to Fleury. Furthermore, an intense rivalry between the houses of Wittelsbach and Habsburg had existed for centuries. In the arrangement between France and Bavaria in 1727 France agreed to give Bavaria an annual subsidy of 600.000 Livres.²³ This subsidy had to be used to create and maintain a standing army that '[...] *dont le nombre ne pourra être moindre de 5.000 hommes tant d'infanterie que cavalerie, se réservant à augmenter ce nombre selon l'exigence des cas.*'²⁴ France also promised both political and military support to the claims of Bavaria's Elector, Charles-Albert, to the imperial title in the event of Charles VI's death.²⁵ In November 1733, this treaty was renewed and, in anticipation of the outbreak of hostilities between France and Austria, the amount of French subsidies to Bavaria was increased.²⁶ This alliance proved to be of great value to France: during

¹⁸ Butler, *Choiseul*, 144-145.

¹⁹ Wilson, *French Foreign Policy*, 247, 257.

²⁰ Butler, *Choiseul*, 72, 268-271, 304. In 1720, the crown of Sweden passed from the house of Palatinate-Zweibrücken, a branch of the Wittelsbach-family, to the house of Hesse in the person of Frederick I. After the death of Frederick in 1751 the Swedish crown would once again pass over to a different noble family, that of Holstein-Gottorp, a branch of the Oldenburg-family. It is safe to assume that the Swedish monarchy during the later seventeenth century and early eighteenth century wasn't the most stable one in Europe.

²¹ Wilson, *French Foreign policy*, 245-246.

²² The first treaty with Bavaria had already been signed in 1670. Its arrangement already shows Bavaria's need for French support; see Sautai, M., *Les Préliminaires de la Guerre de la Succession d'Autriche*, Paris 1907, 427-430.

²³ Sautai, *Préliminaires*, 428-429.

²⁴ Idem, 429.

²⁵ Idem, 429-430.

²⁶ Anderson, *War of the Austrian Succession*, 6-7.

February 1734, when Charles VI appealed before the council of Electors to declare war on France, the Electors of Bavaria, Cologne and the Palatinate, who were all members of the Wittelsbach-family, refused to support the Emperor in his endeavors.²⁷

As his foreign policy thus far has shown, Fleury's strategy proved to be quite successful. He had cleverly used the Polish crisis as an excuse to justify a (mostly political) attack upon Austria. In doing so he diverted the suspicions of the other European nations away from France and towards the Austrian Emperor. Keen on increasing France's fortunes through diplomatic agreements, Fleury remained opposed to full-out open warfare against the Emperor. He tried to walk the fine line between forging alliances with German states like Bavaria, thereby weakening the position of the Emperor, and, apart from some battles, mostly managed to avoid open war. Through diplomacy he and Chauvelin were eventually able to secure new allies and to increase France's international position. However, Fleury had also very much neglected France's candidate for the Polish throne, Stanisław Leszczyński. The military aid sent to Stanisław was underwhelming at best. When Danzig was besieged and taken by Austria's ally Russia between February and July 1734, the French relief force sent to Stanisław's aid was only 6000 men strong and was quickly defeated.²⁸ An important reason the lay behind the lack of military support that Fleury gave Leszczyński was the position of Great Britain. Fleury was worried that if France would support Leszczyński too openly, it would coax France's maritime to break out of its neutrality and take sides with the Emperor.²⁹ Key to the success of France's campaign therefore was to keep Great Britain from becoming involved in the conflict.

On the surface Fleury seemed unwilling to accept the Pragmatic Sanction, the sanction that arranged for Maria-Theresa, daughter and heir to Emperor Charles VI, to be the beneficiary of Charles' titles and possessions after his death. However, Fleury was not against bargaining for it with the Emperor. France's secret aim in the war, besides confiscating parts of Italy, had been the acquisition of Lorraine; a strategically important area on the lower Rhine on France's eastern border.³⁰ Though the border regions between the Empire and France (Lorraine, the Franche-Comté) had for centuries been coveted by France, the urgency to acquire Lorraine had been greatly increased when a marriage between its duke Francis-Stephen of Lorraine (1708-1765) and Maria-Theresa became more likely. If such a marriage would become reality, Austria would undoubtedly exert its influence to get Francis-Stephen elected as Emperor. France could of course ill-afford to have a duke of Lorraine become Emperor, because Lorraine's geographical position would mean that France would have a very powerful enemy at its doorstep. Fleury would go to extreme lengths to prevent such an event from happening.

A possible treaty of peace between Austria and France would go a long way towards solving both the dispute over Poland and the impending problems with Lorraine. The most obvious solution in the eyes of France was to have Stanisław Leszczyński give up his newly regained throne in Poland and be compensated for his loss with the duchy of Lorraine. This would make the election of Francis-Stephen as Emperor less problematic. In order to secure such an agreement however, Fleury had to make sure that Leszczyński would *lose* in Poland.³¹ This, more than anything, explains Fleury's

²⁷ Wilson, *French Foreign Policy*, 246.

²⁸ Antoine, *Louis XV*, 289-292.

²⁹ Black, 'Fleury Reassessed', 363-364.

³⁰ Black, 'Fleury Reassessed', 365-367; Black stresses the importance of Lorraine in the European conflicts during the first half of the eighteenth century. I am inclined to agree with him on this.

³¹ Antoine, *Louis XV*, 292-297.

reluctance to offer much help to Leszczyński: he was using him as a currency; a means to procure Lorraine. It was part of a cunning diplomatic ploy created by Fleury to best serve France's interests. Fleury managed to get the most out of the conflict with the Empire over Poland while using minimum effort. He also averted the risk of fighting a lengthy and costly war to defend the claim to the throne of France's ally, and its King's father in law, Stanisław Leszczyński.

Though the War of the Polish Succession was more of a political confrontation than an all-out war, a number of battles were fought in Poland, Lorraine and Italy between 1733 and 1735. The martial confrontations in Italy were particularly fierce, echoing the Habsburg-Valois wars of the sixteenth century.³² The struggle between imperial troops and the troops of the unhappy alliance between Spain, Sardinia and France led to much bloodshed but little gains for France in Italy. Though successful at first, internal discord started to break up the weak alliance as time progressed and in the end the embattled imperial troops were able to use this to their advantage to repel the attackers.³³ The French invasion of Lorraine, on the other hand, proved to be more successful. Forcing the imperial forces to retreat and pushing through as far as Mainz, the French were eventually fought to a halt by a combination of Russian and Austrian forces.³⁴ Meanwhile in Poland Stanisław Leszczyński predictably was not faring well. Immediately after being crown King in September 1733 he had to fend off troops from both Russia and the Empire. Without any notable military support from his allies, he was quickly defeated by the Russians at Warsaw and forced to withdraw to Danzig.³⁵ Leszczyński was besieged there by the Russians between February and July 1734. Eventually Danzig capitulated and the humiliated Leszczyński was forced to flee to the court of his son in law in France.

The Aftermath: Reaching an Agreement 1735-1738

Negotiations between France and Austria began during 1735. Austria had grown weary of the fighting in Italy and Lorraine. At the same time France became increasingly concerned with both the possibility of a change in the position of Great-Britain and the growing number of Russian troops that arrived in the Rhine area which, combined with imperial forces, put a stop to the French advance in the Franco-Imperial border region.³⁶ As both sides now looked to find a solution to their disputes, an agreement could not be far off. In October 1735, with Great Britain and the Dutch as mediators, the Preliminaries of Peace were signed. However it would take another three years to come to a real treaty. I believe that the main reason for this prolonged period of negotiations was that France, in the knowledge that the Emperor, who was held responsible for the outbreak of the hostilities, found himself in an unfavorable position, took its time to secure a peace on terms that served it best. During these negotiations Fleury, through subtle and long negotiations, managed to relieve some of the pressure from European politics.³⁷ At the same time he convinced most of the European ruling

³² The Habsburg-Valois Wars, or Italian Wars, were fought from 1494 to 1559 in Italy between France and the Spanish Habsburgs. Both dynasties tried to exert a greater control over the many diverse and scattered political entities of the Italian peninsula. Though a formal peace was signed in 1559, the struggle only truly ended during the reign of Louis XIV.

³³ Wilson, *French Foreign Policy*, 244-45, 254-255.

³⁴ Butler, *Choiseul*, 144-145.

³⁵ Tysczuk, R., *The Story of an Architect King: Stanislas Leszczyński in Lorraine 1737-1766*, Bern 2007, 35.

³⁶ Butler, *Choiseul*, 165-167.

³⁷ Jeremy Black discusses this issue in great detail in the afore mentioned article 'French Foreign Policy in the Age of Fleury Reassessed'; I strongly agree with his emphasis on Fleury's growing weariness concerning the-

nobility that Charles VI had been in the wrong by deposing Stanisław Leszczyński from his rightful throne, thereby injuring the honor of Louis XV.³⁸ Convincing other states that Austria was threatening the balance of the European power system was an old trick already used by Louis XIV and earlier French kings and, in the opposite direction, by the Habsburgs themselves.³⁹ However, the balance of power in Europe became a very real concern for Fleury: from the later stages of the War of the Polish Succession onwards he began to fear a possible alliance of Austria and Russia with the new rising-star in Germany, Prussia.⁴⁰ The War of the Austrian Succession would eventually show that such concerns were well founded.

Over time Fleury managed to make most other European states see the reason in trading Leszczyński's loss of Poland for the duchy of Lorraine.⁴¹ His subtle negotiations had made this course of action seem like a natural conclusion to the conflict even though it would mean a great territorial gain for France, as after the death of Stanisław Lorraine would pass into the hands of his only surviving child: Marie, queen of France. The final treaty, known as the Peace of Vienna, was signed in November 1738 and officially ended the War of the Polish Succession. In Italy, the Spanish King Charles III (1716-1788) gave up the duchy of Parma in return for the Kingdoms of Naples and Sicily. In Poland, Augustus III was confirmed in his position as King. Stanisław Leszczyński would be compensated for his abdication with the Duchy of Lorraine.⁴² Francis-Stephen of Lorraine, by now married to Maria Theresa, lost Lorraine but was given the grand duchy of Tuscany in return. As part of the agreement France now officially recognized the Pragmatic Sanction. In doing so Fleury hoped to create, for the time being, a better relationship with Austria. However, as later events would reveal, he was only inclined to partially honor this agreement after the death of Charles VI.

What is important to realize is that during the period 1733-1738 the international politics of Fleury had an overall positive effect on France's international status. Firstly, France had effectively gained control of Lorraine, which it had coveted for over a century. Better still, even though the other European nations were still wary of France's growing power, Fleury had made the exchange of the crown of Poland for the Duchy of Lorraine look like a logical settling of affairs. Furthermore, he had convinced the other European nations that the Emperor's intervention in Poland was unjust. This made the Emperor look suspicious and as a result diverted some suspicion away from France. Through his excellent skills as a statesman and with only a minimum use of military action, Fleury had turned the War of the Polish Succession into a victory for France. France's main rival Charles VI, who was besieged on multiple fronts, was fought to a standstill in both Italy and the Rhineland, had to agree to a humiliating peace.

More importantly, the diplomatic isolation France had found itself forced into by its maritime rival Great Britain in the years that had followed the War of the Spanish Succession had finally been broken. Great Britain by contrast suffered a loss of face due to its indecisiveness during the war. Its neutral position and its unwillingness to get involved in the war had harmed its international status. France's problematic alliance with Sardinia and Spain that had plagued the Italian campaign during the war turned out to have a positive outcome in the end. By not committing to a full alliance with

uncertainty about the motivations of the other European nations during this period.

³⁸ Wilson, *French Foreign Policy*, 15.

³⁹ Black, 'Fleury Reassessed', 368.

⁴⁰ Voltaire, *Voltaire: Histoire de la Guerre de 1741*, Maurens, J. (ed.), Paris 1971, 5-13.

⁴¹ Butler, *Choiseul*, 164-165.

⁴² Tysczuk, *The Story of an Architect King*, 15-33.

Spain, Fleury did not have to give full support to the Spanish King Charles III when he tried to establish himself as ruler in his new territories in Italy. Furthermore by not signing a treaty with Spain Fleury did not overstep the boundaries of the Treaty of Utrecht of 1713, thereby avoiding renewed suspicion of the other European countries. Though no formal treaty was signed, France and Spain remained close allies and France could still count on the help of the Spanish fleet in its maritime battle against Great-Britain. Such a cleverly constructed relationship suited France's needs well.

The outcome of the War of the Polish Succession effectively turned out to be a victory for France over its main adversaries. Shrugging off the humiliating defeat it had endured during the War of the Spanish Succession, France once again confirmed its status as the great political power in Europe. However, it was plain for all to see that the brittle peace between France and Austria would not last. The Pragmatic Sanction proved to be a particularly weak link in the peace agreement of 1738, for even though most European rulers had signed the Pragmatic Sanction by 1738, there was no guarantee that they would actually honor this agreement when the Emperor Charles would pass away. The Electorates of Saxony and Bavaria in particular had excellent claims on both the Imperial title and on parts of the Habsburg lands, as their rulers were related to the House of Habsburg through marriage.⁴³ Also, the plans of Prussia under its young new ruler Frederick II were anyone's guess. For the time being however, the outcome of the war proved to be a personal triumph for Fleury's policy and his position in France would remain undisputed until his death.

Belle-Isle during the War of the Polish Succession

Let us now turn our attention to the ways in which he got involved in the War of the Polish Succession. In 1729 Belle-Isle had married Marie-Therese de Béthune, who was closely related to the Wittelsbach-family. That family was one of the most influential noble families in the Empire, as Electors of Bavaria, the Palatinate and Cologne were all members of it. Through his marriage, Belle-Isle became a member of this family. This, combined with the family bond he shared with his German d'Harcourt cousins, made him a high ranking German Nobleman. In France he now was both part of the French nobility and a *prince étranger* or foreign prince.⁴⁴ Belle-Isle was in the unique position of having high status and influence in both France and the Empire.

In the years leading up the War of the Polish Succession he had been patiently building up his influence and reputation at court and had been made lieutenant-general. He was always eager to improve his position and the War of the Polish Succession must have seemed the perfect opportunity to do so. Just as in the War of the Spanish Succession he was given the opportunity to prove himself in war. During the years 1733-34 Belle-Isle served in the Rhineland in an army under the command of James FitzPatrick, duke of Berwick (1670-1734), the illegitimate son of King James II of England. He captured Trier and Trarbach from the Austrians and took part in the Siege of Phillipsburg between June and July of 1734, proving once again to be a gifted battlefield commander.⁴⁵

During the long negotiations that followed the Preliminaries of Peace, Belle-Isle also proved that he was an accomplished politician as well as an excellent commander. As he was considered a nobleman of the Empire, and had bonds of kinship with three Electors, he was in a unique position to

⁴³ Charles Albert of Bavaria had married the archduchess Marie-Amalie in 1722 and Frederick Augustus II of Saxony (the later Augustus III of Poland) married the archduchess Maria Josepha in 1719. For their claims, see Clark, C., *Iron Kingdom; the Rise and Downfall of Prussia 1600-1947*, London 2007, 190-191.

⁴⁴ Antoine, *Louis XV*, 304-307.

⁴⁵ Antoine, *Louis XV*, 306-307.

play the middleman in the negotiations between France and the Empire. By using his influence in Germany he played an important role in the transfer of Lorraine to Stanisław Leszczyński as well as in arranging the agreement of peace between France and the Empire in 1738.⁴⁶ His actions during the war did not go unnoticed by the King, and for his outstanding service during the war he was awarded the lordship of Metz, Toul and Verdun.⁴⁷

Though Belle-Isle had been recognized as a talented and ambitious man before the War of the Polish Succession, it was his actions during this war that had brought his fame to great heights. He had proven himself both a master of the battlefield and, combined with his unique political position and considerable diplomatic skill, the war had made him a force to be reckoned with. Once again Belle-Isle had tried to advance his position and reputation through war and once again his attempt to do so had paid off handsomely.

This paragraph has shown that from an international scope both France and the two main protagonists had, each in their own way, profited from the War of the Polish Succession. France had reasserted its position as the preeminent power in Europe, whereas Fleury and Belle-Isle had affirmed (in the case of the former) or increased (in the case of the latter) their influence and positions. However, we must now turn our attention to the *internal* scope: the political changes that occurred in France itself during the 1720's and 1730's. There are two reasons why the discussion of the internal political developments during these two decades is of great importance for this paper. Firstly because these political developments were quite dramatic and they brought about changes that would have a great influence on French politics during the War of the Austrian Succession. As such, these developments need to be discussed to offer a vantage point from where to start a closer look at this paper's case study, France's participation in the First Silesian War between the years 1738 and 1743. Secondly, though the renewed emphasis on France's preeminent position in Europe was achieved solely through its international movements, the developments of the careers of Fleury and Belle-Isle were not only influenced by their actions on an international level, but also, and perhaps even more so, by those within France itself.

1.2 Court politics: The Rise of the Factions

Cultural Changes

Before starting to analyze the changes that were taking place in French politics, an introduction to the workings and developments of French court culture and French politics in general from the late seventeenth century to the early eighteenth century is needed. From the days of Louis XIV, the culture at court gradually became more structured and centralized. After the civil wars of the sixteenth century it became of paramount importance to the King to get a firmer grasp on a nobility that had a penchant for starting armed conflicts. In my opinion there were two important developments during the second half of the seventeenth century that resulted in a stronger position of the French crown in the short run, but that would ultimately weaken it in the long run. Although for obvious reasons this part of the paper discusses only the cultural developments that are of importance to the subject discussed here, it goes without mention that these developments were

⁴⁶ Argenson, René-Louis de Voyer de Paulmy, marquis de, *Mémoires et Journal inédit du Marquis d'Argenson, Ministre des affaires étrangères sous Louis XV*, Jannet, P. (ed.), Paris 1887, 142-143.

⁴⁷ *Mémoires du marquis d'Argenson*, 143-144.

part of the Enlightenment, the eighteenth century cultural movement that would radically alter the cultural structure of Europe. Though this paper is not the place to discuss such developments, a special mention should be made concerning the growing importance of the 'public opinion', as during the 1730's and 1740's the public opinion began to play a role of importance for the first time. It will not be discussed further here, as there are a number of excellent studies that look specifically at the social and cultural changes in France during the eighteenth century.⁴⁸ However, I do believe that it is important for the reader to take notice that the developments discussed below are only a part of a greater movement of cultural change and must be viewed accordingly. However, as mentioned above, there are two developments that need to be addressed because of their importance in relation to the events of this paper.

The first development, which has been brilliantly described by Jay Smith in his book *The Culture of Merit*, is a strong turn towards centralization and institutionalization, as well as the development of a more fixed cultural system of customs and stipulations.⁴⁹ The development of a centralized government finds its roots in the Late Middle Ages, and is pursued with renewed vigor by the Bourbon Kings of France after the tumultuous religious wars of the sixteenth century. This development strengthened the position of the King considerably, by making him the central focus of power through the central institutions. There was however, as Smith points out, a paradox to this development. It was precisely the formation of a more permanent and sedentary central government that at the same time made the individual person of the King less important. As the new government was in effect an extension of the King, it became possible for the nobility (especially for the administrative *noblesse de robe*) to influence policy through the different governmental institutions and through patronage at court. In short, it became possible to get noticed and improve one's position without the necessity of being in the personal presence of the King. If a nobleman had an extraordinary talent than the government, and by extension the King, would take notice of it. Though there remained a strong emphasis on the personal authority of the King and the 'gaze of the sovereign' as a concept, these new developments in the operation of royal power implied that this 'gaze' was no longer only represented by the figure of the King himself, but also by his government.⁵⁰ In this reconceptualization, it became vital for the government to keep informed about the whereabouts and actions of the nobility through general surveillance.⁵¹

The growth of the central government and its turn towards centralization and fixed cultural codes had two immediate results. The first was to create a well-oiled and well working system through the setting of fixed standards wherein everybody knew near instinctively what his task was:

⁴⁸ The study of the birth of the public opinion has taken a central place in the debate about the links between the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. To name a few excellent examples that look at the impact of the cultural developments of the eighteenth century on the general public during the Enlightenment: Gestrich, A., *Absolutismus und Öffentlichkeit: Politische Kommunikation in Deutschland zu Beginn des 18. - Jahrhunderts*, Göttingen 1993, Shilling, L. (ed.), *Absolutismus, ein unersetzliches Forschungsconcept?: Ein deutsch-französische Bilanz*, München 2008, Asbach, O., *Staat und Politik zwischen Absolutismus und Aufklärung: der Abbé de Saint-Pierre und die Herausbildung der französischen Aufklärung bis zur Mitte des 18. Jahrhunderts*, Hildesheim 2005 and Beik, W., *A Social and Cultural History of Early Modern France*, Cambridge 2009.

⁴⁹ In my opinion this is one of the most important developments that Jay Smith discusses in his book *The Culture of Merit: Nobility, Royal Service, and the Making of Absolute Monarchy in France 1600-1789*, Michigan 1996, particularly in chapter 5, p. 191-225.

⁵⁰ Smith, *Culture of Merit*, 194.

⁵¹ Idem, 199, 206.

a striking example of the mechanization of the world propagated by the Enlightenment.⁵² The second was the identification and nurturing of individual talent and ability.⁵³ Though these objectives might seem contradictory, in reality they were closely linked. The first objective forced people to act more alike, thereby making it easier for government agents to find talents and to put them in their optimal positions, thus fulfilling the second objective.

As the eighteenth century progressed, this system of cultural standardization and centralization became ever more rigid.⁵⁴ Especially in the army, which actions were so closely linked to the government and to the personal prestige of the King, discipline and standardization became essential. It was argued that endless repetition of military excises would make the soldiers know their drill instinctively and that they would accordingly function better and more orderly on the battlefield. More and more officers' careers began to revolve around routine and military service came to be increasingly described in mechanical terms.⁵⁵ The result was that warfare became more and more focused on discipline as time progressed. Though the old, medieval way of showing valor and courage on the battlefield remained an excellent way to show one's personal excellence, a new kind of military commander was on the rise. This commander was less focused on leading his men headlong into a brawl and more on keeping discipline in the ranks, on administration and planning.⁵⁶ This new kind of commander, who was better suited to the development and growth of standing armies, often came from the *noblesse de robe* that was being educated in just these kinds of qualities from a very young age. As a result, the army no longer remained the sole refuge of the *Noblesse d'épée*, the old warrior nobility whose lineages reached back into the Middle Ages.

It is important to realize that the individuals who were responsible for the surveillance of others, be it the commander of an army or a government official, could decide the fortunes of others. By judging others through their reports, they represented the King's gaze, and as such could greatly influence the career opportunities of their subordinates. This change meant that career ambitions became less focused on one's personal relations with the King and more on showing one's talent for a specific task or profession, thereby hopefully attracting the attention of individuals that could help to improve your standing. As a result, the importance of patronage became perhaps greater than ever before.

This brings us to the second important cultural development, which was the continued growth in both importance and size of the royal court during the first decades of the eighteenth century. The court broadly consisted of the King, his family, the courtiers, servants, and the King's ministers and agents.⁵⁷ Since the Late Middle Ages the Royal court had grown to become the center of politics, patronage and influence, a process that reached its zenith during the reign of the later Bourbon

⁵² Parker, D., *Class and State in Ancien Régime France: the Road to Modernity?*, London 1996. For examples see p. 118-119, 136-144 & 149-157. Throughout the book Parker emphasizes in particular the rigid continuation of the medieval three-class idea. Though I feel that he takes his class-based focus a bit too far, he does show that France's military and cultural ideas were still grounded on ancient medieval thought.

⁵³ Smith, *Culture of merit*, 199.

⁵⁴ Hours, B., *Louis XV et sa Cour*, Paris 2002, 32. Bernard Hour even goes so far as to say that '[...] *la culture était moins indispensable au monde que l'inverse* [...]'.
⁵⁵ Smith, *Culture of Merit*, 203, 205.

⁵⁶ Smith, *Culture of Merit*, 227-235.

⁵⁷ Duindam, J., *Vienna and Versailles: The Court of Europe's Dynastic Rivals, 1550-1780*, Cambridge 2003, 90-92. Jeroen Duindam also gives a good description of both the amalgamation and the size of the court at Versailles in chapter 7, 'Levels and forms of power at court', 223-259.

Kings.⁵⁸ Before Louis XIV the royal court was not based in a fixed place, but travelled with the King as he moved across France from chateau to chateau. Louis XIV, intent on keeping the powers of the provincial aristocracy in check, built his royal palace at Versailles. Though Louis did travel around, the court was from then on firmly located at Versailles.⁵⁹ By creating a sedentary court, Louis had created a means to control the high nobility from his doorstep. As both the King and his ministers now resided at Versailles, it became of vital importance to the careers of the high nobility of France for them to be present there. From then on, only by being at Versailles could the nobility truly further their agendas and gain more influence. By effectively forcing the powerful provincial nobility to spend more time at Versailles, Louis XIV managed to separate those powerful noblemen from their provincial powerbases, thereby reducing the threat of revolt and civil war.⁶⁰

Life at the French royal court is often portrayed as the epitome of decadence: a place where lazy, fat nobles enjoyed themselves with lavish ceremonies, festivals and hunting parties. While there certainly is some truth to this, there was another side to it. Life at court was often tedious for nobles who, apart from the occasional festivities, did not have a whole lot to do. It was also very stressful, as competition between nobles was fierce.⁶¹ A general paranoia must have lain behind the outward façade that was expressed through the social- and cultural conventions of court: backstabbing (both figuratively and literally) and double-crossing were regular events. Court life could also be humiliating for the high nobility, as the powerful elite of France was forced to wait for the King until it suited *him* to meet them, constantly scrapping with each other over the most influential positions.⁶² The closer one's proximity was to the King, the more prestigious and influential his position. Official positions in the Royal Household were therefore much coveted, as the King's personal servants were closer to the King than anyone else. The office of chamberlain was the most influential of all, as it were the King's chamberlains who were the first to see and speak to the King when he woke and the last before he went to bed.⁶³ Life at court was a constant struggle for power.

Though only the highest nobles, constituting no more than five percent of the total nobility, resided at court, the evolution of the royal court had direct consequences for the nobility as a whole.⁶⁴ As the French nobility was organized through networks of allegiances forged through marriage, patronage or common interests, the high nobles at court were at the top of the echelon of power. Their actions and dealings at court therefore did not just affect themselves, but their whole network of family and clients as well. Thus, by extension almost all nobles were in one way or another affected by the events taking place at court.⁶⁵

⁵⁸ Beik, W., *A Social and Cultural History of Early Modern France*, Cambridge 2009, 316.

⁵⁹ Though before Versailles the French King and his court had not been situated in one place, the King had long since favored to reside in one or two places, often Paris being prime amongst them.

⁶⁰ Beik, *Cultural History*, 326.

⁶¹ Hours, *Louis XV et sa Cour*, 32-38; duels between noblemen, for example, were a part of everyday life at court.

⁶² Hours, *Louis XV et sa Cour*, 67-70, 275-278.

⁶³ Duindam, *Vienna and Versailles*, 54-55. Duindam makes a layered distinction in the importance of different functions within the Royal Household: first came the *grands officiers de la couronne*, then the *commensaux du premier ordre*, followed by the *Commensaux du deuxième ordre* and eventually the non-noble *Commenseux du troisième ordre* and certain specialists, such as physicians (90-92).

⁶⁴ Beik, *Cultural History*, 333.

⁶⁵ For a good example of the ways in which the Court in Paris influenced the nobility throughout France, see Miller, S., *State and Society in Eighteenth-Century France: A Study of Political Power and Social Revolution in Languedoc*, Washington 2008.

As already mentioned, the court system became less and less flexible during the first decades of the eighteenth century.⁶⁶ The gaze of the King that had been so vital for the high nobility in their desire to move up the social ladder became less represented by the person of the King himself and more by his government and its agents. Though officially the King was still the ultimate executive distributor of power, in the day-to-day reality it became easier to advance one's position by influencing government officials or members of the ministry. This situation, which had seen precedents in the careers of, amongst others, the cardinals Granvelle (1517-1586) and Richelieu (1585-1642), required a different approach to gaining power: one more focused on displays of personal excellence and on leaving good impressions. Personal relations with- and close proximity to the King were no longer the easiest routes to power. This left life at Versailles following daily routines that no longer were as meaningful as they had been in the days of Louis XIV.

On the one hand the royal court remained a place of great political influence during the first half of the eighteenth century: it remained the central place where the high nobility met and struggled with one another for influence and power. At the same time, because of the cultural changes as well as the private personality of Louis XV, the court lost part of its appeal and importance.

The combined consequence of the two developments described above was that the high nobility, who before had to depend on showing off their skills in ways that would be noticed King to gain more power and prestige, instead became more focused on displaying their talent for the eyes of the increasingly important government. This cultural shift had important consequences. During the second half of the seventeenth century many nobles had been content to live at court while trying to develop their prestige via their relation with the King. From the beginning of the eighteenth century this began to change.⁶⁷ As French court culture became more rigid, the government became more focused on finding individual talent and access to the King became increasingly difficult to obtain, the nobility began to search for other ways to show off their personal excellence to acquire power and influence. There were two main professions where talent and skill were best displayed and most often noticed by the government: as a government official or as a soldier.

In my introduction I stated that the nobility had become severely frustrated by the 1730's and became even more so as the years progressed. Here, then, lies the basis for the explanation of that frustration. After the death of Louis XIV in 1715, the court temporarily moved away from Versailles to the Tuileries palace in Paris where the young Louis XV was residing. In 1722 Louis moved back to Versailles but by then the damage had already been done: a royal absence at Versailles of seven years had greatly disrupted the daily routines that had become customary under Louis XIV.⁶⁸ Though the customs and routines were revived, they had not evolved for seven years, while the court nobility and their culture were starting to undergo the changes described above. Furthermore, the high nobility had tried to take advantage of the infancy of Louis XV to try and gain more influence and power, as they had done in the past when an infant Dauphin ascended the throne.⁶⁹ Different factions were formed and these struggled with each other to gain control over the child-King. Then, in 1726, something unexpected happened: the King's tutor, the aging bishop Fleury, was made

⁶⁶ Beik, *Cultural History*, 336.

⁶⁷ Hours, *Louis XV et sa Cour*, 275-282.

⁶⁸ Beik, *Cultural History*, 336.

⁶⁹ The young age of both Louis XIII and Louis XIV at the time of their ascensions to the throne had led to a power struggles amongst the nobility as different parties tried to exert their influence on the young Kings.

cardinal and effectively became first minister after the fall of the former first minister, the duke de Bourbon, in 1726. Though everyone expected the 73-year old Cardinal to last for only a few years, Fleury ruled France for nearly seventeen years. During those seventeen years it became increasingly difficult for nobles to show off their talents in both the government and the army, as the rigid system and the conservative character of Fleury made social improvement quite a hard thing to achieve. One can now imagine that, in a culture that was becoming fixated on both finding and showing off talent, the court nobility became very agitated over time. In order to show how this agitation developed before and during the 1730's and how it affected French politics, we will have to look at the different bases of power in eighteenth century France.

The Four Bases of Power in France

In early eighteenth-century France there were four major bases of power. First and foremost was the King. The King was of course the highest authority in France and no choice could be made without his formal consent. However, Louis XV, unlike his great-grandfather Louis XIV, was not very enthusiastic about his political role. Though he officially held executive power, he was inclined to leave the running of the state to Fleury and the ministry during the early years of his reign. First minister Fleury and his ministry of course form the second base of power. Though the members of the ministry themselves had great influence at court and exerted much power, it was Fleury who pulled all the strings and who enjoyed the full support of the King. The third great power were the law courts headed by the *Parlement* of Paris, which acted as the high judicial court. However, it possessed some political attributes besides its judicial functions.⁷⁰ The *Parlement* had the prerogative to enshrine new laws and edicts: *ipso facto* a new policy first had to be placed before the *Parlement* and had to gain its approval to be registered as a law. The *Parlement* was allowed to make a formal complaint, known as remonstrance, to the King if they strongly objected to a new proposition. Through these remonstrances the *Parlement* was able to exert a great amount of influence over legislation.⁷¹ The fourth and last power was the royal court at Versailles. Though no formal power was held by the court, as it was technically not an institution or representative body, the sentiments of the court could not easily be ignored. The court was divided into factions: groups of nobles who were bound together by shared beliefs, bonds of kinship and patronage. Many members of the *Parlement*, much like members of the ministry, were part of court factions or were allied to one. The most powerful members at court, who often functioned as faction leaders, also often tried to gain the ear of the King and tried to influence him directly. As a consequence, when one faction and its leaders became dominant, it could exert a great influence on politics. These four different powerbases were all able to exert influence on French politics in their own way. While each of these would deserve a study in their own right, within the confines of this paper I will only briefly examine each in turn, beginning with the King himself.

⁷⁰ Rogister, J., *Louis XV and the Parlement of Paris 1737-1755*, Cambridge 1995, 11.

⁷¹ Rogister, *Parlement of Paris*, 12-13.

'Le Feu Roi et le Roi Timide': the King

Louis XIV was a bellicose man with a will of iron and a forceful character. He had been an incredibly hard worker, a great statesman and politician who was able to adapt his manners to fit the situation and who could be both imposing and easygoing.⁷² Louis XIV had mostly succeeded in remaining uncommitted to the courtiers. To play the court, he had to remain deliberately vague in his distribution of favors so as not to arouse suspicion by making it look like he was favoring one faction over the others. In his memoirs he advised his son to listen to the court well and often, but to say as little to them as possible.⁷³ "*Ceux qui l'approchent [le Roi] de plus près, voyant les premiers sa faiblesse, sont aussi les premiers qui en veulent profiter.*", he said.⁷⁴ Louis' great-grandson and successor would not always put that advice to good use.

Louis XV was a shy and timid man who found it hard to adapt to the circumstances of his time the way his great-grandfather had done in his. He is generally described as having a more pleasant nature than his predecessor and as being more intelligent.⁷⁵ He seemed to have genuinely tried to become a statesman like Louis XIV, but laziness and disinterest in equal parts soon made him abandon this cause.⁷⁶ He would rather remain in the background and let a first minister and his ministry handle political affairs, while he himself was constantly being informed through formal correspondence and spies.⁷⁷ Managing the court was hard work for the King, who officially remained the sole provider of royal honors. It was difficult for any heir to follow up on an illustrious predecessor and Louis XIV came to be seen as such quickly after his death. The strain and pressure that the hard work and the high expectations put on Louis XV were tremendous and most likely more than he could bear. Louis was probably all too happy to let Fleury, who he saw as a surrogate father and whom he held in the highest esteem, control all access to the King.⁷⁸ The downside to this arrangement was that the King became less accessible to the court nobility. This development further decreased the political importance of the person of the King in favor of his government: a process that we have already seen taking place but was accelerated by the actions of Louis XV. Even though the King was still officially the only person who could bestow royal honors and titles upon the courtiers, his increasing inaccessibility meant that the courtiers started to look for other individuals who could help them advance their social positions. In the new arrangement, the fastest way to get to the King was through Fleury. This meant that in a way the court's struggle over influencing the King had now begun to shift towards influencing Fleury. But Fleury, by remaining aloof to the faction struggles at court, did not affiliate himself with any one particular faction and maintained a tight control over all audiences with the King. Access to Louis XV became very difficult to obtain. However, in spite of these difficulties, the court did find other ways to influence the King.

⁷² Duindam, *Vienna and Versailles*, 227.

⁷³ Duindam, *Vienna and Versailles*, 227.

⁷⁴ Louis XIV, *Mémoires de Louis XIV*, Dreyss, C. (ed.), Paris 1860, Vol I, 196-197, Vol. II, 64-65.

⁷⁵ Beaucourt, G. du Fresne de, 'Le caractère de Louis XV' in: *Revue des Questions Historiques*, Vol 3, 1867, pp. 172-217.

⁷⁶ Swann, J., 'Politics: Louis XV', in: Doyle, William (ed.), *Old Regime France 1648-1788*, Oxford 2001, 196-212.

⁷⁷ Bély, L., *Espions et ambassadeurs au temps de Louis XIV*, Paris, 1990. Though this work discusses the use of spies during the reign of Louis XIV, it is nevertheless very informative about the use of such informal ways to gain information.

⁷⁸ Swann, 'Politics: Louis XV', 205.

The lack of parental love he had received during his lonely childhood gave Louis a craving for love and affection. Though he had married Marie Leszczyńska, the daughter of the King of Poland, this had been a purely political union and there does not seem to have been much love lost between the two. Because he did not find true love in his marriage, Louis XV sought it elsewhere and was wont to having mistresses throughout his long reign. These mistresses naturally had a great influence on the King, even more so as Louis was often inclined to take their advice at face value.⁷⁹ These mistresses were themselves often linked to factions at court, and as such were in a unique position to advance their party's interests. As Louis often had one headmistress at a time, this was naturally the one that could exert the most influence on him. Consequently, there was a constant struggle amongst the King's mistresses and their factions for the position of headmistress.

Louis' timidity, along with the great debts that the later wars of his great-grandfather had left him with, meant that he was far less inclined to start new wars than Louis XIV. Though this provided a much needed financial respite, it also proved to be problematic, as Louis XV lacked the strong character of his predecessor, who had perhaps been in the unique position to be able to control the *noblesse d'épée* without the necessity of resorting to warfare to divert their attention and energy. Ironically, it was Louis XIV himself who was far too convinced of the importance of martial prestige to consider using restraint, as he saw success in war as an essential part of the glory of his reign.⁸⁰ Louis XV, who was more inclined to curb the martial enthusiasm of the nobility, lacked the ability and forcefulness to do so. Furthermore, because of the constant warfare during the long reign of Louis XIV, the nobility had become accustomed to increasing their prestige and standing through their excellence on the battlefield. The warrior-nobility therefore remained a constant problem for the foreign policy of Louis XV.⁸¹

It becomes clear that the character of Louis XV and the choices made by him only accelerated and stimulated the cultural changes that were already taking place in France. The rigid cultural code at court that did not progress with the times, combined with a decrease in the accessibility, and therefore the political importance, of the person of the King, as well as Louis' dislike for starting new wars, left the court nobility in discontent. At the same time, the personal integrity of the King was compromised by his many mistresses. Through them the court factions found a way to influence the private Louis XV, and though he had become hard to access, his executive power over royal honors remained undiminished.

The First Minister and the Ministry

Though every member of the royal council was an important source of patronage and of influence in his own right, all the major decisions that were made had to be approved by Fleury himself. As he jealously guarded his top spot at the echelon of power and was fully supported in this by the King, the other ministers came in second place. He maintained control by sitting in on the meetings of the Secretaries of State with the King.⁸² Also, the important ministerial and secretarial posts were personally appointed by Fleury and awarded to those who showed a personal loyalty to him. The most important and influential of these positions were the Chancellor and/or Keeper of the Seals

⁷⁹ Hours, B., *Louis XV*, 44.

⁸⁰ Ford, F., *Robe and Sword: The Regrouping of the French Aristocracy after Louis XIV*, Harvard 1953, 17.

⁸¹ Ford, *Robe and Sword*, 18.

⁸² Swann, 'Politics: Louis XV', 201.

(*Garde de Sceaux*), the Controller-General of the Finances, along with three of the Secretaries of State: the Secretary for Foreign Affairs, the Secretary for War and the Secretary of the Navy.

The Chancellor from 1717 to 1750 was Henri François d'Aguesseau (1668-1751), who also replaced the aforementioned and renowned Germain Louis Chauvelin (1685-1762), who had been disgraced by Fleury in 1737 and of whom we will come to speak in greater detail later on in this chapter, as Keeper of the Seals.⁸³ The Controller-General of the Finances (a relatively new title, that had replaced the title of Superintendant of Finances after the disgrace of Belle-Isle's grandfather, Nicolas Fouquet) between 1730 and 1745 was Philibert Orry (1689-1747). The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs between 1737 and 1744 was Jean Jacques Amelot (1689-1749), who had replaced the disgraced Chauvelin in that position. The Secretary of State for War up to 1740 had been Nicolas Prosper Bauyn (1675-1740), but was replaced afterwards by François Victor Le Tonnelier de Breteuil (1686-1743). The Secretary of State for the Navy between 1723 and 1749 was Jean-Frédéric Phélypeaux, count de Maurepas (1701-1781). These five men, d'Aguesseau, Orry, Amelot, Breteuil and Maurepas, were members and leaders of different court factions and each had their own agendas and motives. Though Fleury may have had the final say in almost all matters and they had to follow his orders, this did not stop these important and powerful men from trying to achieve their own goals through the opportunities that their offices presented them if they could. As we will see in the next chapter, the members of the ministry played an important part in Belle-Isle's fall from grace during the years 1742-43.

The Parlement

The third major powerbase was the *Parlement* of Paris, the greatest of the judicial courts in the Kingdom of France. Since this paper is not the place to discuss at length the developments in the relation between the *Parlement* and the King, only a few words will be dedicated to them here.⁸⁴ The *Parlement* was able to pose a serious problem for the ministers and their plans by stalling or flat-out refusing to codify a new law or by writing a *remonstrance* to the King, as it had done in the past. Louis XV was often inclined to endorse the advice that he was given, even though his attitude towards the *Parlement* was prejudiced against it.⁸⁵ Fleury also did not favor the *Parlement*. Perhaps the most important prerogative of the *Parlement* was that a new tax could not be levied without its formal consent. Between the 1720's and early 1740's there was a lot of friction between Fleury and the *Parlement*, especially on religious matters.⁸⁶ Despite these disputes, however, the *Parlement* was

⁸³ For more on Chauvelin and his *tomber en disgrâce*, see page 34.

⁸⁴ The *Parlement* during the time of Fleury is solidly dealt with in the article 'The Political Role of the *Parlement* under Cardinal Fleury', by J.H. Shennan, *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 81, No. 320 (July 1966), pp. 520-542. Shennan comes to the conclusion that the French King's traditional duty to always act within the law began to diminish in importance during the age of Fleury, a conclusion that I fully agree with. Also, see Alatri, P., 'Parlements et lutes politique en France au XVIIIe siècle' in : *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, Vol. 151, 1976, pp. 77-108.

⁸⁵ Rogister, *Parlement of Paris*, 29-30.

⁸⁶ This religious dispute, which had been heavily debated in France for decades, revolved around the austere Jansenist movement and their objections to the *Bull Unigenitus*. *Unigenitus* was an apostolic constitution issued by Pope Clement XI in 1713 as a reaction to several pleas made by Louis XIV and a number of French Bishops, who feared that Jansenism would cause a schism in the French catholic church. The bull was specifically aimed against the Jansenists, warning against false prophets that spread a false doctrine under the guise of piety. See Thomas, J.F., *La querelle de l'Unigenitus*, Paris 1950, Shennan, 'The Political Role of the Parlement', 529-539, Campbell, *Power and Politics*, 195-275.

generally inclined to grand Fleury the right to raise special wartime taxes (*dixième*). Suffice to say that Fleury was often able to convince the members of *Parlement* in favor of the proposed course of action when it concerned financial matters related to warfare. If he was under the impression that the *Parlement* was disinclined to follow his advice, he would simply misuse an old prerogative of the King, known as the *lit de justice*, or decree by royal command.⁸⁷ This would normally be used by the King on rare occasions to bypass the *Parlement* when he wanted to register an important new law or raise a tax with great urgency. However, Fleury now used it extensively as a handy tool to sidetrack the *Parlement*.⁸⁸ There were protests against this abuse of the *lit de justice* and against Fleury's financial policy, but in general these protests were easily and cleverly dealt with by Fleury.⁸⁹ Though in the short run it proved to be an effective tactic to deal with the *Parlement*, in the long run it meant that the sacred task of the King to uphold the law was greatly diminished, further reducing his status and credibility.⁹⁰

The Royal Court

The greatest French philosopher of the early eighteenth century, Charles de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu (1689-1755), wrote in his seminal work *De l'Esprit des Lois*: "*Elle entre en quelque façon dans l'essence de la monarchie, dont la maxime fondamentale est, point de monarque, point de noblesse; point de noblesse, point de monarque; mais on a un despote.*"⁹¹ In France this was indeed very much the case.

The royal court at Versailles was a melting pot where nobles from all over France met. It was the place where alliances were forged, where rivalries and feuds were both started and ended and it was the place where the social hierarchy was established. The nobility at court was divided into factions, tight-knit groups of families and friends. These factions included members from the lowest aristocratic families up to the very highest and even included ministers and secretaries of state. Over time different factions arose under charismatic leaders, only to disappear as their influence diminished. Factions were mostly based around one important noble family, which was often a branch of the royal family that had members that could directly influence the King or the ministry and could use this influence to see their intrigue pay off. It is important to realize that such a faction aroused *vertical* solidarity; its sentiments were shared by people from all levels of (noble) society. What is relevant for this paper, however, is that only the very highest nobles of a faction, the top of the echelon, attended the royal court in Paris. It is also of interest to note that the court nobles were not necessarily men. Women played an integral part at court as mistresses, as possibilities for extending a faction's influence through marriage, or even as faction leaders.

The different factions were constantly at loggerheads with one another over who would take precedence in influencing such important matters as nominations or political decisions. Usually these naturally recurring power struggles and vendettas between different factions were restrained and kept in check by the first minister and the King. As we have seen, warfare remained one of the defining trades of the nobility and therefore took precedence over almost all other political matters.

⁸⁷ Rogister, *Parlement of Paris*, 28-45.

⁸⁸ Shennan, 'The Political Role of the *Parlement*', 524-525.

⁸⁹ Shennan, 'The Political Role of the *Parlement*', 527-535. Shennan gives some examples of the criticisms on Fleury's behavior and shows how Fleury managed to deflect them.

⁹⁰ *Idem*, 532, 539-542.

⁹¹ Montesquieu, C. de Secondat, Baron de, *De l'Esprits des Lois*, Le Ron d'Alembert, J. (ed.), London 1772, 32.

During his long reign Louis XIV had effectively managed curbed the influence of the nobility and their factions, partly by diverting their energy through almost constant warfare, thereby preventing them from rising to their full and often antagonistic potential.⁹²

Only at times when a King died with an infant heir, known as the *dauphin*, as his successor, could the most influential members at court could become truly powerful. Each faction would throw in its lot with a candidate for the position of Regent, or *Régent*: a steward of an infant King appointed to rule until the new King's coming of age. As the Regent would effectively govern France during the King's infancy, it need not be said that the power struggle that broke out between the different factions and their candidates during such times was particularly fierce and had in the past led to civil war. Though there were some troubles during the minority of Louis XV between 1715 and 1723, notably with the duke of Maine (1670-1736) and the count of Toulouse (1678-1737), power remained firmly in the hands of the Regent, Phillippe II d'Orléans (1674-1723), until his death in 1723.⁹³ After the death of the duke d'Orléans Louis XV began his personal reign with the help of a first minister, which after 1726, following the fall of the duke de Bourbon, became Fleury. Fleury made it a point not to extent his patronage to individuals who were to intimately involved with members of his ministry and with important factions at court.⁹⁴

To have any control over the court, it was essential for the King and his first minister to strike a balance between the different factions. To prevent one faction from becoming more powerful than the others, the factions had to be played off against one another. In this way the factions remained manageable.⁹⁵ While Louis XIV had a tremendous talent for managing the court, Louis XV initially preferred to leave this task to his first minister. He himself only managed the court from the shadows through informal spies and intrigue, for which he appears to have had some talent.⁹⁶

Intrigue was an important feature of the political life at court. Fleury may have become nearly untouchable, but nonetheless became the victim of intrigue. During the 1730's there was the 'conspiracy of the Marmidons': members of the court tried to convince the King that Fleury was unfit to rule and had to be replaced by either the disgraced duke of Maine or the duke de Noailles.⁹⁷ In the end the King could not be persuaded and the conspiracy failed. Now secure in the fact that the cardinal could not be removed through intrigue, the court had to be content to wait and scheme for the time when the old cleric would pass away. The factions fought amongst themselves over his succession and in this fight the ministers and secretaries also became involved as either actors or potential targets.⁹⁸ As these dynastic networks formed the core of court politics, it is desirable to focus for a moment on the most important factions at court and their top players.

⁹² One of the underlying causes of the French War of Religion during the sixteenth century was the constant clash between different factions, whose struggle for power was further exacerbated by the divide in religious beliefs. Primarily, it was a clash between three of the highest noble families in France, the houses of Montmorency, Bourbon (both Calvinist Huguenots) and Guise (Roman-Catholic). A recurring theme was that these antagonisms tended to rekindle when a new, young King ascended to the throne. The last time this had occurred was during the first years of the reign of Louis XIV himself, between 1648 and 1653, a period now know as the *Fronde*.

⁹³ Campbell, *Power and Politics*, 39-69 & Barker, N., 'Phillipe d'Orléans, frère unique du Roi: founder of the family fortune' in: *French Historical Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 2, 1983, pp. 145-171.

⁹⁴ Campbell, *Power and Politics*, 129-156.

⁹⁵ Campbell, *Power and Politics*, 156.

⁹⁶ Antoine, *Louis XV*, 200-229, 255-265.

⁹⁷ Cruickshanks, E., *Factions at the Court of Louis XV*, PHD Thesis, University of Ixindon 1955, 38.

⁹⁸ Campbell, *Power and Politics*, 157-190.

The two most important factions at court for most of the 1720's and 1730's represented the House of Orléans and the House of Bourbon-Condé, two side branches of ruling house of Bourbon. The third influential group consisted of an amalgamation of the *princes légitimés*, the legitimized bastards of the house of Bourbon, and the scions of the powerful noble house of Noailles, which had been important since the early years of Louis XIV and whose patriarchs had been Marshals of France since 1693. Though this diffuse group was more sympathetic to the House of Orléans than to the House of Condé, they were also a separate faction in their own right.⁹⁹

Each of these three groups revolved around a leader who represented the nucleus of each faction. The Condé faction was led by the aforementioned temporary first minister, Louis-Henri, duke de Bourbon. The Orléans faction was led by Louis d'Orléans (1703-1752) after the death of his father, the Regent Philippe II. The disparate, loosely affiliated Noailles faction was principally led by Adrien Maurice, duke de Noailles (1678-1766). Each of these factions strove to have one of their own succeed Fleury as prime minister. During the 1720's and early 1730's Fleury seems to have regarded the Condé candidate, the Keeper of the Seals Germain Louis Chauvelin (1685-1762), as his most likely successor. Thanks to court intrigue, however, Chauvelin eventually began to fall out of grace during the mid-1730's, culminating in his dismissal by Fleury in 1737.¹⁰⁰ He had been ousted by Fleury from his prominent position as a result of a mixture of jealousy and irritation over Chauvelin's success. Chauvelin, who was both firmly anti-Austrian and warlike, became quite popular amongst the court nobility during the early years of the Polish Succession, which began to irritate the pacifistic Fleury to the point where he removed his former pupil from his position of power.¹⁰¹ With Chauvelin disgraced and with little chance of Fleury finding a new successor himself, the way to the succession of Fleury was open once more, and the factions continued their struggle for supremacy.

During the Chauvelin-affair Fleury showed that he was masterful at playing out the court factions and at using people's weaknesses against them at the most opportune time. However, the prime minister was past his eightieth year and he began to feel the weight of his position. He became ill for most of the year 1738, as the strain of the War of the Polish Succession and the troubles with Chauvelin at court had taken their toll on him. Though physically he seemed to have made an almost full recovery, mentally he did not. He became more absent-minded at times and, more importantly, slowly began to lose his grip on both foreign policy and on the court, as we shall see later on.

Belle-Isle's rise at court

When Belle-Isle's rise to fame started is not exactly clear. The duke de Luyes tells us that he was told that:

Il m'a ajouté que cependant le feu Roi, un an ou dieux avant sa mort, avoit remarqué avec plaisir la grande volonté de M. de Belle-Isle, qui avoit demandé avec empressement à server

⁹⁹ Noailles, Adrien-Maurice de Noailles, duc de, *Mémoires Politiques et Militaires, pour servir à l'histoire de Louis XIV & de Louis XV*, Paris 1777.

¹⁰⁰ Campbell, *Power and Politics*, 157-165.

¹⁰¹ Campbell, *Power and Politics*, 156-165, Rogister, J., 'New Light on the Fall of Chauvelin' in: *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 83, No. 327, pp. 314-330, Oxford 1968 and Bréban, A., *Germain Louis Chauvelin (1685-1762), Ministre de Louis XV*, PHD Thesis, École Nationale des Chartes 2004.

et étoit parti pour aller server en Espagne pour un expédition où il fallut envoyer promptement quelques troupes.¹⁰²

Whether Louis XIV really spoke this fondly of Belle-Isle or if it is an exaggeration by de Luynes, which seems more likely, cannot be said for certain. What is certain, however, is that Belle-Isle would eventually get his wish to go to Spain. In the following pages, which are dedicated to the description of the early life of Belle-Isle, much use will be made of the different memoirs described in the introduction in an effort to give an accurate description of Belle-Isle. Though on occasion the different defects of said memoirs will be hinted at in the text, the reader would do well to remember the general descriptions about them given in the introduction.

As a man whose family had been in disgrace since before his birth, Belle-Isle could not begin his career with the same ease that many other young noblemen had. However, he was extremely ambitious and used his mother's name, who was a member of the powerful Lévis-family, to gain support. The Lévis family was quite influential, not in the least because the governess of the young Louis XV, Mme de Ventadour, was a Lévis through marriage. Furthermore, he was closely related to the German countess d'Harcourt, who was the mother of the duchesses de Bouillon and Richelieu.¹⁰³

At the time of the War of the Spanish Succession his connections enabled him to take command of a regiment of dragoons. He fought at the Siege of Lille in 1708, where he caught the eye of the commanding officer, Marshal de Boufflers, and soon became his right hand officer. Proving his valor in battle during the siege, Belle-Isle got shot in the chest during the fight. Boufflers seems to have been quite taken with him and pushed for him to be promoted to the rank of colonel in favor of the likes of the marquis de Maillebois.¹⁰⁴ During the 1710's he steadily continued to expand his connections at court, becoming closely associated with the pro-war, anti-Austrian Orléanists at court. Through Boufflers, he retained close ties with some very influential persons, such as the cardinal de Rohan and Claude le Blanc (1669-1728), who was the Secretary of State for War under the Regency from 1718 to 1723 and with whom he would have an intimate friendship.¹⁰⁵ Le Blanc also introduced him to the cardinal Dubois (1656-1723), who became Councilor of State during the regency and who was one of the most important men in the Kingdom, and to John Law (1671-1729), the Scottish economist-turned-Controller-General of Finances.¹⁰⁶

Belle-Isle seemed to have been mainly interested in warfare and politics, leaving the management of the family's estates to his brother, Louis Charles Armand Fouquet, chevalier de Belle-Isle (1693-1747). Coming from the robe nobility, Belle-Isle was a perfect example of the new breed of soldier: he fully appreciated the importance of logistics and valued good provisioning, a good communication network and a perfectly orchestrated and orderly army. Learning more on the art of war at the ministry for war under his good friend Le Blanc, he soon became an expert on warfare.¹⁰⁷ He wrote down the aspects that he believed to be essential for a good general in his political testament, which was written twenty years after the events of the War of the Austrian Succession in 1761. In these he stresses that a person with a full knowledge of the art of war recognizes the

¹⁰² Luynes, Charles Phillipe d'Albert de Luynes, duc de, *Mémoires de Duc de Luynes sur la Cour de Louis XV (1735-1758)*, Dussieux L. and Soulie E. (ed.), Paris 1860, Vol. III, 288-289.

¹⁰³ Saint-Simon, Louis de Rouvroy, duc de, *Mémoires de Saint-Simon*, Colette, A.S. and Gonzaque, T. (ed.), Vol. V (Paris 1958), 85-86.

¹⁰⁴ *Mémoires du marquis d'Argenson*, 138-139.

¹⁰⁵ *Mémoires de duc de Luynes*, Vol. IV, 270.

¹⁰⁶ *Mémoires de duc de Luynes*, Vol. IV, 304-305.

¹⁰⁷ *Mémoires de duc de Saint-Simon*, Vol. VI, 270, 308, 322-323.

importance of all the different elements that act together on the battlefield; not just the troops.¹⁰⁸ Though this source does give us a good insight into the general ideas that Belle-Isle had on armies and warfare, one has to remember that it was written twenty years later by a much older and more experienced Belle-Isle.

According to the marquis d'Argenson, Belle-Isle did not put much faith in the ideas of John Law, and as such was spared the terrible fiscal disaster that would befall so many others during the fall of Law and his financial system.¹⁰⁹ Proving his value once again during the Spanish War between 1718 and 1720, he rose to the rank of Brigadier and became *maréchal de camp*.¹¹⁰ Showing his faithfulness to the Orléans-faction, he supported the candidacy of Cardinal Dubois for the post of first minister after Louis XV's coming of age. The deaths of both Cardinal Dubois and the duke d'Orléans in 1723, however, put a stop to these plans.

The duke de Bourbon eventually rose to the position of prime minister, and there was little that the now leaderless Orléans-faction could do to prevent it. Le Blanc was removed from office and Belle-Isle was even placed in the Bastille for his intrigue. After being released from the Bastille a year later, he was exiled from court.¹¹¹ Though Belle-Isle had been a rising star at court for more than a decade, he had finally met defeat. For three years he was forced to continue his business from his country house at Bizy in Normandy.¹¹² Belle-Isle's luck again made a change for the better when Louis XV dismissed the duke de Bourbon as first minister in favor of Fleury in 1726. Fleury had a strong sympathy for Le Blanc and reinstated him as Secretary for War. Belle-Isle also returned to the ministry to continue to learn under Le Blanc until his death two years later. At first Fleury seemed to have been indifferent towards Belle-Isle and was suspicious of his tendency to use intrigue, given his previous close connections to the Orléanist cabal.¹¹³ However, Belle-Isle's circle of acquaintances included both Louis' old governess Mme de Ventadour and her daughter, Anne Geneviève de Lévis, who persuaded Fleury to promote him to the rank of lieutenant-general in 1731 and to make him governor of Metz in 1733. As Argenson tells us:

Mais enfin M. le duc (de Bourbon) fut déplacé, et les ennemis de M. De Belle-Isle enfermés et exilés à leur tour. Le cardinal de Fleury vint en place. Il avoit été ami intime de la duchesse de Lévis, tante de M. de Belle-Isle, qui profita de cette liaison pour gagner la confiance de ce nouveau premier ministre. Il y réussit.¹¹⁴

Apart from his strong support at court, Belle-Isle himself also possessed a character that was well suited to the life at court. According to the duke de Saint-Simon he was well mannered, charming

¹⁰⁸ Belle-Isle, Charles Louis Auguste Fouquet, duc de, *Testament*

Politique du Maréchal Duc de Belle-Isle, Chevrier, F.A. (ed.), Amsterdam 1761, 95-96.

¹⁰⁹ *Mémoires du marquis d'Argenson*, 140; Le Roy Ladurie, *The Ancien Régime*, 335-337, 354-357, John Law (1671-1729) was a Scottish Economist who became Controller General of Finances in France. He tried to introduce a new financial system, which subsequently failed, causing both hyperinflation and great financial losses throughout the Kingdom. For more on John Law, see Murphy, A., *John Law: Economic Theorist and Policy Maker*, Oxford 1997 and Giraud, M., *Histoire de Louisiane française, Tome III: l'Époque de John Law (1717-1720)*, Paris 1966.

¹¹⁰ *Mémoires du marquis d'Argenson*, 139-141.

¹¹¹ Butler, *Choiseul*, 259; *Mémoires du marquis d'Argenson*, 140-141.

¹¹² Butler, *Choiseul*, 356; Campbell, *Power and Politics*, 169.

¹¹³ Especially with le Blanc, the duke de Charost and cardinal Dubois. To learn more about this tendency to intrigue, read the *Mémoires de duc de Saint-Simon*, Vol. VI, 270, 304-305, 322-323, 739-741, 785.

¹¹⁴ *Mémoires du marquis d'Argenson*, 142.

and able to make almost anyone feel at ease in his presence. However, Saint-Simon also describes him as being secretive, hiding his ideas and thoughts behind a façade of friendliness. He was flexible and found it easy to rise to every occasion. He was smart and hard-working and always tried to become indispensable to his peers.¹¹⁵ He governed his charges, Maine and the three dioceses (Metz, Toul and Verdun), very well. The duke de Luynes comments that the people there lived in abundance thanks to the good care and prudence of Belle-Isle, though once again one has to remember that Luynes has a tendency to exaggerate.¹¹⁶ These traits made him perfectly suited for a career at court, though he also had his vices. Although there was no love lost between the marquis d'Argenson and Belle-Isle, his memoirs do show a number of flaws that, despite Argenson's exaggeration, become apparent throughout Belle-Isle's career.¹¹⁷ First of all he seems to have had illusions of grandeur and always thought up grandiose schemes that would have no real chance of success. Furthermore, though his manners may have been excellent, his use of the French language possibly lacked the finesse that was customary amongst the nobility.¹¹⁸ His style of writing in particular seems to have been lacking; a fact that is easily corroborated by reading through some of his letters. His style is short, to the point and lacks flair. In the introduction of one of his letters he even apologizes for his bad, military style of writing.¹¹⁹ Though the argument that Belle-Isle had a poor style of writing is further corroborated by the introduction of the publisher of his political testament, who apologizes that Belle-Isle's own poor style of writing had necessitated a ghostwriter; one does have to be aware that both of these forms of apologies about the use of written language were quite common literary conventions.¹²⁰ Despite these apparent flaws in his character, his upbeat nature and pleasant demeanor seem to have made him generally well liked at court. He had a number of influential associates, including *intendant* Louis Fagon, Marshal of France Phillippe Charles de La Fare and *intendant* and future controller-general of finances Jean-Moreau de Séchelles.¹²¹ By 1736, he was already established well enough at court to be able to help the duke de Luynes secure the position of master of the dragoons for his son.¹²²

Separately from his rise at the court in Paris, Belle-Isle also became an influential nobleman in the Holy Roman Empire, where his relation to German nobility (through his d'Harcourt relatives) and his already discussed marriage to Marie de Béthune made him the perfect French negotiator and ambassador in the German Empire. Furthermore, two of his closest friends were the highly regarded French foreign diplomats and ambassadors Chavigny and Blondel. Belle-Isle's background, marriage and court connections culminated in the important role he played during the War of the Polish Succession and its aftermath, which drove his honor and esteem at court to even greater heights. Around 1738, Belle-Isle was at the height of his fame in both France and the Holy Roman Empire.

¹¹⁵ *Mémoires de duc de Saint-Simon*, Vol. VI, 267-268.

¹¹⁶ *Mémoires de duc de Luynes*, Vol. III, 255.

¹¹⁷ Through his rise at the ministry of war during the 1740's and 50's Belle-Isle seems to have disgruntled the Argenson-family. See the notes by Editor P. Jannet on page 138 of the *Mémoires du marquis d'Argenson*.

¹¹⁸ *Mémoires du marquis d'Argenson*, 144-145.

¹¹⁹ Letter from Belle-Isle to Luynes in *Mémoires de duc de Luynes*, Vol. VI, 379.

¹²⁰ Belle-Isle, *Testament Politique*, publisher's introduction.

¹²¹ Campbell, *Power and Politics*, 169.

¹²² *Mémoires de duc de Luynes*, Vol. I, 85-89.

Conclusion

As this chapter shows, the different cultural developments and changes that had already begun during the reign of Louis XIV were only enhanced and accelerated during the reign of Louis XV. The turn towards centralization and institutionalization and towards a more fixed and rigid cultural code became increasingly restrictive and would only continue to become even more so until the end of the *Ancien Régime*. Louis XV did not actively participate in the government of France during the first two decades of his reign, instead preferring to relegate this task to his first ministers, the duke de Bourbon and cardinal Fleury respectively. The inherent paradox in strengthening the power of the King by increasing the size and importance of the government can easily be seen throughout this period. Though Louis XV's power remained supreme, in reality it was the first minister and the government that dominated most of the French policy-making during this time. It becomes quite apparent from reading the sources that the nobles at court tried to further their own cause by trying to win favors from government officials as well as from ministers and secretaries. Though officially the King was the ultimate executive power and the only one who could bestow Royal honors, we have seen that getting an audience with the King was difficult because Louis XV was a very private person and because Fleury did not allow anyone to meet with the King without his approval. Following the King's weak (personal) rule during the first twenty years of his life and the improved importance of the government, these developments quickly eroded the importance of the position of the King as an accessible patron in the eyes of the royal court. Influencing Fleury and the ministers and secretaries of state became the new top priority of the courtiers and their factions. As Fleury ultimately decided who would be granted an audience with a King who fully trusted his advice and decisions, Fleury can almost be seen as taking the place of the King in the court factions' ambitions. However, there were other ways to gain influence over the King, for example through one of the King's mistresses or through the members of the royal household.

All these ways gained in importance *because* of the greater inaccessibility of the King to the courtiers. This increased inaccessibility made it much harder for the nobility to get the favors from the King they so desired. They were very much aware that there was little chance of unseating the cardinal and so they were relatively hopeless to put an end to it.¹²³ The courtiers, and especially the lower placed ones who very seldom benefitted from the alternative routes used to influence the king, thus were often forced to look for career opportunities elsewhere, with warfare taking a prime place amongst them. From the late seventeenth century, the martial nobility had started to change both in style and in composition. Influenced by the spirit of the enlightenment, the focus on personal talent and on organizational skills became important alongside the traditional battlefield valor. Furthermore, coinciding with this development, the *noblesse de robe* became the new stars of the martial elite alongside the established *noblesse d'épée*. The new focus on talent as well as the increased numbers of the martial nobility made warfare more than ever a place to show one's ability and to attract the attention of both influential courtiers and high government officials. Even the King, who kept himself informed about important and notable developments, might take a liking to an exceptionally talented individual. Another solid way to start a career was to find work as a government official and to start building up one's status and influence by rising through the ranks within the government. In both cases it was mostly the *robe*-nobility who managed to profit from it.

¹²³ Swann, 'Politics: Louis XV', 205.

In an era in which so much emphasis was put on individual talent and where the traditional way of gaining power and prestige through the patronage and favor of the King was closed off, showing one's own excellence was a good way to get noticed and to start build a career. Though there were many ways to achieve this, excelling in war was preferred. Not only did it have a long and illustrious history, but as the eighteenth century progressed the nobility found a new appreciation for the Middle Ages, including its knights.¹²⁴ Furthermore, stories of exceptional feats of arms reached every part of society from the lowest peasant up to the King. It was the fastest, most assured road to greatness, as had been shown many times over in the past.

Perhaps no one embodied this new culture and generation better than Belle-Isle. In his career the new attitude at court the cultural changes became apparent from the very start. Belle-Isle's family had been in disgrace since the time of his grandfather, but thanks to his political and martial talents Belle-Isle still managed to rise at court. Warfare played an important factor in this. By showing his organizational skills as well as his martial prowess in the War of the Spanish Succession, he caught the attention of such influential courtiers as cardinal de Rohan and Marshal de Boufflers. These connections helped him cement his position at court and gain ever increasing prestige. He also got the chance show off his talents as a statesman during the negotiations that followed the War of the Polish Succession from 1735 to 1738 and took full advantage from this. Combined with his disarming charm and pleasant manners, he quickly rose through the ranks of Versailles. Though Fleury remained skeptical, after the negotiations at Vienna even he began to favor Belle-Isle. Combining great talent with the ability to know how to sell it, he was destined to become an influential member of the French court nobility and as a result he could be seen as being exemplary for a new generation of noblemen who grew up in a time of significant cultural changes.

This chapter has shown some of the political and cultural changes that were taking place in France during the first decades of the eighteenth century and the reaction to these changes from the court, the King and the government, as well as the reasons behind the increasing importance of warfare to the career of most nobles during the early decades of the reign of Louis XV. What has become less apparent is the link between the internal political developments in France and their influence on French foreign policy. This is mainly because the wars that were fought during the Regency and the early years of Louis XV's reign, most prominently the Wars of the Spanish- and Polish Succession, saw much diplomacy, but large-scale battles were few and far between. In other words, warfare was relatively small scale and sparse compared to the wars fought during the reign of Louis XIV. However, the French nobility had not become as disgruntled about the lack of ways to improve their own career and prestige as they would become a few years later and the old Fleury continued to live and remain powerful. As achieving social advancement through the personal patronage and favor of the King became either very difficult or near impossible, that other main road to power, war, became even more important. However, Fleury's reluctance towards open war and personal talent for diplomacy made warfare a relatively scarce commodity during the 1720's and 1730's, especially when compared to the string of wars fought during the later years of Louis XIV. The frustration and the pressure from the court to start a war, that increased as the 1730's continued, would eventually have great consequences during the 1740's.

¹²⁴ Raedts, P., *De Ontdekking van de Middeleeuwen; Geschiedenis van een Illusie*, Amsterdam 2011, 113-125. The romantic stories about knights had always remained popular amongst the lower classes, especially in the countryside. However, during the eighteenth century, a new fascination by the higher classes for the romantic aspects of the Middle Ages began to grow as a reaction to the Enlightenment.



Map 2

Chapter two: The War of the Austrian Succession

2.1: The Short Peace 1738-1740

Prologue

On October 20th 1740 Emperor Charles VI died with only a daughter, Maria Theresa, as his heir. It was a difficult situation, as the rules of the House of Habsburg regarding inheritance did not cover women.¹²⁵ Though most European rulers had signed the Pragmatic Sanction in the aftermath of the War of the Polish Succession, few had the intention of keeping their word. As noted above, even before the death of Charles, the prince-electors of Bavaria and Saxony had argued that they were entitled to parts of the hereditary Habsburg lands in the absence of a male heir. During the 1720's these Electors had made a number of secret arrangements to work together to make good on these claims.¹²⁶

France's initial standpoint on the matter of the Austrian Succession remains rather obscure. Though France had signed the Pragmatic Sanction, it seems that Fleury was only willing to grant Maria Theresa the lordship over the Habsburg lands as per the agreement, but not the imperial title.¹²⁷ This was a typical course of action for the pacifistic Fleury: he honored the Pragmatic Sanction by safeguarding Maria Theresa's inheritance, but tried to diminish the power of the House of Habsburg by supporting the election of the Elector of Bavaria, who was heavily indebted to France, at the imperial electoral diet at Frankfurt.¹²⁸

This chapter will look at the period between roughly 1738 and 1743 from both an international and national perspective. It will begin by looking at the events and developments that led up to the beginning of the War of the Austrian Succession and will end with the loss of Prague by France and its allies at the beginning of 1743. The war itself will be described from a broad international perspective, but at the same time an attempt will be made to show the changing sentiments about the war at the court at Versailles as the war progressed. The ultimate goal of this chapter will be to show the link between those internationally important developments in the war and the change in sentiments at the French court, thereby illustrating the importance of combining both national and international French political perspectives.

International diplomacy

For now let us return to the diplomatic solution of the War of the Polish Succession. As it turned out Fleury's initial pacifistic course of action became impossible to follow through, and I believe there were two notable reasons for this. The first of these was the attack on Silesia by Frederick II of Prussia; the second was the pressure exerted by the court at Versailles in favor of a military intervention. Note that this shows that both national (pressure from the court at Versailles) and international (the attack on Silesia by Frederick) occurrences already had an influence on the

¹²⁵ Clark, *Rise and Downfall*, 190.

¹²⁶ Clark, *Rise and Downfall*, 190-191.

¹²⁷ Sautai, *Préliminaires*, 453-454.

¹²⁸ Campbell, *Power and Politics*, 174.

developments that led up to the war. Both of these will be discussed in turn, starting with the actions of Frederick of Prussia.

Frederick II had been crowned King in Prussia a short time before the death of Charles VI.¹²⁹ As an eager young King looking for ways to prove himself, the death of the Emperor proved to be just the opportunity that Frederick was looking for. He chose not to honor the Pragmatic Sanction that had been signed by his father and instead launched an attack on the Austrian province of Silesia in December 1740. A number of reasons can be given to explain why Frederick took this course of action and why he specifically chose to attack Silesia. First of all, it was a form of revenge for the lack of Austrian support in Prussia's claim to the duchy of Berg in 1738, during which Austria cut off its agreement with Brandenburg-Prussia in favor of another claimant.¹³⁰ Secondly, Silesia was the only Habsburg province to share a border with Brandenburg and as it also happened to be lightly defended it seemed a perfect opportunity for Frederick to quench his thirst for conquest and martial glory.¹³¹ Thirdly, Frederick must have been afraid that the Elector of Saxony had similar plans regarding Silesia. As Saxony and Poland were only divided from one another by Silesia, conquering it seemed a logical step, especially since Saxony held dubious claims on Habsburg lands as we have previously seen. For Prussia this would mean that Saxony would eclipse it in power and effectively cut it off from the rest of the Empire, something that Frederick could not let come to pass.¹³² Fourthly, there must have been a strong economic motivation for invading Silesia. Christopher Clark argues in his book *Iron Kingdom* that economic motivations do not seem to have been on Frederick's mind when he took Silesia. Instead Clark emphasizes that it should be seen as a rash and bold act of a young King who was out to prove himself.¹³³ Though I think this must certainly have played a great part in Frederick's motivation, I also believe it goes too far to imply that Frederick had not been motivated by economic reasons at all. He must have known that Silesia was one of the wealthiest parts of Germany. It was one of the most industrialized parts of Western Europe at the time and was highly specialized in textile industry.¹³⁴ Having such a rich yet poorly defended property at his doorstep must have been a motivation for Frederick.

Frederick was a hard man to know. Reading through his correspondence shows that he remained courteous towards the recipients of his letters, but his contemporaries found that his exact motivations and standpoints on important international matters often remained obscured, vague and uncommitted.¹³⁵ Whatever reasons Frederick may have had for ignoring the council of his

¹²⁹ Frederick was crowned King *in* Prussia on May 31, 1740; note that the formal title at the time was 'King in Prussia', because by then the Hohenzollern of Brandenburg had only conquered parts of Prussia. In 1772 Frederick would style himself King *of* Prussia after he had acquired the rest of it.

¹³⁰ Clark, *Rise and Downfall*, 191; Frederick based part of his dubious claim on the violation of the Treaty of Schwiebus of 1537, which stated that the Silesian princedoms of Liegnitz, wohlau and Brieg would pass to the House of Brandenburg after the ruling Piast-dynasty had died out. When in 1675 the past member of the Piast-dynasty had died. However, during this time Frederick-Wilhelm chose to renounce his claim in return for a considerable payment. Frederick, however, used the alleged 'violation' of this treaty to support his claims on Silesia.

¹³¹ Clark, *Rise and Downfall*, 192.

¹³² *Idem*, 192.

¹³³ *Idem*, 193-194.

¹³⁴ For a good study of Silesia's economy during the early-modern period, see the chapter 11, 'The Industrial Revolution: Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia' by Milan Myska in Porter, R. & Teich, M. (ed.), *The Industrial Revolution in National Context: Europe and the USA*, Cambridge 1996, 247-265.

¹³⁵ Prussia, Frederick von Hohenzollern, King of, *Oeuvres de Frédéric le Grand – Werke Friedrichs des Großen*, Universitätsbibliothek Trier (ed.), *Digitale Ausgabe des Universitätsbibliothek Trier*; for Frederick of Prussia's

advisors by attacking Silesia, the fact remains that his attack formed the start of the First Silesian War (1740-1742) and signaled the beginning of the War of the Austrian Succession (1740-1748). Though Frederick's attack on Silesia was a shattering blow to Fleury's hope of relieving the international tension without having to resort to warfare, this event alone did not by itself implied that France had to get militarily involved in the conflict and Fleury himself certainly seems to not have had the wish to do so.¹³⁶ To understand why it was that France eventually *did* get involved, we have to turn our attention to the court at Versailles.

The court

From the time of the Regency up to 1738 there had been a great deal of continuity at the French court. It remained dominated by two long standing factions, those of Orléans and Bourbon-Condé, both of whom were led by a *prince du sang*, a member of the royal family. The factions' leaders were also the factions' candidates for the coveted position of first minister. This all changed in the years around 1740. In January of that year the duke de Bourbon, leader of the Bourbon-Condé faction, suddenly died. A few month afterwards the duke d'Orléans, who had become increasingly religious, made the decision to withdraw from court and retire to the Abbaye Sainte-Geneviève de Paris to spent the rest of his days in religious seclusion. Within a year, both major factions had lost their leader, leaving the court in disarray and providing the opportunity to those with political ambition to fill the gaps. From this upheaval of the established order emerged three powerful new factions. It is important to note that factions were often formed around a family nucleus and its close associates and friends. However, this did not mean that individual members were always tied to one faction, and so over time members of one faction could join another, or even be part of two factions at the same time. This fluidity often makes it hard to pinpoint exact allegiances of individuals, but some broad assumptions can be made.

The first faction formed around the disgraced Keeper of the Seals Chauvelin. Chauvelin was still supported by a good part of the old Condé-faction, amongst them the Condé family itself and the high ranking de Carignan-family. He also received support from a number of ducal houses, amongst others the houses of de Villeroy and de Biron, as well as the marquis de La Fare and the marquis de Beringhen.¹³⁷ His most important ally, however, may have been the King's first valet, Francois-Gabriel Bachelier, who was both a valued confidant of Louis XV and a close friend of Chauvelin.¹³⁸ Though Chauvelin had a powerful backing at court and a good way to influence Louis XV through Bachelier, as long as Fleury (who by now strongly disliked Chauvelin) remained first minister, he would not get the chance to return to court. By 1741 he was far removed from the court in disgrace at Bourges, and it would not be until after the death of Fleury in 1743 that Chauvelin would attempt to make a return.

The second great faction was that of the Noailles-family which, as we have seen, already held a dominant position at court. Adrien-Maurice, the current duke de Noailles, was a highly honored statesman and soldier. He had been President of the Council of Finances and had been made Marshal of France in 1734. The duke de Noailles had two daughters, of which one married the

complete correspondence and memoirs, see <http://friedrich.uni.trier.de>. All further references to Frederick's memoirs and correspondences in this paper are taken from this website.

¹³⁶ Le Roy Ladurie, *The Ancien Régime*, 373.

¹³⁷ *Mémoires du marquis d'Argenson*, 156-160; Campbell, *Power and Politics*, 167-168.

¹³⁸ Campbell, *Power and Politics*, 168.

prince of Lorraine and the other married the duke de Villars. His sons, the duke d'Ayen (1713-1793) and the count de Noailles (1715-1794), were both friends and confidants of Louis XV.¹³⁹ This gave the Noailles-faction great opportunity to influence the King. Even more important, the duke de Noailles was a great friend of Armand de Vignerot du Plessis, duke de Richelieu (1696-1788), who was perhaps Louis XV's best friend.¹⁴⁰ However, though he was indeed a personal friend of the duke de Noailles, Richelieu was a conniving and treacherous individual and was often inclined to look after his own interests first regardless of the consequences for others. Though very powerful and influential, the Noailles-family was also very large and its individual members were often inclined to give their own fortune prevalence over that of the family. It was only when opportunities to increase the fortunes of the family name presented themselves that they banded together to reach their common goal.¹⁴¹

The third great faction was that of Belle-Isle. We last left Belle-Isle when he was acquiring an ever-growing support at court and had impressed the skeptical Fleury with his political acumen in his role as a *prince étranger* during the negotiations at Vienna that followed the War of the Polish Succession. Before going into the details of Belle-Isle's faction, it is important to note that although a close network of family and relations was at the heart of every faction, in some ways the Belle-Isle faction differed from the former two. Whereas the Noailles and Chauvelin factions could build on a long history going back to the days of Louis XIV, the Belle-Isle faction did not. Coming from a disgraced family, the faction was carefully constructed by Belle-Isle over time. Though Belle-Isle was originally a member of the Orléanist faction, his extensive and carefully built-up network enabled him to gain enough support to start his own faction in the wake of the death of the duke de Bourbon and the retirement of the duke d'Orléans.

In the end Belle-Isle would prevail over his competitors. But why exactly was it the upstart Belle-Isle that triumphed over the veterans Chauvelin and Noailles? Jeroen Duindam mentions in his book *Vienna and Versailles: The Court of Europe's Dynastic Rivals, 1550-1780* that access to power, being in favor and the actual obtainment of power were attributes that did not necessarily run parallel: not all those in high favor became powerful and not all those with access to power profited from it.¹⁴² When we look at our three contenders, we see that Chauvelin did wield considerable power and influence, but was denied access to real executive power because he was in disfavor. The Noailles family also maintained considerable influence and had possible access to true power through the duke de Richelieu. However, they were not in high favor, and their internal squabbling and the strong emphasis on personal gains of its individual members meant that the Noailles faction had a hard time focusing on the advancement of their family and faction as whole. Belle-Isle on the other hand *was* in high favor, as by this time he was liked by both Fleury and the King. Furthermore, as he and his faction were relative newcomers, he did not have the sorted past that his competitors had. He also had possible access to power through his many acquaintances, especially Mms. de Ventadour and de Lévis. Thus, as both of his main competitors each had the odds stacked them in their own separate ways, Belle-Isle was in the perfect position to make a bid for power. Of the three

¹³⁹ For more on Noailles, see the aforementioned Noailles, A.M. de, *Mémoires Politiques et Militaires, pour servir à l'histoire de Louis XIV & de Louis XV*, Paris 1777 and Noailles, A.M. de, *Les Correspondants du duc de Noailles; lettres inédites de Le Verrier, Renaudot et Valincour*, Gabriel, L., Baptiste, J. and Péliissier, M. (ed.), - Paris 1905, as well as the *Mémoires du marquis d'Argenson*, P. LXIJ, LXIJJ; especially note 1 on page LXIJ.

¹⁴⁰ Noailles, A.M. de, *Correspondance de Louis XV et du Maréchal de Noailles*, V. I, Rousset, C. (ed.), Paris 1865, XII-XIII.

¹⁴¹ Campbell, *Power and Politics*, 169.

¹⁴² Duindam, *Vienna and Versailles*, 234.

contenders, Belle-Isle was the one who would turn out to be the right person in the right place at the right time and, as a result, he was the one to prevail over the others.

Belle-Isle at court

As said before, Belle-Isle did not have a background as a faction leader at court; he gradually built up his reputation over the years and remained somewhat in the limelight at court during the years that preceded his rise to fame between 1738 and 1740. He also did not keep a journal or a diary as consistent and as extensive as, for example, Saint-Simon and Luynes did. This makes it hard to keep track of him and his comings and goings at court during this period. However, making use of his personal and official correspondences as well as the memoirs of other courtiers with whom he crossed paths and who accordingly knew him well, we are able to sketch a general picture of Belle-Isle's court life during these years.

First and foremost, after showing his negotiating skills at Vienna after the War of the Polish Succession, Belle-Isle seems to have garnered a political reputation throughout Europe. For Belle-Isle this period marked the definitive break with his family's disgrace. This was plainly shown during the entry of the former King of Poland, Stanisław Leszczyński, into his new duchy of Lorraine. Belle-Isle, who was the commanding officer there at the time, was the one who was selected to greet him on his arrival, which was a great honor.¹⁴³ At the same time Belle-Isle's cousin, Armand de Béthune, duke de Charost (1663-1741), who seems to have been well liked by the queen, continually tried to present Belle-Isle favorably to her, but apparently without avail.¹⁴⁴ The King and Fleury, however, were under the impression that Belle-Isle, who had shown his skills at negotiating in Vienna and who had the exceptional status of being counted amongst the high nobility in both France and the Empire, was the person most suited to become the French ambassador at the imperial electoral diet at Frankfurt.¹⁴⁵ It seems that Belle-Isle's knowledge of the Empire, which so impressed Fleury and the King, was at least in part taught to him by the French ambassador Blondel, who during November 1740 gave him several lectures on the subject in preparation of his meetings with Fleury.¹⁴⁶ On December 12 1740 Belle-Isle was officially appointed as the leading ambassador of France to the imperial diet. Following the appointment, preparations were made for his departure between December 1740 and January 1741. Belle-Isle arranged for one of his subordinates, Henri-François, comte de Ségur (1689-1751), to act as commander-in-chief in Maine and the three dioceses during his absence.¹⁴⁷ He also made arrangements for a splendid entourage to accompany him during his entrance in Frankfurt. In these arrangements we get a glimpse of Belle-Isle's illusions of grandeur, as he estimated the costs for this entourage at a million Livres, which Fleury subsequently toned down to 600.000 Livres.¹⁴⁸ Though the marquis d'Argenson, may have been exaggerating on this point, there certainly seems to have been some truth behind his claims.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴³ Butler, *Choiseul*, 151-155, 259-261 & *Mémoires de duc de Luynes*, Vol. I, 214.

¹⁴⁴ The queen seems to have disliked Belle-Isle from the moment that they were introduced to each other. See *Mémoires de duc de Luynes*, Vol. III, 288-289.

¹⁴⁵ Wilson, *French Foreign Policy*, 330.

¹⁴⁶ Blondel, M., *Remarques et anecdotes politiques*, Manuscript 350, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

¹⁴⁷ *Mémoires de duc de Luynes*, Vol. III, 291.

¹⁴⁸ *Mémoires de duc de Luynes*, Vol. III, 308.

¹⁴⁹ *Mémoires du marquis d'Argenson*, 144-145.

On February 12, 1741, the King created seven new Marshals of France: the duke de Brancas (1672-1750) the duke de Chaulnes (1676-1744), the marquis de Nangis (1682-1742), the prince d'Isenghien (1678-1767), the duke de Duras (1684-1770), the marquis de Maillebois (1682-1762) and, of course, Belle-Isle himself.¹⁵⁰ These promotions may have been encouraged by Marie-Anne de Mailly (1717-1744), who was a close friend of Belle-Isle and the soon-to-be mistress of Louis XV.¹⁵¹ What is striking is that all of these men had at one time or another been linked to the old Orléanist party and that all were from roughly the same generation as Belle-Isle. A number of them were close associates of him and the duke de Luynes even notes that the wives of the Marshals Duras, Nangis and Maillebois swore to serve him. However, as Luynes tends to exaggerate and inflate Belle-Isle's influence and power, this event may have been blown out of proportions.¹⁵² Here then we have a new generation of top noblemen who were like-minded and of roughly the same age (they were in their fifties and early sixties at the beginning of the War of the Austrian Succession). This generation had only experienced long periods of continued warfare in their youth, during the final years of the reign of Louis XIV. As we have seen there was some warfare during the first decades of the eighteenth century, the War of the Spanish Succession and the War of the Polish Succession prime amongst them, but they were more political affairs and large military actions remained relatively scarce. These men therefore did not share the older generation's battle fatigue and were impatiently looking for ways to get themselves noticed and to boost their careers.

The preliminaries of War

As he had now become the unofficial head of a powerful court faction and found himself in a position where he could exert considerable influence over French foreign policy, Belle-Isle had created the optimal situation for himself to set his plans for a quick, decisive strike at Austria in motion. He had a powerful influence over the court and had become well-liked by the King. Most of the other Marshals of France were now his confidants or at least favored him. Two of the most respected French diplomats, Blondel and Chavigny, were his close friends and he had gained great respect from the high nobility of the Empire in particular and that of Europe in general. As Frederick II wrote in his memoirs:

Le maréchal de Belle-Isle était de tous les militaires celui qui avait le plus séduit le public; on le regardait comme le soutien de la discipline militaire. Son génie était vaste; son esprit, brillant; son courage, audacieux; son métier était sa passion, mais il se livrait sans réserve à son imagination [...].¹⁵³

Belle-Isle had long been distinctly anti-Habsburg; a sentiment that had been festering in France since the time of the later Valois Kings and that was shared by many.¹⁵⁴ The longing for warfare that we have seen before, compared with the anti-Habsburg climate, caused a general outcry for military intervention in the conflict.¹⁵⁵ Most nobles seem to have reasoned (and not without cause) that if

¹⁵⁰ *Mémoires du marquis d'Argenson*, 227-229.

¹⁵¹ Antoine, *Louis XV*, 408, 426-428, 485-490.

¹⁵² *Mémoires de duc de Luynes*, Vol. III, 229.

¹⁵³ *Werke Friedrichs des Großen*, band 2, 10.

¹⁵⁴ Le Roy Ladurie, *The Ancien Régime*, 344.

¹⁵⁵ Le Roy Ladurie, *The Ancien Régime*, 342-345.

France would remain on the sidelines of a general European conflict, it would in all probability be excluded from the settlement of affairs when that war would come to an end, thereby missing out on an opportunity to bend the situation to France's advantage.¹⁵⁶ This collective outcry for intervention strengthened Belle-Isle's position even further. He tried to have Charles-Albert, Elector of Bavaria, elected as Emperor and was eventually appointed as special ambassador to the imperial Electoral diet in Frankfurt. Charles-Albert was in debt to France for the financial and political support given to him in the past and this made him the perfect candidate for France to support. Belle-Isle of course also had a strong personal interest in seeing Charles-Albert elected, as he was a relative of him through marriage.

The negotiations proved to be long and complicated. During the election period Belle-Isle worked extensively with Charles Albert and the Elector's chief confidant, minister and Marshal, Ignaz Felix von Törring-Jettenbach (1682-1763). In a letter to Amelot in May of 1741, Belle-Isle writes that they worked together at least three hours a day.¹⁵⁷ Thus, we can assume that the three men got to know each other quite intimately. However, in the same correspondence he also grossly overstates the abilities of Charles-Albert and count Törring. He presents them to Amelot as brilliant strategists while in fact their political and military abilities were acceptable but mediocre at best. In all likelihood Belle-Isle painted such a favorable picture of his associates in an attempt to create more reassurance. During the negotiations it became apparent that there were a number of Electors that favored the cause of Charles-Albert and France. Prime amongst them was Frederick of Prussia, whose dubious plans have already been touched upon and who was eager to form an alliance with France after starting hostilities with Austria. In an entry in his memoirs written around this time the duke de Luynes relates a conversation he had with Belle-Isle during which the Marshal talked about how splendidly he was received at the diet in Frankfurt, especially by a seemingly overly courteous Frederick.¹⁵⁸

In July Belle-Isle returned to Versailles to discuss new developments and strategies.¹⁵⁹ What is striking is that during this time Fleury seems to have truly confided in Belle-Isle and the two men worked together for days on end.¹⁶⁰ It is often implied by historians that even though Fleury eventually took a liking to Belle-Isle, he remained suspicious of him, which greatly damaged the French war effort. This, however, is not the image that the sources present. Despite the fact that a certain amount of suspicion was a healthy thing to have when dealing with courtiers, Fleury seems to have continually supported Belle-Isle once the decision to go to war had finally been made, regardless of his personal feelings about warfare. Taking into account that the sources are heavily biased and that Belle-Isle had simply become France's leading agent in (and expert on) the Empire, it is still quite surprising to see that Fleury and Belle-Isle seem to have become really close in the years following 1740. That being said, one must of course be aware that Fleury, after recovering from a long period of illness during 1738 and by now in his late eighties, was not as physically and mentally fit as he had once been. Therefore, from about 1739 onwards, he had no choice but to confide in others concerning matters of state, including foreign policy. This shows that the situation during the War of the Austrian Succession differed greatly from that of the War of the Polish Succession. At that

¹⁵⁶ Wilson, *French Foreign Policy*, 327.

¹⁵⁷ Letter from Belle-Isle to Amelot in: Sautai, *Préliminaires*, 560.

¹⁵⁸ *Mémoires duc de Luynes*, Vol. III, 435-436; note the way in which Luynes relates how pleased Belle-Isle was with the honors given to him by Frederick.

¹⁵⁹ For a full description of the visit of Belle-Isle to Versailles during July, see the Journal that Belle-Isle kept during this period in Sautai, *Préliminaires*, 605-609.

¹⁶⁰ Sautai, *Préliminaires*, 560-604.

time Fleury had been able to oust the increasingly popular Chauvelin. Now however, because of his advancing age, Fleury no longer was the powerhouse he had been in those days, and so was in need of confidants. Belle-Isle seems to have filled that position concerning France's interests in the Empire and its subsequent involvement in the War of the Austrian Succession. However, weak as he may have been, Fleury still remained in executive control and had to be kept informed of every decision that was made. By keeping Belle-Isle close, Fleury assured that he remained informed of ongoing events while at the same time it enabled him to keep a close eye on his confidante Belle-Isle.

On July 20th 1741, during his visit to Versailles, Belle-Isle managed to convince Fleury and the King, who by now began to feel the pressure and discontent coming from the court as a reaction to France's inactive approach to the events, that it was necessary to send a large body of troops to the Empire.¹⁶¹ It was also decided that Belle-Isle would be in command of the French forces that would join Charles Albert in Bavaria (which was called the Bavarian army). A second army, called the Meuse army, would be sent to the Rhine area and was to be led by Marshal Maillebois. Simultaneously with these two armies, an army would be sent to Italy to offer support to the efforts of France's Spanish allies there.¹⁶² This was a momentous decision with great consequences, as it meant that France had now become an active participant in the war.

Despite now being committed to a war, it took a long time to get the French soldiers in the field. There were a number of affairs that considerably, and perhaps decisively, slowed down the momentum of the French military effort. Prime amongst these were the negotiations at Frankfurt and the uncertainty of France in regard to its alliances.

Firstly, following the War of the Polish Succession, the long standing rivalry between France and England had made a turn for the worse. In 1739, England felt confident enough to enter into a war with Spain, known as the War of Jenkins' Ear, which was to last until 1748. When hostilities between England and Spain commenced, it was initially thought by both Spain and Britain that France would offer support to the Spanish, and indeed during 1739 and 1740 the cautious Fleury feared that France's participation in the war would become unavoidable.¹⁶³ During the 1730's Fleury had worked carefully to isolate England from mainland Europe without arousing international suspicion against France, but the outbreak of hostilities between Britain and Spain put a stop to these plans.¹⁶⁴ Had Frederick of Prussia not started the War of the Austrian Succession with his attack on Silesia, a war between England and France would have become almost inevitable. As it was, France now suddenly had to concentrate its efforts on a different front, thereby giving Britain more room to maneuver. At first Britain seemed to have been in favor of supporting the claims of Maria Theresa and her husband in the conflict over the Imperial crown. However, fearing for the safety of Hanover, which had long been coveted by Frederick of Prussia and which soon became threatened by the French army under the command of Marshal Maillebois, King George II and his advisor Harrington made a deal with France that would secure its safety. In exchange for the safety of Hanover Britain would abstain from voting in the imperial elections.¹⁶⁵ This decision was made without the consent of the Ministry and Parliament in London and caused a general outrage.

¹⁶¹ Sautai, *Préliminaires*, 439-440.

¹⁶² Butler, *Choiseul*, 314-317, *Mémoires de duc de Luynes*, Vol. III, 439-440.

¹⁶³ Browning, *War of the Austrian Succession*, 22-24.

¹⁶⁴ Wilson, *French Foreign Policy*, 322-326.

¹⁶⁵ Wilson, *French Foreign Policy*, 338-339.

Combined with other internal troubles that Britain was having at the time, this left England paralyzed and unlikely to act.¹⁶⁶

As mentioned before Frederick had attacked and taken Silesia, which had been weakly defended by the Austrians, during the months of December 1740 and January 1741. One of the reasons why the Austrian defenses were so weak in Silesia was because Vienna had for a long time concentrated its troops in Hungary and especially in its possessions in Italy, which as we have seen was coveted by many, including France and Spain. The long years of war with the Turks in the southeast and the War of the Polish Succession had brought irresolution and battle-fatigue to Austria.¹⁶⁷ Furthermore, it was impossible for Austria to improve the defenses of Silesia's largest city, Breslau, as it held the status of a free imperial city and as such had the right to garrison itself as it saw fit. Lastly, pro-Prussia protestant sentiments were strong in Silesia.¹⁶⁸ By the end of January most of Silesia was in the hands of Prussia. However, Frederick was looking for martial glory, not all-out warfare. Initially he tried to reconcile himself with Austria, stating that in exchange for Silesia he would defend all other Austrian territories. In the end, Maria-Theresa refused this proposition despite her weak position.¹⁶⁹ By rejecting the possibility of making an ally out of Prussia, Austria was making itself more and more vulnerable. Its two logical allies, Great Britain and Russia, were in no position to come to Austria's aid. As we have seen, Great Britain had its hands full dealing with its own problems, while Russia was still troubled by Sweden in the north and hard-pressed by the Turks in the south.

We know that France sought to take advantage of this situation and to deal a deathblow to its hereditary enemy.¹⁷⁰ The plan was to use one army in Bavaria, supported by the Saxons and Bavarians, while the other, which was stationed in the Rhine area, would join with the allied forces of the Elector Palatine and the Elector of Cologne to keep a check on Great-Britain/Hanover and its Dutch allies.¹⁷¹ During the months of April and May 1741 a deal was struck with Frederick of Prussia, who now claimed that when he had attacked Silesia, he had done so in the expectation that France would have offered him support.¹⁷² In concert with the attack on Austria from France and Bavaria, a combined Franco-Spanish effort would be made in Italy, thus creating a war on two fronts and forcing Austria to divide its attention.

As Austria's predicament became direr, Maria-Theresa tried to make Austria's desperate situation a little less desperate by trying to form new alliances. First she tried to get the Elector of Saxony on her side; an effort that initially seemed to succeed, but which proved unsuccessful in the end when Saxony joined the side of Bavaria and France. Austria also tried to remove France from the war by offering Luxembourg in exchange for France's withdrawal. However, France had by this time

¹⁶⁶ For a good rundown of Britain's politics and its difficult relationship with France during the first decades of the eighteenth century, see Claydon, T., *Europe and the making of England 1660-1760*, Cambridge-2004, 192-220.

¹⁶⁷ As we have already seen in the previous chapter, Austria was constantly besieged by the Turks in the south and harassed by Sweden in the north; Anderson, *War of the Austrian Succession*, 78-80; Butler, *Choiseul*, 226-229, 804-810.

¹⁶⁸ Anderson, *War of the Austrian Succession*, 68-69.

¹⁶⁹ Clark, *Iron Kingdom*, 193-194.

¹⁷⁰ An initially overly optimistic view about the outcome of the war is shown throughout the sources, and was supported by the warmongering courtiers at Versailles, though Fleury remained a bit more skeptical; Anderson, *War of the Austrian Succession*, 74-75; Wilson, *Foreign Policy during Fleury*, 54, 76 & 242.

¹⁷¹ Anderson, *War of the Austrian Succession*, 74.

¹⁷² Browning, *War of the Austrian Succession*, 57-59.

become too deeply invested in the outcome of the war to concede to this offer and Fleury declined, stating that the bond he had with his current allies was sacred.¹⁷³

Apart from the long negotiations, the complex position of Belle-Isle considerably marred the French war effort. For most of 1741, Belle-Isle was tasked with both leading the negotiations at Frankfurt and with commanding the French forces in Bavaria at the same time. In his position as lead negotiator at Frankfurt he did an admirable job and during September 1741 he managed to secure the votes of the Electors of Cologne, Treves and Mainz. Eventually he even managed to win over the Elector of Saxony.¹⁷⁴ With so many influential voters joining the cause of Charles-Albert, his election became practically inevitable. However, Belle-Isle could not be in two places at the same time, and the negotiations at Frankfurt remained both difficult and time-consuming, taking most of 1741 to round up. This prolonged preoccupation with the negotiations marred Belle-Isle's task as military commander. During the last months of 1741, with serious fighting taking place in Bohemia and Belle-Isle still caught up in the negotiations, the French armies clearly suffered from the lack of good leadership:

[..] et que dans celle de Bavière l'on désireroit beaucoup la présence de M. de Belle-Isle; elle est actuellement commandée par l'électeur et sous ses ordres de M. de Törring, celui qui étoit ici il y a deux an: on l'appelle le maréchal de Törring; il a été fait feld-maréchal à l'occasion de cette champagne.¹⁷⁵

Both Maillebois and Törring were capable commanders, but they lacked the skill, zeal and the inspiring presence of Belle-Isle.¹⁷⁶ In November Belle-Isle finally felt confident enough about the election of Charles-Albert to leave Frankfurt and to head to the French forces that were located in Bohemia near Prague.¹⁷⁷ However, he fell ill at Dresden and had to remain there for some time. Belle-Isle had suffered from a weakened health after he had received grievous wounds during the War of the Spanish Succession and he seems to have been struck by a hernia during his trip to Prague.¹⁷⁸ He missed out on the capture of Prague by the Franco-Saxon forces in late November and early December, which was successfully led by the Elector of Saxony, and had to be brought there in a sedan chair at the beginning of December. However, he fell ill again at Saint-Hubertsbourg near Prague and was again forced to stay there, prolonging his absence from the front even further.¹⁷⁹ The combination of the dragging negotiations at Frankfurt and Belle-Isle's ill-opportune and unfortunate illness meant that the French armies had to make do without their principle commander-in-chief. This caused delays and, perhaps more problematic, meant that the French armies were still lacking both Belle-Isle's political and military knowledge and skill. Not only did Belle-Isle's unforeseen absence have a detrimental effect on the military offensive, but it also ultimately led to the appointment of Marshal François-Marie de Broglie (1671-1745) as co-commander of the French

¹⁷³ Broglie, A., *Frédéric II et Marie Thérèse, 1740-1742*, Paris 1883, V. II, 74-79.

¹⁷⁴ Butler, *Choiseul*, 264-265.

¹⁷⁵ *Mémoires de duc de Luynes*, Vol. IV, 3.

¹⁷⁶ Boisilecomte, V. de, 'Le Maréchal de Belle-Isle Pendant la Guerre de La Succession d'Autriche d'après les Lettres Écrites au Comte de Labasèque, Ministre a la cour de Trèves (1741-1743)' in: *Revue de Questions Historiques*, Vol.22, No. 15, Paris 1899, 192; Letter from Chavigny to Chauvelin in Sautai, *Préliminaires*, 443.

¹⁷⁷ Butler, *Choiseul*, 295-296.

¹⁷⁸ Browning, *War of the Austrian Succession*, 73-79 & *Mémoires de duc de Luynes*, Vol. IV, 28, 57-58.

¹⁷⁹ *Mémoires de duc de Luynes*, Vol IV, 31, 35.

armies and as Belle-Isle's replacement in his absence. This decision, made by Fleury and his ministry during the time of Belle-Isle's illness, would eventually turn out to be a grave mistake that contributed greatly to the eventual outcome of the war, as will be discussed later on.

A further difficulty was the choice of Bavaria as the French base of operations in the Empire. From a political standpoint Bavaria was an obvious choice because its Elector, Charles-Albert, was enthralled and indebted to France. Furthermore, Charles-Albert was a member of the Wittelsbach family, a royal family that was not only held in high regard throughout the Empire, but whose members included the Elector Palatine and the Elector of Cologne. It was also a smart choice from a tactical standpoint, as Bavaria bordered on the hereditary lands of the Austrian Habsburgs.¹⁸⁰

However, Bavaria had relatively little income to spend on its armies. It had somewhat misused the French donations that it had been receiving since the secret arrangement between France and Bavaria of 1727. These donations were primarily meant to bolster, update and maintain Bavaria's army, but were apparently squandered on other things, leaving the army in a poor state in 1740/41. Bavaria, then, was not the most powerful Electorate from a military perspective.¹⁸¹ This meant that France would have to put in a major effort to increase Bavaria's military prowess besides focusing on its own armies. Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie called the reinforcements sent to Bavaria in 1742 useless and an 'absurd spectacle' meant to show off France's military might.¹⁸² However, showy as it may have been, the Bavarian military was in all probability in quite a bad state and in need of improvement, thus making the French soldiers that were sent there most welcome and much needed. All in all the state of the Bavarian military must have hampered the French preparations considerably.

Who did not hamper the French momentum as much as has often been claimed, was Fleury. As already mentioned, it has often been implied that Fleury remained hesitant towards warfare, which brought him into headlong collisions with Belle-Isle that this greatly influenced the speed with which France acted. It is my strong belief that this problem has been given too much emphasis. Before the war the two men undeniably had their disagreements as Fleury remained reluctant to go to war against Austria. This animosity most certainly must have slowed down the decision to join the war. However, when that decision had finally been made, Fleury seems to have given his full confidence to Belle-Isle despite his personal dislike of warfare. As already discussed the two seem to have become quite close despite their quarrels and Fleury does not seem to have interfered too much with Belle-Isle's strategy. Of course, one has to remember that this was only logical as the old Fleury was no longer in any position to lead such demanding military operations and as such was dependant of Belle-Isle's knowledge and ability. Though, as Wilson emphasizes, Belle-Isle on occasion indeed shows his frustration with Fleury, this was certainly not the case at all times and the two established a good working relationship.¹⁸³ Belle-Isle generally speaks fondly of him in the journal that he kept on his visit to Versailles during July 1741 and his advice was more often than not

¹⁸⁰ See map 2 on page 40.

¹⁸¹ For more on the power of Bavaria, see Sautai, *Préliminaires*, p. 430-437 for a rundown of the state of affairs in Bavaria around the ascension of Charles-Albert in 1726, p. 449-453 for Bavaria in 1733 and on page 574-575 for Bavaria in 1741.

¹⁸² Le Roy Ladurie, *The Ancien Régime*, 373.

¹⁸³ Wilson, *French Foreign Policy*, 332-340. Wilson puts a lot of emphasis on the stress in the relationship between Fleury and Belle-Isle, using fragments from the sources collected by Maurice Sautai in his work *Les Préliminaires de la Guerre de la Succession d'Autriche*. However, there is also more than enough material in that work and elsewhere to emphasize the strong bond between the two.

accepted by Fleury.¹⁸⁴ Before taking his leave of Versailles at the end of July, Belle-Isle visited the sickly Fleury at his apartment at Issy, and afterwards wrote in his journal:

Le 23, j'ai été dès le matin à Issy, où j'ai trouvé M. le Cardinal beaucoup mieux, n'ayant eu aucun ressentiment de fièvre. Je suis resté une heure et demie avec lui. J'en reçu des marques inexprimables d'amitié et de la plus grande confiance: il s'est attendri en me disant adieu, comme préjugant qu'il ne me verrait peut être plus, ce dont je serais fort fâché.¹⁸⁵

This is not the kind of expression that one would expect to find in the personal memoirs of one of two men who had constantly been crossing swords with each other, and who as a result had become hostile and estranged and had grown to dislike one another. I am therefore inclined to believe that even though Belle-Isle and Fleury indeed at times clashed with each other, their relation was not as bad as it is often depicted by historians. In his political testament, Belle-Isle does criticize Fleury's initial lack of support of his war plans after refusing to support Maria Theresa's claim to the Imperial title. He especially criticizes Fleury's unwillingness to give him the funding he needed to put his plans into action.¹⁸⁶ But despite this criticism, Belle-Isle immediately adds that such avarice is the sign of great men. In any event, it is once again important to remember that Belle-Isle wrote his political testament twenty years after the events described here and that they were written by him with the intention to pass on his knowledge to the next generation, not to discuss at great length his own sentiments about the different people he crossed paths with. However, it remains interesting that he continues to speak so mildly about Fleury twenty years after the event.

Regardless of their personal likes and dislikes, I do tend to agree with Wilson when he argues that in his heart Fleury remained opposed to the war.¹⁸⁷ In part this must have been caused by his doubts about the choice of Bavaria as the French base of operations. Fleury complained quite rightly that Bavaria was relatively poor and low in power and that Elector Charles-Albert was whimsical in his decision-making and not competent enough to carry out the important task he had been given.¹⁸⁸

Here, then, we have a paradox: on the one hand the sources clearly show that Fleury had given his full support to the war and Belle-Isle, while on the other he personally seems to have strongly resented warfare. Once Fleury had agreed on joining the war there was no way back for him. In his old age he no longer had the mental and physical power to conduct the war or to make a stand against Belle-Isle and the enormous support he had procured at court. Campbell states that after the capture of Prague in January 1742, the court generally believed that Belle-Isle would take over command of the government from Fleury after the end of the war and that they subsequently began to lose their interest in Fleury in favor of Belle-Isle.¹⁸⁹ I think that there is much truth to this, but that his emphasis on this point is too strong. The court had over time grown more and more unfavorable towards Fleury. His loss of power was not a sudden event, but something that had been gradually building up over time. The resentment towards Fleury's policy erupted following the initial success of Belle-Isle's plans during the first months of the war. The courtiers, who had been essentially bottled up for the greater part of twenty years, finally saw a way out of this constriction and most courtiers

¹⁸⁴ Journal kept by Belle-Isle during his visit to Versailles in July in Sautai, *Préliminaires*, 605-609.

¹⁸⁵ Sautai, *Préliminaires*, 608.

¹⁸⁶ Belle-Isle, *Testament Politique*, 113-115.

¹⁸⁷ Wilson, *French Foreign Policy*, 334-336.

¹⁸⁸ Sautai, *Préliminaires*, 271.

¹⁸⁹ Campbell, *Power and Politics*, 171.

must have been more than happy to join Belle-Isle when the opportunity presented itself. As we have seen, the cultural changes in France made it a necessity to show of talent and to get noticed by influential individuals if one sought career opportunities or social advancement. In his political testament Belle-Isle comments that one aspect of a good general is that he should seek out exceptional talent within his staff of general officers or subordinates and reveal such talent to the court in Paris, as according to him “[...](*la plupart des Princes ont le Coeur bon, ils ne demandent que d’être instruits pour recompense*) [...]”.¹⁹⁰ Thus Belle-Isle, on his part, seems to have been more than willing to oblige the courtiers in their needs.

2.2: The War Years 1740-1743

Fighting the War

Though some acts of war have, by necessity, already been spoken of in the section above on the preliminaries of the war, it is now time to look at the warfare that took place in the Empire between 1740 and 1743 in more detail.

The warfare in the Empire between 1740 and 1743, the part of the War of the Austrian Succession that has become known as the first Silesian War, can broadly be split in two phases. The first phase, from the summer of 1741 to the spring of 1742, saw the advance of the Franco-Bavarian armies and its Saxon and Prussian allies into Bohemia, with the ill-prepared Austrian army receiving some crushing defeats and being fought to a standstill. The second phase, from the summer of 1742 onwards, was the Austrian retaliation that saw Austria gaining control of the situation and taking the initiative away from France and its allies, eventually forcing them to fall back. These two phases will be discussed here. However, as the focus of this paper is more on the political developments than the military ones, it will only cover the broad outlines. A more in-depth discussion of the War of the Austrian Succession can be found elsewhere.¹⁹¹

From the start of the war the Austrians were in a bad position, with a lack of allies, an ill-prepared defense and a weak position at the Electoral diet at Frankfurt. The Austrian candidate for the imperial crown, Maria Theresa’s husband Francis-Stephen, duke of Tuscany and former duke of Lorraine, gradually lost his chance of becoming Emperor as time went by. Austria’s enemies, including France, took notice of Austria’s weak position and duly tried to profit from it. After the war plans had been approved by the King and Fleury and all the preparations had been made, battle finally commenced in earnest in August 1741. The army that was heading for Bavaria marched in four columns and passed the Rhine between the 15th and 21st, with one being led by Augustus III of Saxony, which was to give support to France’s beleaguered Prussian allies.¹⁹² In the months that followed some battles were fought in Bohemia, which were lost by the Austrians, sending them into a retreat. Meanwhile the army of Marshal Maillebois, stationed near the-

¹⁹⁰ Belle-Isle, *Testament Politique*, 96.

¹⁹¹ Most notably in *The War of the Austrian Succession* by Matthew Anderson and *The War of the Austrian Succession* by Reed Browning.

¹⁹² *Mémoires de duc de Luynes*, Vol. III, 444-445.

Hanoverian border to keep the Anglo-Hanoverian troops and their Dutch allies in check in case they were planning to intervene in the conflict, was doing its job well, but was apparently weakened by supply problems.¹⁹³

The triumphant army that marched into Bohemia from Bavaria was commanded by Elector Charles-Albert and count Törring, who was made Field Marshal for the occasion while Belle-Isle remained detained at Frankfurt. Though the talent, knowledge and overall commanding presence of Belle-Isle were sorely missed during this time, as discussed above, the Austrians had thus far proven easy to defeat and by November 1741 an army composed of French, Bavarian, Prussian and Saxon troops was preparing to lay siege to Bohemia's capital city Prague.¹⁹⁴ During the month of November some skirmishes broke out among the villages that surrounded Prague, which were easily won by the Franco-Bavarian forces. At this time Prague's defenses were tried and tested and during the first days of December the walls of Prague were secretly scaled by French dragoons. In coordination with this action, a diversionary assault was carried out at the other side of the city, which drew the defenders away from their positions. This meant that the scaling party had an easy time climbing over the walls and opening the gates, thereby giving entrance to the attacking army and ending the siege.¹⁹⁵ It was a great success for the allied forces. Not only was Prague taken in a minimal amount of time, but within the city they found a large storage of munitions that could be put to good use in the fighting to come.¹⁹⁶

Up to now the war had been going well for France and its allies. The victory at Prague had been a great triumph, but the victory did not belong to the unfortunate Belle-Isle. As he still remained unable to join the army due to his infirmity, the old Marshal Broglie, who was stationed at Strasbourg at the time, was sent by Fleury and his ministry to command the forces in Bavaria in Belle-Isle's absence. This appointment proved to be problematic even before Broglie arrived in Bohemia, as the duke de Luynes wrote:

M. le maréchal de Broglie doit être présentement à Prague. Le public a été un peu surpris ici d'apprendre cette nouvelle. M. de Broglie est l'ancien de M. de Belle-Isle, et d'ailleurs il a paru dans les discours qu'il a tenus à Strasbourg qu'il désapprouvait hautement presque tous les projets de cette guerre; cependant il paroît que le ministère croit que MM. de Broglie et de Belle-Isle sont fort bien ensemble [...]¹⁹⁷

Even though it was written by Belle-Isle-apologist Luynes, who must surely have overemphasized the problem, it does show that when the initial decision was made to send Broglie to Bohemia, it was done so with the conviction that Belle-Isle and Broglie would work well together. It could be assumed that this would imply that the Electors of Saxony and Prussia, who had personally made their arrangements with Belle-Isle, would be just as willing to work with Broglie. This however turned out not to be the case, as Augustus III stressed that he put his troops under the personal command of Belle-Isle and Frederick sent a regiment to the front that was to be commanded by Belle-Isle alone.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹³ *Mémoires de duc de Luynes*, Vol. IV, 3.

¹⁹⁴ Boislecote, 'Le Maréchal de Belle-Isle Pendant la Guerre de La Succession d'Autriche', 199-200; *Mémoires de duc de Luynes*, V. IV, 57-58.

¹⁹⁵ Browning, *War of the Austrian Succession*, 75-79.

¹⁹⁶ Butler, *Choiseul*, 299-302; *Mémoires de duc de Luynes*, Vol. IV, 31.

¹⁹⁷ *Mémoires de duc de Luynes*, Vol. IV, 34.

¹⁹⁸ Browning, *War of the Austrian Succession*, 120-123; Anderson, *War of the Austrian Succession*, 101, 112.

The Electors do not seem to have put too much faith in the old Broglie's abilities, nor in those of most other French officers. As Frederick wrote in his memoirs:

La longue paix dont la France avait joui, avait interrompu dans son militaire la succession des grands généraux. M. de Villars, qui avait commandé la première campagne en Italie, était mort. MM. de Broglie, de Noailles, de Coigny étaient des homes médiocres; Maillebois ne les surpassait pas.¹⁹⁹

Broglie's appointment was a grave mistake because it undermined Belle-Isle's authority and plans. It must also have been seen as a vote of no confidence in his abilities. Furthermore the assessment that the two would work well together would, as we will see later on, be proven wrong.

After taking Prague the allied army went into quarters for winter, with only a few small towns like Budweiss and Tabor being captured to establish better communications. All seemed to go well for the allied forces at the start of 1742: they had taken Prague and Charles-Albert had been crowned King of Bohemia on December 9th 1741. Little could the French and their allies have known that their luck was about to run out. One could argue that there were three important reasons for the monumental change of initiative during 1742. Prime amongst them was the difficult relation between Marshals Belle-Isle and Broglie, which would have both short term and long term effects.

In the short run Broglie, as he was strongly opposed to many arrangements and plans of Belle-Isle, seems to have immediately started to press through changes upon his arrival at Prague: *"Dès son arrive, le maréchal de Broglie se brouilla avec M. de Belle-Isle. Broglie changea toutes les dispositions de son prédécesseur [...]"*.²⁰⁰ From the moment that Prague had been taken the allied forces became increasingly hard pressed. As a reaction Broglie wanted to retract the front closer to Bavaria and resume the offense once a good strategy had been developed and the time was right. During the spring of 1742, when Bavaria itself came under attack by the Austrians, he even suggested to completely withdraw to Bavaria without consulting France's allies first. Belle-Isle, however, still wanted to push on and wished to do everything in accordance with the allies.²⁰¹ This difference of opinion meant that the two Marshals quickly developed an antagonistic relationship. From the moment that Belle-Isle finally arrived at the front the two men were constantly caught up in heated discussions and debates about the course of action. When Belle-Isle wrote his political testament in 1761, nearly twenty years after the events of the First Silesian War, the fights with Broglie were still fresh on his mind: *"[...] on me permettra de ne point parler ici de M. le Maréchal de Broglie, mon collègue et mon ancien, j'ai respecté ses talents, combattu ses plans, parce que M. de Broglie....mais j'ai promis de n'en dire mot, je tiens parole"*.²⁰²

Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, in the long run their antagonism would split the French court, which up to now had been united under their lust for war and glory, in two. At the front, according to Luynes, the soldiers generally seem to have favored Belle-Isle over Broglie: *"M. le maréchal de Broglie, quoique fort estimé, n'a pas été reçu avec plaisir de la plupart de l'armée, qui regrette infiniment M. de Belle-Isle."*²⁰³

¹⁹⁹ *Werke Friedrichs des Großen*, band 2, 10.

²⁰⁰ *Werke Friedrichs des Großen*, band 2, 108-109.

²⁰¹ Boislecote, 'Le Maréchal de Belle-Isle Pendant la Guerre de La Succession d'Autriche', 200-210.

²⁰² Belle-Isle, *Testament Politique*, 112.

²⁰³ *Mémoires de duc de Luynes*, Vol. IV, 67.

Though Luynes will have blown this fact out of proportions, it is at least plausible to believe that most of the soldiers preferred Belle-Isle. Not only had officially he been their commander since the beginning of the campaign, but in the past he had shown himself to be a great strategist and a courageous leader who was naturally disposed to lead from the front. Broglie by comparison was in his seventies, had suffered two strokes and could hardly be expected to lead the battle from the front. For the officer-nobility, who had ties with the French court, matters were different. As we will see later on they were divided between the two Marshals in accordance with their bonds with courtiers in France. The initial effects of this prolonged antagonism were profound. As an unforgiving Frederick comments: *“Ainsi l’inactivité des généraux français donna aux Autrichiens le temps de respire, et de se fortifier dans leurs quartiers.”*²⁰⁴ The continued delays, discussions and disagreements were giving the Austrians not only the time to rally and regroup but also to plan a new strategy, which leads us to the second development that changed the fortunes of war.

During the last months of 1741 Austria had been gathering a large relief force at Vienna under Marshal Ludwig Andreas von Khevenhüller (1683-1744) to aid the beleaguered forces at the front in Bohemia which were led by Maria-Theresa’s husband Francis Stephen and his brother Charles de Lorraine (1712-1780). The plan was to start an unexpected winter campaign, simultaneously attacking the Franco-Bavarian troops in Bohemia and the Electorate of Bavaria.²⁰⁵ It is here the allied aggressors made a fatal misjudgment. Because of their total confidence in the fact that the Austrians could be swiftly defeated, they never made an effort to increase Bavaria’s defenses and left only a small force of defenders behind. As a result, the Austrian troops sent to Bavaria had an easy time taking out the Electorate’s weak defenses in only a few small scale battles. In a cruel twist of fate, Bavaria’s capital city Munich surrendered on January 24th 1742: the same day that the coronation of Charles-Albert as Emperor Charles VII took place.²⁰⁶ Meanwhile the allied armies along the Bohemian frontline were having a hard time fighting the refreshed and bolstered Austrian forces of prince Charles de Lorraine and only managed to retain a precarious foothold. By leaving Bavaria relatively defenseless, the allied forces had gambled and lost: they were now fighting a newly reinvigorated Austrian foe in Bohemia without the support and refuge of their base of operations in Bavaria. The fall of Bavaria was an important turning point in the war that could have been easily prevented. It was to the allies’ great shame that from the spring of 1742 they found themselves bottled up, fighting a two front war. This development had been a serious strategic error. But who was to blame? I believe that most of the blame should be put on the rash Elector of Bavaria and his field Marshal, who were in command while Belle-Isle was engaged elsewhere and who should have made a greater effort in protecting Bavaria from the outset. That said, it was Belle-Isle who was the overall commanding officer of the French armies in the Empire and as such he was the one who ultimately held executive responsibility. Had he not been forced to put most of his time and effort in the Electoral diet, things may have turned out differently. As it was, Belle-Isle ultimately was the one to blame for this unfortunate turn of events. As his rival Broglie had long advocated a partial withdrawal to Bavaria, the loss of Bavaria greatly damaged Belle-Isle’s image and position.

The difficult situation that the allied forces now found themselves in led to the decision of the new Emperor Charles VII, whose own Electorate Bavaria had now been overrun by the Austrians,

²⁰⁴ *Werke Friedrichs des Großen*, Band 2, 108.

²⁰⁵ Butler, *Choiseul*, 308-317.

²⁰⁶ Boisilecomte, ‘Le Maréchal de Belle-Isle Pendant la Guerre de La Succession d’Autriche’, 197-198.

to ask Saxony and Prussia to create a diversionary attack on Moravia.²⁰⁷ This would give the allied forces in Bohemia the brief respite they needed to pull back and retake Bavaria. This brings us to the third factor that turned the fortunes of war around.

The last important factors of change during 1742 were the actions of Frederick of Prussia and, to a lesser extent, those of Augustus III of Saxony. After entering an alliance with France that for the time being secured his hold over Silesia, Frederick was mostly content to wait. Reading his correspondence with France during this time shows this very clearly. Though he was careful enough to shower his addressees in praises and words of friendship, he remained unwilling to act while at the same time he constantly urged his French and Bavarian allies to take action. He even went so far as to threaten to deny them his Electoral vote if no actions were taken, as he wrote in July 1741 to Fleury:

Monsieur mon Cousin. J'ai vu par une longue lettre du maréchal de Belle-Isle qu'il me presse beaucoup accélérer l'élection impériale, et qui le traîne en longueur les opérations de la guerre. Vous devez savoir, Monsieur, que ce n'est pas ainsi que je l'attends, et que je ne prétends donner ma voix à l'électeur de Bavière que du moment où il agira et que vos troupes entreront en Allemagne.²⁰⁸

Frederick's seeming indifference and reluctance to aid his allies might seem odd at first glance, but one has to remember that he was primarily interested in securing Silesia. Though the alliance he made with France, Bavaria and Saxony served this purpose well, he was unwilling to take risks. Nonetheless Frederick obliged to Charles VII's plea to invade Moravia alongside the Saxons. The Austrians under Charles de Lorraine had not suspected this turn of events but, despite the fact that they were soundly beaten by Frederick's Prussian forces at the Battle of Chotusitz on May 17th, they eventually managed to fight the Saxons and Prussians to a standstill.²⁰⁹ Now was the opportune time for Frederick to reopen negotiations with Maria Theresa, as both his own victory at Chotusitz and that of the French forces under Broglie and Belle-Isle at Sahay on May 24th forced Maria-Theresa to act. A truce was reached on June 11th and a formal, albeit secret, peace treaty was signed in Berlin on July 28th. This truce stated that Maria Theresa, who was still in desperate need for allies, would officially hand over Silesia to Frederick in return for the withdrawal of his forces.²¹⁰ From this point on Frederick left the front and returned to Berlin, content to wait out the events that unfolded over the following months, leaving his former allies unaware of the agreement of peace with Austria and his betrayal.

By contrast, Saxony remained nominally allied to France and Bavaria for almost a year after the failed conquest of Moravia and the subsequent failure to recover Bavaria. However, after the disappointment in Moravia Elector Augustus III chose to retire from the war much like Frederick of Prussia had done.²¹¹ Frederick's initial lack of support and subsequent treachery was a great blow to

²⁰⁷ Antoine, *Louis XV*, 356-360.

²⁰⁸ Letter from Frederick the Great to cardinal Feury, *Werke Friedrichs des Großen*, band 1, 276-277.

²⁰⁹ Anderson, *War of the Austrian Succession*, 101-104; the Prussian forces were renowned for the discipline and professionalism of their infantry.

²¹⁰ Browning, *War of the Austrian Succession*, 106-108.

²¹¹ Butler, *Choiseul*, 321, 355, 484.

the Franco-Bavarian alliance, and the retirement of Prussia and Saxony from the war left it bereft of two powerful allies at the time when they were most sorely needed.

As shown, the three important developments that led to a change in initiative during the war were closely connected to one another. Combined they would prove catastrophic for France and Bavaria. From the spring of 1742 onwards the situation rapidly turned desperate for the allies. The combined effort of the French, Bavarians, Prussians and Saxons had proven to be unsuccessful in bringing Austria to its knees. After the failed attempt of Prussia and Saxony to invade Moravia, which was supposed to give the Franco-Bavarian forces the time to recover Bavaria, the allies became disillusioned and battle-weary. Even though, as already mentioned, Broglie and Belle-Isle managed to secure a victory near Sahay on May 24th 1742 while profiting from the Moravian invasion by Saxony and Prussia, the tables had turned and the Franco-Bavarian forces were now on the defense. The loss of the military support from Saxony and Prussia after the failed Moravian invasion was a great blow to the alliance. After the victory at Sahay, the different visions and miscommunication between Belle-Isle and Broglie once again became apparent. When Belle-Isle went to negotiate with the Saxon and Prussian allies during the month of June 1742, Marshal Broglie ordered and conducted a number of skirmishes that was destined to end in disaster.²¹² The Austrian forces in Bohemia had all banded together under Charles de Lorraine and the Franco-Bavarian skirmishing forces were quickly routed. Worse still, the Franco-Bavarian forces were pushed back to Prague and the strategically important town of Pisek was lost to the Austrians: Broglie himself had escaped Pisek only just in time, but a large cargo- and munitions train was lost. This humiliating defeat caused an outrage at the French court, which fuelled a turbulent argument.²¹³

From June 1742 Prague itself came under siege from the Austrians, only six months after it had been taken from them. The large army that besieged it was led by Charles de Lorraine and Marshal Georg Christian von Lobkowitz (1686-1755).²¹⁴ The siege lasted all through the summer of 1742 with little signs of a breakthrough, and during this time the decision was made in France that Marshal Maillebois would be sent to Prague with a relieve force.²¹⁵ Though it took a long time before Maillebois was able to reach the city, Prague seems to have been well stocked and well-defended, as Luynes writes on September 14th: *“Effectivement, le courier m’a dit que le vin n’étoit pas cher dans Prague, que la viande n’y valoit qu’environ 8 sols et le pain 4 sols, que les troupes y paroisoient sans inquietude et en très-bon état, et la ville très-bien fortifiée.”*²¹⁶

Maillebois eventually reached Prague during the second half of September, but wasn't able to fully lift the siege. His efforts did give some of the defenders the chance to escape the city, Marshal Broglie being one of them.²¹⁷ This left Belle-Isle as sole commander of Prague. Before long the Austrians had fought off Maillebois' relief force and once again turned their full attention to besieging Prague. For three more months the defenders held out. On December 16th, Belle-Isle made a move that was to become perhaps his most renowned feat. Though conditions in Prague had worsened and many defenders were sick or injured, Belle-Isle miraculously managed to escape the city with 14.000 men. Struggling through the bitter cold and defeating Austrian scout parties as they went, Belle-Isle's men managed to hide their escape from the Austrian attackers for two days. The

²¹² *Mémoires de duc de Luynes*, Vol. IV, 175-185.

²¹³ For more on this argument, see page 60 and following.

²¹⁴ Wilson, *French Foreign Policy*, 434.

²¹⁵ Anderson, *War of the Austrian Succession*, 112-113.

²¹⁶ *Mémoires de duc de Luynes*, Vol. IV, 225.

²¹⁷ Browning, *War of the Austrian Succession*, 120-122.

Austrians on their part were confident that they had cut off all access to roads and rivers, but Belle-Isle led his men through the mountains. They struggled for days through the harsh winter landscape until they finally reached the safety of the town of Cheb on December 26.²¹⁸ From the 14,000 that had left Prague some 12,500 made it to safety. The escape had been a success. As Belle-Isle himself once wrote: “*Dans la guerre, c'est précisément les choses qui sont pensé impossibles pensé que réussissiez le plus souvent quand elles sont conduites bien.*”²¹⁹

Successful as Belle-Isle's daring escape may have been, the subsequent surrender of Prague was a great humiliation for France, as the losses during 1742 had greatly damaged its image as the premier European powerhouse. Though the War of the Austrian Succession would continue until 1748, France's military intervention in the Empire was all but over, as was Belle-Isle's current assignment in the war: he was called back to Paris in disgrace. Why it was that he was called back in disgrace in spite of his initial success in the war and the daring escape from Prague is the question that now deserves our attention. To answer it, we must look at the developments at court at Versailles between 1741 and 1743.

The French court during the War

When we last left the court around 1740/41, Belle-Isle had the firm support of most courtiers as well as that of Fleury and the King. Fortunes continued to increase for the Belle-Isle family during 1741 and early 1742, with the chevalier de Belle-Isle, the Marshal's brother, being made lieutenant-general of the King's army in January 1742.²²⁰ Belle-Isle and his brother seemed to have been quite close, and Saint-Simon comments on their close bond:

Jamais le concours ensemble de tant d'ambition, d'esprit, d'art, de souplesse, de moyens de s'instruire, d'application de travail, d'industrie, d'expédients, d'insinuation, de suite, de projets, d'indomptable courage d'esprit et de cœur, ne s'est si complètement rencontré que dans ces deux frères, avec une union de sentiments et de volontés, c'est trop peu dire, une identité entre eux inébranlable: voilà ce qu'ils eurent de commun.²²¹

Furthermore, on a visit to Paris in the spring of 1742 Belle-Isle was made a duke for his services to the Crown.²²² Yet despite these fortuitous events, by this time a development had already been set in motion that would have a tremendous impact on both the French court and the eventual outcome of the war, one that perfectly illustrates the close connection between foreign policy and court politics.

As we have seen, the absence of Belle-Isle on the battlefield led Fleury and his ministry to make the decision to send the aged Marshal de Broglie to lead the army in Belle-Isle's absence in early 1742.²²³ This was the greatest mistake Fleury had made since the beginning of the war, and probably one of the greatest mistakes in his career as first minister. It would eventually lead to a head-on collision between Belle-Isle and Broglie, both literally at the front and figuratively at court.

²¹⁸ For a detailed description of the escape from Prague, see Browning, *War of the Austrian Succession*, 123-128.

²¹⁹ Letter from Belle-Isle to Breteuil, Prague, July 26, 1742, Du Moulin, P.F. (ed.), *Campagne de Marécheaux de Broglie et de Belle-Isle en Bohême et en Bavière*, Amsterdam 1772/3, 296.

²²⁰ *Mémoires de duc de Luynes*, Vol. IV, 83-84.

²²¹ *Mémoires de duc de Saint-Simon*, Vol. V, 84-86.

²²² *Mémoires de duc de Luynes*, Vol. IV, 109-111.

²²³ The choice to send in Broglie has already been discussed on pages 55-56.

At first the appointment of Broglie must have seemed a good idea: the forces in Bohemia were in need of an experienced general and at that Broglie was stationed at Strasbourg, which was relatively close by.²²⁴ However, problems already began to occur during the first weeks after his arrival. Though most of these problems have already been broadly discussed above, it is nonetheless important to recapitulate some of them, as they are relevant to the developments that occur simultaneously at the court in Paris. Firstly, the old Marshal did not relish his new appointment and his lack of enthusiasm was apparent to all. He also seems to have been generally liked less by the troops than the charismatic and energetic Belle-Isle.²²⁵ Secondly, it was Belle-Isle who had personally made arrangements with both Saxony and Prussia, and both of these Electors (especially Frederick) did not take a liking to Broglie.²²⁶ Frederick even comments in his memoirs: *'On fit encore quelques tentatives pour inspirer de l'activité au maréchal de Broglie, mais inutilement.'*²²⁷ Broglie also started having troubles with Jean-François Gabriel de Polastron (1716-1794), one of the commanding officers of the French army in Bohemia and a good friend of Belle-Isle.²²⁸ Lastly and perhaps most importantly, Broglie was of the opinion that the army in Bohemia should fall back to Bavaria, which had been overrun by the Austrians between February and May 1742, while Belle-Isle remained eager to push on to Vienna. All these problems led to an intense rivalry between Broglie and Belle-Isle that not only affected the armies in the empire, but also had a detrimental effect on the court of Versailles.

Before going into further details, it is important to note that in this section I will make more explicit use of the memoirs of the duke de Luynes, for a number of reasons. The duke de Luynes was a nobleman of fairly high standing at court and as such was well informed about the different developments there, which he subsequently wrote about in great detail in his memoirs. Though he is quite prejudiced towards Belle-Isle, he does give us a good insight into the growing dislike towards Belle-Isle at court. He shows his outrage about this by commenting on the standpoints of the opposition, thereby giving us a glimpse of the debate held at court during this time. He also gives a good summary of the ideas and beliefs of both the Broglie and Belle-Isle parties.

Up to January 1742, Belle-Isle had been the principle mover at court, directly influencing policy with the support and approval of most of the court. This situation changed with the appointment of Broglie. Now the court, which had become united under Belle-Isle in their thirst for glory, had to choose between him and Broglie. As a result the court became split in two: some chose to remain loyal to the plans of Belle-Isle, whilst others saw more wisdom in the ideas of Broglie. Though Broglie, being over 70 years old at the time, could not have been seen as a viable successor for Fleury, he still presented a focus point for the growing anti-war sentiments at court as the fortunes of war began to change during 1742.

²²⁴ *Werke Friedrichs des Großen*, band 2, 108-109.

²²⁵ *Mémoires de duc de Luynes*, Vol. IV, 67-68, 183; Luynes, as is often the case, exaggerates on this point, but Broglie seems to have been mostly disliked by the troops, who were generally in favor of Belle-Isle. See also Boislecote, 'Le Maréchal de Belle-Isle Pendant la Guerre de La Succession d'Autriche', 199-200.

²²⁶ Frederick is especially clear about his personal dislike of Broglie; see *Werke Friedrichs des Großen*, band 2, 109 and 122 and he also comments on the count of Saxony's lack of trust in Broglie; see *Werke Friedrichs des Großen*, band 2, 121.

²²⁷ *Werke Friedrichs des Großen*, band 2, 122.

²²⁸ Butler, *Choiseul*, 306-309.

In this rivalry we see a perfect example of the cultural developments discussed in the first chapter. The war in the Empire finally presented opportunities to the French nobility to get themselves noticed after being bottled up by Fleury. At first Belle-Isle alone had been the main object of the court's attention. His considerable influence over foreign policy and pro-war sentiments made it altogether likely that he would start a war, which, together with his high position, made him the ideal patron for the courtiers. War meant new opportunities to show one's worth, and Belle-Isle's power, influence and position as Marshal made him the most likely person to award those with whom he was impressed. With the coming of Broglie, however, there suddenly became a choice of patrons to follow. The different nobles now had to decide for themselves with whom they saw their interests served best, because by supporting the losing side they could possibly commit career suicide. The following descriptions of the two factions, broadly following those written down by the duke de Luynes just after the fall of Pisek in June 1742, perfectly illustrate the sharp lines that were drawn between the two factions.

The Broglie-faction was of the opinion that the French war effort should have been handled better from the beginning. It was believed that the realization that the Austrians under Prince Charles had held a very weak position in Bohemia for most of 1741 had come too late. Broglie and his followers tried to put the blame for this on associates of Belle-Isle such as Polastron and d'Aubigné. They also emphasized the weak performance of Frederick of Prussia and his unwillingness to fully commit himself to the cause. France should have done more by itself without relying as much on its allies as it did. They found prove that the affairs could have been handled better in the form of Broglie himself, who had been able to hold his position at the city of Pisek against the Austrian army under general Lobkowitz for some time, and even managed to strengthen its defenses. Eventually Broglie had to retreat as the strength of the attackers grew, but according to the Broglie-faction the loss of Pisek was not his fault: he had done all he could. A lot of emphasis was put on how glorious and heroic the retreat from Pisek had been. According to the Broglie-faction, the best course of action would be to pull back and relieve beleaguered Bavaria.²²⁹

The Belle-Isle-faction on the other hand stressed that it was important for France to do everything in accordance with its allies; it was for this reason that Belle-Isle had ordered Broglie to wait until he had had the chance to convene with France's two great allies Saxony and Prussia. They emphasized that Broglie's outpost at Pisek had been too far removed from the friendly lines to be held for long and that he stubbornly and deliberately chose not to be informed properly of his situation even though he had ample opportunity to do so. The retreat had been unfortunate but inevitable and was badly executed. However, the Belle-Isle party was of the opinion that after France and its allies would have sorted out their differences and had come up with a satisfactory plan to take on the large Austrian army, they could still press on to Vienna.²³⁰

There is something to say for both standpoints. The Broglie faction was right in their assumption that France's allies had been the cause of many problems, especially the untrustworthy Frederick. In all probability, France would have been better off if it had relied more on its own strengths from the beginning instead of putting so much trust in its allies. Furthermore, at the time when these descriptions were written, with the Austrians on the attack in both Bohemia and Bavaria, it would have been wise to fall back and try to recover Bavaria. However, the problem with this point of the

²²⁹ *Mémoires de duc de Luynes*, Vol. IV, 182-183.

²³⁰ *Mémoires de duc de Luynes*, Vol. IV, 183-184.

Broglie party's argumentation was that Broglie had already wanted to fall back to Bavaria when Prague was only just taken by the allied forces. At that moment a combined effort of Franco-Bavarian, Prussian and Saxon troops was on the winning side and might even have had the ability to take Vienna by storm. Broglie's hesitance paired with his unfavorable position with France's allies prevented such an attack from ever taking place before Austria got the time it needed to regain its strength and retaliate.

The Belle-Isle faction was right in its assumption that it would have been smart to coordinate with France's allies and draw up a joined battle plan before going on the offense, as by now so much time and effort had already been put into France's alliances. However, their strong believe that they could still easily press on to Vienna with a combination of brute force and the right battle strategy, at the time when these descriptions of the two parties were written by Luynes, was completely unrealistic and unachievable. Not only was Bavaria by now overrun with Austrian troops, but they would also never have been able to push on to Vienna, as Saxony and Prussia had by this time already virtually retired from the fighting and fresh Austrian troops were pushing the allied forced back. If their plan had been properly executed months earlier it might have worked. As it was, Belle-Isle's unfortunate inability to reach the front during 1741 and the constant bickering between the two marshals and their followers only gave the Austrians time to recuperate and work out a new battle strategy.

The political rift that began to appear amongst the nobility of France did not confine itself to Versailles, but also began to influence the French officer-nobility at the front, as they were part of the court nobility as well.²³¹ Needless to say, this situation was very harmful to the French war effort. With Fleury both physically and mentally incapable of sorting out the situation and Belle-Isle no longer in the sole position to benefit from Fleury's loss of power, the sense of unity at court that had crystalized behind the ascendant Belle-Isle during the years 1738-1740 suddenly disappeared as fast as it had come. During his visit to Paris in March 1742, he was already received coldly by his enemies at court: "*M. le maréchal de Belle-Isle arriva hier au soir; il a été parfaitement bien reçu par le Roi et par M. le Cardinal; ce n'est pas que les ennemis qu'il a ici en grand nombre n'aient fait courir le bruit qu'il a été reçu fort froidement.*"²³²

During the spring and early summer the situation had become even direr and the lines between the two factions had been sharply drawn:

Cette retraite de M. le maréchal de Broglie a donné occasion ici à différent raisonnements; à Paris et à la Cour, les esprits sont partagés en deux partis, les uns pour M de Broglie, les autres pour M. de Belle-Isle. La Reine, M. de Nangis, Mme de Mazarin, encore plus M. de Châtillon, Presque tous les ministres, surtout M. Orry et M. de Maurepas, soutiennent vivement M. de Broglie. Le Roi paroît aimer M. de Belle-Isle; Mme de Mailly soutient fortement; beaucoup de gens qui entourent le Roi sont aussi dans ses intérêts; presque toute l'armée de Bohême et une partie de celle de Bavière fort attachées à M. de Belle-Isle. Tous les Noailles, hors Mme la comtesse de Toulouse, n'aiment pas M. de Belle-Isle.²³³

²³¹ Boislecote, 'Le Maréchal de Belle-Isle Pendant la Guerre de La Succession d'Autriche', 199-212.

²³² *Mémoires de duc de Luynes*, Vol. IV, 104-105.

²³³ *Mémoires de duc de Luynes*, Vol. IV, 182-183.

Some powerful opponents had found the perfect opportunity to weaken Belle-Isle's position in the twist between him and Broglie and were using this to their advantage. At court some of his most powerful and ambitious rivals chose to support Marshal Broglie, including the Noailles family and the countess de Toulouse. The queen, who had always disliked Belle-Isle, also chose to favor the side of Broglie, and she was supported in this by most of the ministry, most strongly by Orry and Maurepas.²³⁴ However, Belle-Isle could still count on the support of the King, who would personally continue to like Belle-Isle even after his fall and disgrace in 1743, and on the support of the King's mistress, Mme de Mailly. Also, the greater part of the soldiers in the French armies in Bohemia continued to favor Belle-Isle.²³⁵ Thus the French court, which had initially become united under Belle-Isle in the prospect of the first chance at glory and swift social advancement in nearly twenty years, was now once again divided to the bone.

During the following months the situation worsened for Belle-Isle, with his enemies gathering as much incriminating evidence against him as they could so that they would have enough proof to begin criticizing him and his plans openly:

Le cabale contre M. de Belle-Isle est plus forte que jamais; elle va jusqu'à dire que l'on acquier tous les jours des preuves par écrit contre lui. Mme de Mailly, qui a entendu ces propos, y a répondu que l'on ne trouverait jamais d'autres preuves que celles du zèle et de l'attachement de M. de Belle-Isle pour les intérêts du Roi. M. le Cardinal paraît accablé de travail et de fatigue.²³⁶ and: "Les partisans de M. de Broglie vont jusqu'à blâmer presque ouvertement le projet de faire tomber l'empire à l'électeur de Bavière, et voudraient faire retomber sur M. de Belle-Isle toutes les fautes qui ont été faites dans l'exécution dudit projet."²³⁷

We have already seen the series of unfortunate events that would unfold during 1742, which would cast a shadow over the French war effort and put the French army at Prague in danger as it came under siege in the winter of 1742. During these disastrous times Belle-Isle's aggressive plans and ideas became less and less popular as battle-fatigue set in amongst the nobility of France. His position at court was now in serious jeopardy. Ironically, the majority of the French courtiers, who before had been so eager to join Belle-Isle in war, had become tired of that same war and would become even more so after the humiliating, albeit valorous, retreat of the French from Prague between December 1742 and January 1743. By then most of the courtiers, opportunistic as ever, claimed that Broglie's ideas had been correct all along and that Belle-Isle was to blame for France's humiliating defeat at the hands of Austria. Belle-Isle's support and standing at court began to crumble and his carefully built reputation vanished: in the end it was not only France that had been humiliated by this war, but Belle-Isle as well. The duke de Luynes tells us in February 1743 that Belle-Isle was blamed for everything that had gone wrong for France during the war by most of the courtiers, even by those that he had formerly counted amongst his friends:

²³⁴ Campbell, *Power and Politics*, 172-174.

²³⁵ Campbell, *Power and Politics*, *Mémoires de duc de Luynes*, Vol. IV, 182.

²³⁶ *Mémoires de duc de Luynes*, Vol. IV, 189.

²³⁷ *Idem*, 191.

On continue toujours ici à tenir de mauvais discours sur M. de Belle-Isle; le mauvais succès de nos armées en Allemagne, même l'état fâcheux où se trouve l'armée de Bavière, qui dépérit tous les jours par la fatigue et les maladies, tout retombe sur M. de Belle-Isle, comme l'auteur, dit-on, de cette entreprise. Le déchaînement va si loin que les mêmes gens qui disorient qu'il faudrait lui ériger des statues, s'il trouvait moyen de ramener en France l'armée enfermée dans Prague, disent aujourd'hui que c'est une entreprise mal concertée et une fuite indigne du nom François.²³⁸

Conclusion

Was Belle-Isle justly blamed for France's humiliating failure during the First Silesian War? In some ways he was. His plans did not have the desired effect: he had overestimated the favorability of the situation and had underestimated the resilience of Austria. He had also spent too much time at the diet in Frankfurt away from the front in Bohemia where he was supposed to take command. Though it is now hard to assess how long his presence in Frankfurt remained a requirement, the sources do give the impression that Belle-Isle was fond of grandeur and luxury and that perhaps he might have preferred to stay at Frankfurt in the presence of the high and mighty instead of going to the front in Bohemia. Perhaps he could have left Frankfurt earlier than he did and leave the loose ends to some of his most well-instructed subordinates. As it is, we have to assume that his presence in Frankfurt was required until the end of 1742 and, correspondingly, that his absence at the front in Bohemia was (for the greater part) beyond his control.

Furthermore, he consistently misjudged his allies and had a misplaced confidence in their honesty and loyalty, particularly in Frederick II. However, there were many things that were out of Belle-Isle's hands or beyond his control. Prime amongst these were the actions of Prussia. It was Prussia under Frederick the Great that would play a pivotal role during the War, to the detriment of France. It was Frederick who attacked Silesia and started the war, it was Frederick that sought out France as an ally after his negotiations with Maria Theresa of Austria had failed, and it was Frederick who ultimately betrayed France by signing a secret truce with Austria in 1742. France had chosen its allies poorly and for this it paid the price. Belle-Isle's unfortunate debilitating illness during his journey to the front was also a regrettable occurrence, but one that could not have been foreseen. Finally, once Broglie had been made commander, Belle-Isle was no longer the only person responsible for the actions of the French armies. Though in the end Belle-Isle was held accountable for almost everything that had gone wrong during the war, others had also made their fair share of mistakes.

Even though his (negative) influence on the proceedings of the war have been greatly overstated in the past, it is true that Fleury remained reluctant towards warfare until his death and he *did* have a negative influence on the amount of time it took to make the decision to join the war. During the war itself Fleury's pacifistic nature and his complicated relationship with Belle-Isle will have caused some delays, although, as explained above, I firmly believe that these did not have the large impact that has often been suggested by historians in the past.

What had a far greater influence on the war than Fleury's personal sentiments, were the poor decisions made by him and his ministry. The ministry first made the mistake of giving Belle-Isle both an important political role and command of the French armies. These two tasks proved too

²³⁸ *Mémoires de duc de Luynes*, Vol IV, 414.

great to be jointly executed by one individual and the intensity of the first task proved to be so time-consuming that it withheld Belle-Isle from properly executing the second. The government's second mistake, which ironically was made to correct their first one, was to send Broglie to the front in Belle-Isle's absence. Throughout this chapter it has become apparent that the appointment of Broglie was a grave mistake with dire consequences. Not only did it disrupt the coordination and organization of the armies at the front, but it also had a profound effect on the court at Paris. It had been the French court that initially fully supported Belle-Isle's plans to attack Austria. Extraordinarily, it were these exact same courtiers that would eventually abandon Belle-Isle's cause in favor of supporting Broglie: though Belle-Isle had gained unprecedented support for his plans from the court when the war began, it was that same court that eventually turned on him and cast him out. The courtiers had been all too happy to facilitate Belle-Isle's rise to the top as long as they saw in him a chance to improve their own positions. When the war turned sour for France and word of the counterargument to Belle-Isle's plans expressed by Broglie began to spread, most of the courtiers showed no hesitation to switch sides.

It is striking to see how much Belle-Isle's career up to his disgrace after the First Silesian War mirrors that of Germain-Louis Chauvelin. Both of these men rose to great heights before falling from grace in a dramatic change of fortunes. However, the manner in which each of them eventually fell is noticeably different. Chauvelin was ousted from power by a jealous and, at that time, still powerful Fleury who covetously guarded his power. This was not the case with Belle-Isle. Fleury who, as we have seen, physically and mentally deteriorated between the summer of 1741 and the spring of 1743, did not play such pivotal role in Belle-Isle's fall from grace as he had played in the disgrace of Chauvelin. Instead, Belle-Isle was undone by the courtiers at Versailles, who withdrew their support of him as fast as they had given it to him some years prior. In a way the cases of Chauvelin and Belle-Isle can almost be seen as mirror images, with Chauvelin's disgrace at the hands of the first ministers representing the age of first-ministers, representing the 'old' if you will, and the fall of Belle-Isle due to the different factions and trappings at court presenting the 'new': the time of the court factions.

In the end it might be said that the Austrians were not only ones that defeated France in this war, because France had defeated herself as well. If Belle-Isle had been able to conduct the war from the front from the start of the war, he would in all probability have continued to hold the support from court and might have even been able to push through to Vienna alongside France's allies. As it turned out, this would not be the case. For various reasons France and her allies were eventually defeated. When looking for explanations for this defeat, we can now confidently say that Belle-Isle wasn't the only one who was to blame for France's failure during the war. Fleury and his ministry, the courtiers at Versailles, Broglie, and the Prussian and Saxon allies: all had a share in the French defeat.

Finally, the one person who shines in absence throughout the events of the war, but who deserves a special mention nonetheless, is of course Louis XV, the King of France himself. The one person, who could have had a decisive influence on the choice between the two contradicting visions of Belle-Isle and Broglie and the political turmoil that the debate about them created, chose to remain on the sidelines. Louis XV did what he had done for the past two decades and left the decision-making to his old and debilitated first minister and his politically divided ministry. He did not, in an apparent way, show to be in favor of either Broglie or Belle-Isle and chose to remain, for the most part, inactive during the first years of the War of the Austrian Succession. The fact that the King is almost absent from this chapter does not mean that he did not exert his influence over the eventual outcome of the war, but the contrary: Louis XV's lack of personality and leadership may

have had one of the greatest influences on the war. Had he shown more willingness to act and chosen to openly support either Broglie or Belle-Isle when the rift between the two parties first started to appear, the court might have agreed upon a unified strategy, which as a result could perhaps have altered the outcome of the war. Louis' aloofness did not remedy the problems France was facing during the second half of 1742 and the first half of 1743, but instead only increased and deepened them. As a result, the King is as much to blame for France's failure as, say, Fleury and Belle-Isle.

It is ironic that Belle-Isle was blamed for all the different things that had gone wrong during the war by people who were just as much to blame as he was. The defeat of the French armies in the Empire had been unnecessary, firstly because France did not have to get involved in the First Silesian War to begin with and, secondly, because the problems at the front and the internal turmoil at court prevented the French armies from securing a victory that might not have been impossible to achieve from the outset. Though many were at fault, it was Belle-Isle who had promoted and initiated France's participation in the war and it was he who was held responsible for France's defeat in the end. As unjust and unfair as that may be, Belle-Isle had gambled and lost; such are the dismal dregs of defeat.

THE AUSTRIAN WAR OF SUCCESSION



Map 4

Conclusion

In closing I will recapitulate the larger motifs and developments that have had a profound influence on the events that have come under scrutiny in this paper. As these central and pivotal political developments were a part of larger social and cultural occurrences, I will implement some terms from the social sciences that will enable me to write a more clear-cut conclusion. To this end, I will borrow heavily from Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow's excellent book, *Contentious Politics*.²³⁹ Secondly, I will use this conclusion to convey my thoughts about the role of geographical scopes in historical research. This will eventually result in the conclusion as to why I chose to combine two different French political scopes (national and international) and why I specifically chose France during the time of the War of the Austrian Succession as the subject of this paper.

It is important to realize that it were long-term cultural developments (part of the developing Enlightenment movement), which had already begun to develop during the later reign of Louis XIV, that played an important role in the political culture in France during the first half of the eighteenth century. The focus on uniformity in cultural practices and education, stimulated by a growing government that wanted to be better able to monitor society for both detrimental developments and new talent, combined with an increased focus on the individual, meant that from the later reign of Louis XIV a greater emphasis than ever before was put on the display of individual skill and talent and the necessity to get noticed. Not just in war, but in many facets of society displays of personal excellence became of the utmost importance to the social development of the individual. At the same time the royal court began to grow to even more epic proportions. The now sedentary court at Versailles attracted nobles from all over France, who sought to be close to the King and his government.

As it became increasingly important for the nobility to show off their individual talents and to get noticed if they desired to boost their prestige and open the way to new career opportunities, much began to depend on the different ways in which they were able (and allowed) to do so. However, this system of centralization and cultural rigidity did not evolve over time, and it was precisely this legacy of Louis XIV that would haunt both his successor Louis XV and his first minister Fleury during that King's early reign.

A number of different developments created an uncomfortable situation for the nobility during this period, that upset the by now established cultural conventions. Louis XV was not as interested in politics as his predecessor had been and initially left most of the policy making to the first minister and the ministry. The result of this heightened importance of the ministry and the government was the growth in size of said government. As Fleury personally controlled all access to the King, arranging an audience with Louis XV became a difficult proposition, and the nobility had to find other ways to gain influence and increase their positions. One of the ways in which the court factions tried to reach the ears of the King was through his mistresses and his household staff; a phenomenon we see readily throughout the reign of Louis XV. Another was to try and influence the members of the King's ministry, in particular the first minister. As the government was seen as an extension of the King's gaze, trying to increase one's position in life by getting intimately involved with important government officials, ministers and secretaries, or by becoming a government official yourself, also became viable options. A third way, one that had been proven to be successful in the

²³⁹ Tarrow, S. & Tilly, C., *Contentious Politics*, Boulder 2007.

past, was to get noticed by excelling in the art of war. The problem was that both Fleury and Louis XV preferred to avoid warfare if they could. The War of the Polish Succession, for example, saw only relatively few large scale battles.

The combination of a rigidly structured court culture that focused on personal displays of talent and skill and an ever increasing lack of possibilities to do so created an uncomfortable and unhappy situation for the court nobility. Their two most assured ways to success, directly impressing the King during an audience with him and making an impression through warfare, were now virtually closed off to them. From 1726 onwards Fleury kept a close control on power. Internally, he managed to play the different factions at court out against each other and managed to partially sidetrack the *Parlement* of Paris where wartime finances were concerned. Externally, the diplomatic strategy he adopted during the War of the Polish Succession brought him great success, which made it even harder for the increasingly unhappy nobility to unsaddle Fleury and his pacifistic politics. However, as successful as France's diplomatic strategy may have been during the War of the Polish Succession, the conclusion of that war showed that the problems that had been building up in international politics during the first decades of the eighteenth century were not yet resolved. The conflict in Italy between the Empire and Spain ended in an uncomfortable stalemate, France and Great Britain were still great rivals and in the Empire the succession of Emperor Charles VI by his daughter Maria-Theresa had not been fully secured with the signing of the Pragmatic Sanction. When the long negotiations of peace that followed the War of the Polish Succession had ended in 1738 it was plain for all to see that a new international conflict could break out at any moment.

After 1738 a number of events swiftly created a very different political climate in France. First Fleury, who was well over eighty by the time the War of the Polish Succession ended, became exhausted from the strain that that war had put on him. He fell ill during 1738 and though he recovered, from that moment on he slowly started losing the reins of power that he had held on so tightly over the previous decade. In this respect it is both interesting and instructive to remember that only a few years earlier Fleury had been able to oust the increasingly popular Chauvelin from power, but by 1740 he had become unable to do the same to Belle-Isle. Secondly, the leaders of the two great court factions, the duke de Bourbon and the duke d'Orléans, were removed from the political scene for different reasons within a year of each other. This left the court in disarray and opened up the way for the politically ambitious to take control. Though Chauvelin and de Noailles were long standing leaders amongst the nobility, it was Belle-Isle who would eventually take prominence at court. When war broke out in the Empire after the death of the Emperor in 1740, Belle-Isle seized his chance to fulfill his wish to crush the Austrian Habsburgs. In the charismatic Belle-Isle the court nobility saw a way to finally break out of the social restraint that they had endured for nearly fifteen years and began to rally around him en masse. By this time Fleury no longer had the endurance and the will to interrupt this development. Even if he could have done so, it would probably have been unlikely, as by that time Fleury had already come to depend on Belle-Isle and had given him his full confidence in all matters relating to the war. Finally the court nobility that had been deprived the opportunities for quick social advancement for such a long time once again had a chance to show off their skills through mastery of arms.

In short, the court nobility that had seen little chance to quickly improve their fortunes since Fleury's ascension in 1726 found deliverance from this situation in the person of Belle-Isle during the latter 1730's. From around 1738, Belle-Isle's power was rapidly on the rise and he was in strong favor of a war against Austria, a course of action that was favored by many at court. This identification of a common goal, or *attribution of similarity* as Tilly and Tarrow call it, quickly turned into *collective*

action, as most of the court began to actively support Belle-Isle. This in turn gave him the strong position he needed to carry out his plans.²⁴⁰

When France joined the war in 1741 its armies initially had great success. However, from the spring of 1742 this changed. In chapter two I discussed a number of reasons for this turn of events. There are two in particular that deserve a final mention here. Firstly, the choice to give Belle-Isle two important assignments at the same time turned out to be disastrous. Though Belle-Isle was both a gifted strategist and a zealous negotiator, he could have never been able to give both assignments an equal amount of attention.

Belle-Isle's career had been greatly influenced by the culture of his time. Though he was born into a family that was in disgrace, his talents as a battlefield commander were quickly noticed by his commanding officers. As he rose through the ranks during the time of the Regency he became acquainted with some very politically influential nobles and was eventually able to secure a position in which he could closely study the workings of both warfare and the government under his good friend Le Blanc. He subsequently put all that he had learned to good use during the War of the Polish Succession and its aftermath and managed impress both Fleury and the King.

Passing through the phases of his career really shows how much Belle-Isle was a child of his time. He was schooled in the way of the new military Robe-nobility and was as focused on supplies and discipline in the ranks as on personal valor in combat (perhaps even more so). He also had the good fortune to get the opportunities to show off his talents at moments when his superiors were there to take notice of him. Though Belle-Isle unquestionably had both political and military talent, luck played a great part in his ascension to power: the government's close watch for talent combined with the fact that he proved himself at times when he was being monitored gave his career the edge it needed. However, when he acquired both the task of lead negotiator at the imperial Electoral Diet in Frankfurt and Marshal of the French armies, both he and the French ministry overplayed their hands. The two assignments were both very demanding and time consuming and though Belle-Isle would have excelled at each of them individually, the combination was simply too much for one person to manage. As a result of this error of judgment, Belle-Isle managed to fulfill his assignment at Frankfurt with great success, but consequently had to neglect his military occupation. This greatly damaged the military campaign in Bohemia, as a noticeable lack in leadership and military acumen led to both delays and faulty tactics.

The second item I want to give a final mention is the appointment of Marshal Broglie, the importance of which in my opinion cannot be stressed enough. Though many historians have tended to follow Wilson in putting emphasis on the strain in the relationship between Fleury and Belle-Isle, I do not only believe that the antagonism between these two men has been overstated, but also that in doing so, the far more problematic relationship between Belle-Isle and Broglie has been overlooked. As said before, the decision to send the aging Broglie to act as commander in Belle-Isle's absence can be seen as a direct result of Belle-Isle's double assignment, as the lack in military experience amongst the commanders in Bohemia in the wake of Belle-Isle's prolonged absence forced the ministry to take action.

The most disastrous effect of this appointment was that the dispute between Broglie and Belle-Isle did not restrict itself to the front, but that it was also prominently fought out at the court at Versailles. The court nobility, that before Broglie's appointment only had Belle-Isle to focus on for

²⁴⁰ For a clear descriptions and references on the terms mentioned on this page and the next, see Tarrow & Tilly, *Contentious Politics*, 214-217.

bringing change to their desperate situation, now had to choose between the two men. The remarkable harmony at court that had crystalized during the late 1730's disappeared as fast as it had come. As the nobility again had to choose sides, it began to split into factions once more. In the end Belle-Isle's luck ran out. When the war made a turn for the worse, the greater part of Belle-Isle's followers opportunistically changed sides. In a culture where one's personal appearance and associations meant everything, it was career suicide to be seen with such a widely viewed failure like Belle-Isle. The court that in the past had helped him rise to the top eventually facilitated his downfall.

To recapitulate, after the *collective action* of Belle-Isle and most of the courtiers had facilitated France's participation in the First Silesian War and the War of the Austrian Succession in general, the appointment of Broglie caused a new *boundary formation*. As a new object of social and political interest entered the scene, the court that had virtually worked in unison before now had to choose on which side of the boundary they belonged. After sides had been chosen, *contention*, that is the formation and recognition of opposing thoughts and interests, soon followed. In the end, the change of fortunes in the war eventually caused a *boundary shift*, as most of Belle-Isle's followers defected and joined Broglie, which would eventually lead to Belle-Isle's disgrace. The struggle that developed at court could have been prevented or sorted out by either the King or Fleury. However, as Fleury lost his grip on matters of state due to old age (leading up to his death in early 1743) and the King remained aloof, the absence of their *brokerage*, the attempt to form a connection between the two opposing parties, did nothing to remedy the situation. This eventually facilitated the turmoil that plagued the court as its members split between Broglie and Belle-Isle and greatly contributed to the loss that France would eventually have to endure at the hands of Austria.²⁴¹

In my introduction I stated that the main aim of this paper would be to show that internal and external political developments in this period were interwoven and should not always be seen separately, and that the internal power struggles before and during the war greatly influenced France's external policy. The reason that I chose to look at the links between national and international French political scopes is that I believe that historians often pay too little attention to the boundaries they create for themselves during their studies. This is not to say that they deliberately force these boundaries upon themselves; when they are not initially chosen, such boundaries often form naturally. As boundary demarcation develops just as often unintentionally as it does intentionally, I find that it is worth to stop and think about it for moment.

Historians are compelled to set boundaries for their studies, thereby making the deliberate choice to focus on a period between two specified points in time, on a particular aspect or aspects of a society (i.e. politics, culture, economics etc.), on a certain geographic level or scope (i.e. personal, local, regional, national, international, European, global etc.) and/or on a certain scientific approach or combination of approaches (a combination of social sciences and history, for example). Though much has been written on the subject of research boundaries in scientific studies and this paper is neither the time nor the place to discuss this subject as a whole, within the confines of this conclusion there is one form of boundary demarcation that I would like to comment on: geography.

Under the increased influence that anthropology had on the social- and human sciences, a number of renowned historical works, mostly written in the 1970's and early 1980's, put the geographical demarcation in the spotlight. These works mostly focused on the 'micro' side of the geographical level, making the 'daily life' of individuals or small communities their subject; Emmanuel

²⁴¹ Tarrow & Tilly, *Contentious Politics*, 214-217; see note 219.

le Roy Ladurie's *Montaillou* and Carlo Ginzburg's *Il Formaggio e i Vermi* are two titles that spring to mind.²⁴² Though these studies can be seen as a reaction to the prominent French historical *Annales*-tradition, which specifically concentrated on the *longue durée*, and they rekindled the debate about the role of geography within historical studies, the results of these debates have been varied.

Thus geographic scopes have undeniably played a role in the historical debate, but the emphasis in this debate was mostly put on the *different* geographical scopes that can be studied, not on the possibility to *combine* those scopes. Though it is now perfectly acceptable for a historian to write about a small-town community or about a country or about long time, large scale geographical developments, studies that *combine* those geographical scopes remain scarce. This is not to say that they do not exist at all. For a good example, see Peter Sahlins' book *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees*, which combines local, regional, national and international scopes to great effect.²⁴³ However, most historical studies that do combine scopes usually do so between the personal and national geographical scopes. I believe this is so because, to a certain extent, the personal, local, regional and national scopes can rather easily be assumed or proven to be either related to each other or to have directly influenced one another.

Combining national and international scopes has proven to be more difficult. This is especially true for political historians, as it is often exceedingly complicated to combine a country's internal political developments and intrigue with its large scale European diplomacy. However, I believe that doing so, difficult though it may be, can be very beneficial and could potentially yield interesting new results. Through the example of the Belle-Isle/Broglie conflict during the War of the Austrian Succession, I hope to have shown just how fruitful it can be to combine national and international scopes in historical studies. In the past, historians have either focused on the broad international diplomacy during the War of the Austrian Succession *or* on the internal political and cultural developments in France during the eighteenth century. I truly believe that by combining these different scopes, the intricate links that exist between them and that could never be seen by examining each separately, can be discovered. By using this method I have tried to show that during the War of the Austrian Succession internal French politics had a decisive influence on the outcome of the war. Vice versa, the developments of the war had a great impact on the court at Versailles. Though this paper principally focuses on France during the first half of the eighteenth century and specifically on the War of the Austrian Succession and the First Silesian War, this premise is of course not bound to any one specific period in time and historic research in general could benefit from combining different scopes.

Why then did I choose this specific example? The first reason is that the long reign of Louis XV, which lasted for 52 years, has been somewhat neglected by historians. The glory and splendor of Louis XIV and the tragic end of the reign of Louis XVI that led up to the French Revolution have gained far more attention from historians than the reign of Louis XV. The obvious reason, the proverbial elephant in the closet, for this is that the reigns of both Louis XIV and Louis XVI can potentially be seen as turning points in French history: Louis XIV is often seen as the father of absolutism, while Louis XVI was King at the time of the outbreak of the Revolution. Historians have a strong tendency to study such breaking or turning points in history, to look at events that radically changed the society in which they occurred. Both the unprecedented splendor of Louis XIV and the shameless capture and

²⁴² Le Roy Ladurie, E. & Bray, B. (Trans.), *Montaillou*, London 1990; Ginzburg, C. & Tedeschi, A. and J. (Trans.), *The Cheese and the Worms; The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, Baltimore 1992.

²⁴³ Sahlins, P., *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees*, Oxford 1991.

beheading of Louis XVI fall into that category. The timid, private and perhaps somewhat lackluster Louis XV does not. I was shocked that when I was searching for books about Louis XV in the library of Utrecht University I initially only found one, the classic work of Michel Antoine, wedged between dozens of books on both Louis XIV and Louis XVI.

With this paper I hope to have shown that the early reign of Louis XV was neither lackluster nor uneventful: it was a period of cultural and political change during which France found neither internal nor external political stability. The court at Versailles went through an extraordinary change between the ascent of Fleury in 1726 and his death in 1743. As I stated in my introduction, it is often claimed that the age of factions began when Louis XV took up the control of the government after the death of Fleury. The developments described in this paper clearly show that this is not the case, but that a number of events that occurred during the years preceding the death of Fleury have contributed to the situation in which Louis XV started his personal reign. The time of factions did not begin at one fixed moment but was a *gradual* process that evolved over time. Following this it can be said that the period discussed here proved to be a fruitful time for change in general: the cultural changes, the development of the young Louis XV, the growth of the government, the increasingly complex and shifting international politics and the aforementioned changes at court. These developments do not give the impression that this was a period during which little happened. On the contrary, many things that attract historians to the reigns of Louis XIV and Louis XVI can be found in this period: a number of developments set in motion during the reign of Louis XIV were still very much present in the first half of the eighteenth century. Conversely, many developments that would eventually lead to the tragic downfall of Louis XVI also found their origin in this period.

It is a great injustice that the reign of Louis XV, and in particular his early years, have received so little scholarly attention. The period might not have had the dramatic developments of the reigns of Louis XIV and Louis XVI, and on its own the (early) reign of Louis XV cannot be seen as a turning point in French history. However, the focus of historians on turning points often means that the sense of *continuity* in history is overlooked or lost, and it is precisely this sense of continuity that makes the reign of Louis XV so fascinating. His reign was a period of *change*: personally he might not have been the most interesting of French monarchs, but through the changes that took place during his reign the splendor of Louis XIV and the tragedy of Louis XVI are bound together. This fact alone warrants further study and with this paper I hope to have made a contribution to fill that gap.

The second reason for choosing this period as the subject of my study stems from the first one. The two protagonists of this paper are André-Hercule de Fleury and Charles Louis Auguste de Fouquet, duke de Belle-Isle. I feel that these two men, who have both left their mark on French history in their own way, have not gained the scientific attention they deserve. Though Fleury has been the subject of research a scant few times, these studies are either old or only partially dedicated to him. The most recent study of him by Peter Campbell dates from 1996. Belle-Isle, by contrast, has never been fully studied before. Though it could be said that he was of less importance to French history than Fleury, he nonetheless played an essential role during the War of the Austrian Succession, became Secretary for War later on in his career and was a very influential courtier for a number of decades. He is often mentioned when historians write about France during the middle decades of the eighteenth century, but his career has never been studied in its own right. I have tried to give these two men some deserved attention.

In conclusion, my aim with this paper has been twofold. The first was to make a contribution to the scientific study of early eighteenth century France. I am fully aware that this paper only barely scratches the surface of the research that will be needed to give this period the attention it deserves, but at the same time I hope to have shown that this period greatly deserves such research.

The second was to stress the importance of thinking about the geographical boundaries within which historians conduct their research, by deliberately combining national and international French political scopes. I believe that there is a lot to gain by combining different geopolitical scopes, specifically combinations of smaller (between the personal and national) and greater (international, global) scopes.

However, like every literary scientific work, this paper has its shortcoming. Due to the difficulty of combining different political scopes, some concession had to be made. Furthermore, restrictions in time and space have made prioritizing inevitable. As a result, depending on their importance to the focus of this paper, some areas and aspects are not as fully developed as others. As I already stated in my introduction, this paper has mostly focused on political developments.

Despite these shortcomings, I hope, on the one hand, to have made the reader more aware of the effects that geographical scopes have on historical research, in the case of this paper political history. On the other I hope to have shown the limited scholarly attention that the early reign of Louis XV has received in the past and to have made the reader enthusiastic about the possibilities it offers for further studies. This paper only hints at the multitude of opportunities for further historical research into this period. It is up to other historians to take up this challenge and to drag Louis XV out from the looming shadows of his luminous forbearer and successor and give him the day in the sun he so deeply deserves.

Epilogue

After the loss of Prague and the end of the First Silesian War, France and her allies would not come as close again to achieving the destruction of Habsburg Austria until the time of Napoleon in the 19th century. From early 1743 the allies were beset by Austria on three sides: Charles de Lorraine along the Danube, Lobkowitz in Bohemia and Khevenhüller from Salzburg towards Bavaria. To try and relief Prague and Bavaria and keep the oncoming Austrians at bay consumed all the Franco-Bavarian attention, thereby weakening their efforts along the Rhine.

As Maillebois and his army began to retract from the Rhine area, the English, who had finally resolved their own problems, came to the aid of the Austrians. An army led by King George II himself gathered along the Rhine and was heading into the German Province of Mainz from the west. France reacted to this by sending an army under the duke de Noailles to deal with the English. At first he seemed successful, but in the end the French received a heavy defeat at the hand of the English at the battle of Dettingen on June 27.

At the end of 1743 Austria had allied itself with Britain, Holland, Prussia, the newly defected Saxons, as well as with Sardinia in Italy. France and Bavaria had only retained their Spanish allies. The Franco-Bavarian forces were in full retreat and France had suffered a tremendous blow to its image as a world power. Of France's original goals little had been achieved. It had managed to put an Emperor on the throne, but it was an Emperor who was bereft of his homeland and rendered nearly powerless by his Habsburg enemies. The new Emperor Charles VII had to stay at Frankfurt for three years. He remained homeless until 1744, when Bavaria could finally be retaken. The only Emperor not to come from the House of Habsburg since the election of Frederick III in 1442 was destined to have a lonely reign spent in exile. He died in 1745 after only 3 years on the imperial throne.

France was left with a humiliating defeat and a great financial debt. Though the First Silesian War had been an absolute disaster, France would eventually begin to slowly restore its international political position as the War of the Austrian Succession continued. Its military successes under Marshal de Saxe in the later stages of the war would eventually recover some face for France.

Fleury himself would never know the outcome of the war. He died on January 29, 1743 at the advanced age of 89. Last of the four great Cardinal-Ministers (Richelieu, Mazarin, Dubois and Fleury), he had led France for seventeen years and in that period had increased both France's international reputation and its prosperity. After his death, Louis XV decided to rule by himself without a first minister. It was the end of an era. From the death of Fleury onwards the road to the King was open to the court nobility once more and gaining control over the ministry and over policy making became the court factions' new primary objective. They would continue to constantly fall out with each other and the court became even more divided and hostile than it already had been: the time of the court factions had now truly begun.

For Belle-Isle France's defeat during the War of the Austrian Succession meant not only an end to his hopes of destroying Austria, but also a great personal blow. After returning to Paris in disgrace he was abandoned and ridiculed by almost all his former friends and allies as well as by the public in general. Even more embarrassing, he was taken prisoner by the English when he crossed the borders of Hanover on a visit to Berlin a few months after his return from the war. Even though it did not take long to procure his release, Belle-Isle remained in England for a year despite the fact that Louis XV had strongly desired his return to France. After his return to France from his adventures in England he began his slow recovery from his disgrace and led several armies during the final years

of the War of the Austrian Succession, as well as during the Seven Years War (1754-1763). For his services to the Crown he was allowed to join the hallowed ranks of the peers of France in 1748. He became Secretary of War in 1757 and would die in office after a well-spent and eventful life on January 26, 1761 at the age 76.

Plate 1

Half-length portrait of Charles Louis Auguste Fouquet, Marshal of France and duke de Belle-Isle (1684-1761), depicted in the wardrobe of a French courtier (French courtiers were dressed in blue). Painted by Maurice Quentin de La Tour (1704-1788) in 1748; currently resides in a private collection.

**Plate 2**

Another portrait of Belle-Isle. Notice the marked difference in appearance: Belle-Isle is clad in armor, wearing a leopard skin and the blue sash of *l'Ordre des Chevaliers du Saint-Esprit*, or the Knightly Order of the Holy Spirit, and carrying a *baton*, the sign of military leadership. The neutral grey background of the former painting is replaced by dark storm clouds and a battle scene. Belle-Isle, who is bathed in light, functions as the 'light in the darkness'. Painted by Hyacinthe Rigaud (1659-1743) in 1713; currently resides at the Château de Manom.



Plate 3

Half-length portrait of Cardinal André-Hercule de Fleury (1653-1743), wearing the robes of his Episcopal office. Painted by Hyacinthe Rigaud sometime between 1728 and 1743; currently resides in the London National Gallery.

**Plate 4**

Painting of François-Marie de Broglie, Marshal of France and duke de Broglie (1671-1745), painted once more by Hyacinthe Rigaud. Notice the striking similarities between this painting and the one of Belle-Isle. Both are wearing the exact same attributes; the *baton*, the sash of the Order of the Holy Spirit and the leopard skin. The pose is also similar in both paintings, as is the gloomy, cloudy background. The noticeable difference is that this is a half-length portrait, whilst the painting of Belle-Isle is a three-quarter portrait. Because of this difference, the battle-scene background found in the Belle-Isle painting is missing here. Not dated, but presumably between 1700 and 1720. Currently resides at the Rockefeller Plaza in New York.



Plate 5

King Louis XV in his ceremonial/coronation wardrobe. The Fleur-de-Lys, France's royal symbol, is depicted on the King's robe and the pillow on the stool next to him. Also depicted are the royal regalia: the crown (resting on the Fleur-de-Lys pillow), the staff and the sword (worn by Louis on his side). Painted by Louis-Michel van Loo (1707-1771); currently resides at Versailles palace in Paris.



Plate 6

Painting of the Siege of Prague by the Austrians in 1742; currently resides in the Heeresgeschichtliches Museum in Vienna, Austria.



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Maps

Map 1: <http://www.zonu.com/fullsize-en/2009-09-17-783/Europe-in-1730.html>.

Map 2: <http://www.zonu.com/images/0X0/2009-09-17-784/Europa-en-1740.jpg>.

Map 3: <http://warandgame.files.wordpress.com/2009/02/bhjiop.jpg>.

Map 4: <http://www.historyonmaps.com/ColourSamples/cbig/AustrianWar.jpg>.

Illustrations

Plate 1: http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/a3/Charles_Louis_Auguste_Fouquet.jpg.

Plate 2: <http://hyacinthe-rigaud.over-blog.com/article-version-belle-isle-remaniee-a-chatellerault62860885.html>.

Plate 3: http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/5c/Cardinal_Fleury.jpg.

Plate 4: <http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/LargeImage.aspx?image=/lotfinderimages/d50563/d505348x.jpg>.

Plate 5: http://26.media.tumblr.com/tumblr_luovfdm4rO1qatfdco1_500.jpg.

Plate 6: <http://warandgame.files.wordpress.com/2009/12/sdfghju.jpg>.