

**The Valet: The Marquis de Louvois's Invited Guest  
in the Mystery of the Man in the Iron Mask**

by  
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**Prefatory Remarks on the Spelling of Names**

The last name of the man known as the Man in the Iron Mask is spelled “Dauger” except where another author’s spelling is quoted.

A seventeenth-century Paris family of minor nobility will be discussed. That family’s name is spelled “d’Auger de Cavoye,” except where another author’s spelling is quoted.

**Why Solving the Problem of the Man in the Iron Mask Is Important  
for Scholars of French Seventeenth-century History**

This article addresses one description of the mysterious prisoner called *L’Homme au masque de fer* written in a letter, dated 19 July 1669, by the government official who oversaw his transfer to prison, Louis XIV’s (1638–1715) twenty-eight-year-old secretary for war, François-Michel Le Tellier, the marquis de Louvois (1641–1691). Louvois characterized Dauger in that letter as “only a valet.” Scholars have been compelled to incorporate this description of the prisoner into their theories about his identity. The search for the answer to this mystery has been tangled up in the demand of the “valet” to be consequential.

This paper shows that, contrary to what has always been assumed, Louvois’s characterization of the prisoner as “*un valet*” does not describe the prisoner’s background or previous occupation, nor did Louvois intend it to. The word “valet” is a keyword in a pun that Louvois inserted into the state document that he wrote to the prison jailer, whom he knew personally. It does not indicate that Louvois knew the prisoner’s identity. This conclusion has been reached through interdisciplinary research on seventeenth-century playing card design, French name spelling differences, salon culture word games, and a personal life episode of one of the *Ancien Régime*’s most redoubtable military administrators, the marquis de Louvois himself. The elimination of the “valet” will upset assumptions about Louvois’s comment about the famous prisoner; it will neutralize the only description in the official French archives of the prisoner’s occupation before his arrest.

Louvois's valet description has been a barrier to a launch of serious historical research to settle the question of whether the mysterious man was genetically related to Louis XIV. If, freed from the parameter of the valet, future researchers on the Man in the Iron Mask mystery would find clarity on the genetic issue, then the problem would migrate into the supervision of a larger set of *Ancien Régime* historians who would have to accept that Eustache Dauger threatened Louis XIV's political and familial status. If Dauger's existence threatened Louis XIV's personal and legal royal rights, we must reconsider Louis XIV's role in the *Grand Siècle*.

### Introduction

*L'Homme au masque de fer* (?–1703) was a man imprisoned by Louis XIV in July 1669 for an unknown reason (Iung 56). Neither do we know the reason that he wore a cloth mask over the top of his face during the latter part of his imprisonment when he was out of his cell or when strangers came into his cell (Iung 51). His identity, his name, and his appearance were carefully hidden from everyone except a very small number of jailers (Iung 51). These three facts—his unknown crime, his mask, and the very stringent security given to him unceasingly for thirty-four years—are the reasons that members of the court and the public became interested in him as soon as they were aware of him.

The first person at court to speak publicly about him was Louis XIV's sister-in-law, Princess Palatine Elisabeth-Charlotte (1652–1722). She told her aunt in a letter on 11 October 1711, only eight years after the prisoner had died in the Bastille (Orléans 187), that she had heard there had recently been a mysterious prisoner at the Bastille, always masked, who had been forbidden to speak under pain of death. Voltaire (1694–1778) became interested in the prisoner, perhaps during his own imprisonment in the Bastille in 1717, and spurred the public's interest in the story incessantly, including treating it in his *Siècle de Louis XIV* (1751) and *Supplément au Siècle de Louis XIV* (1753). Voltaire was the first writer to say that the prisoner's mask was made of “fer” when he wrote to the abbé Dubos on 30 October 1738 (Voltaire “À M. l'Abbé Dubos” 305) that he had knowledge of “*l'homme au masque de fer*” — that he had spoken with people who had served him. In 1746, the chevalier de Mouhy wrote *Le Masque de fer ou les aventures admirables du père et du fils*. The book tells a story about a prisoner who wore an iron mask. Mouhy tells of metal masks used on prisoners in Turkey, Scotland, Spain, and Sweden. Duvivier suspects that Mouhy shared with Voltaire his research on masking (Duvivier 17). Whether Mouhy encouraged Voltaire to add the metal mask

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or not, Voltaire inserted it in his description of the masked man in his *Siècle de Louis XIV* (Voltaire *Siècle* 311). Witnesses who actually saw the masked prisoner do not mention a metal mask, but say that he certainly always wore a cloth mask when out of his prison cell.

In Liège in 1769, the Jesuit R. Père Henri Griffet (1698–1771) published *Traité des différentes sortes de preuves qui servent à établir la vérité de l'Histoire*, which included quotations of journal entries taken from a journal made by the lieutenant of the Bastille in 1698 named Etienne Du Junca (1642?–1706) that described in detail both the Mask's entry into the Bastille and his death five years later (Griffet 307–08). The journal entries are eyewitness reports of the prisoner by a state official: a date stamp of his entry into the confines of the Bastille; confirmation that he was always masked; confirmation that he had never had a jailer other than Saint-Mars, and that the prisoner had no name (Griffet 303–09). Saint-Mars (1626–1708), on the day that Du Junca wrote his first journal entry on the prisoner, 18 September 1689, was taking command of the Bastille after formerly being governor of Pignerol, Exiles, and Sainte-Marguerite prisons. “Saint-Mars” was a *nom-de-guerre* (Rousset 170 and Dijol 56); the name his family gave him was Bénigne Dauvergne. On 10 January 1673, the king gave him letters of nobility (Barine 20). Here is Du Junca's entry from the prison register located in the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal that describes the arrival of the new prisoner in September 1698:

Du judy 18e de septembre 1698 a trois heures apres midy, monsieur de St Mars, gouverneur du chateau de la Bastille, est arive pour sa premiere entree, venant de son gouvernement des illes St Marguerite Honorat aient mene avec queluy dans sa litiere un ensien prisonnier quil avet a Pignerol le quel il fait tenir touiours masque dont le nom ne sedit pas et laient fait mettre en de sendant dela litiere dans la premiere chambre delatour de la basiniere en atandant la nuit pour lemettre et mener moy mesme aneuf heures du soir avec Mr de Rosarges un des sergens que monsieur le gouverneur a mene dans la troisieme chambre seul delatour dela bretaudiere que javes fait mubler de touttes choses — quelques jours avent son arrivee en aient reseu lhordre de monsieur de St Mars le quel prisonnier sera servy et sounie par Mr de Rosarge que monsieur le gouverneur norira. (Du Junca 37 v<sup>e</sup>)

Griffet's publication showed proof that the masked prisoner had really existed and gave credibility to Voltaire's insistence that the subject was

important (Duvivier 22, 28). These two historians fueled a detective search which continues today.

Pioneer nineteenth-century researchers went to the archives to identify all the prisoners of Saint-Mars, the jailer of the masked prisoner, realizing that inevitably (Iung 5), among this set of people, one would have to have been the masked prisoner. Their results and that of many subsequent authors might today be called a mashup of state prisoners who were incarcerated in the relevant time period arranged on a framework of event dates (such as the prisoners' transfers between prisons), witness reports, and political events with the goal being elimination of as many candidates as possible.

Each writer on the Man in the Iron Mask mystery has had at least three tasks: telling the story of the man's arrest, where and with what special security he was kept, and the witness accounts of his appearance and activities; a review of the most likely candidates with an historical account of each; and the writer's own conclusions, including why he or she chose one candidate over the others.

General Theodore Jung in *La Verité sur le Masque de Fer (Les Empoisonneurs) d'après des documents inédits des Archives de la Guerre et autres dépôts public* (1873) believed that the Mask was one of a group of conspirators who wished to assassinate Louis XIV; Emile Burgaud published *Le Masque de fer, révélation de la correspondance chiffrée de Louis XIV* (1893), claiming the Mask was Vivien Labbé de Bulonde, who made a serious military mistake that embarrassed Louis XIV (failed to hold the siege of Coni in the Piedmont in 1691); John Noone concluded in *The Man Behind the Iron Mask* (1988) that the prisoner was a fictional character created by the governor of Pignerol prison to advance his own interests. Paul Sonnino's usual thorough research described in "On the Trail of the Iron Mask: The Candidacy of Claude Imbert" shed light in 1992 on a likely candidate, who, although Sonnino admits that the archives produced an *échec* for his suspect, nevertheless showed masterfully the length to which researchers should go to investigate each lead (Sonnino "Imbert" 104). Sonnino said in 2014 that the testament of Cardinal Mazarin (1602–1661), specifically, changes made in the different versions of Mazarin's will written by Jean-Baptiste Colbert (1619–1683), Mazarin's intendant, after Mazarin's death, indicate the identity of the prisoner (Sonnino "Three Testaments" 16). Michel Vergé-Franceschi of the university François Rabelais de Tours in his 2009 *Le Masque de fer, enfin démasqué* believed that the prisoner was a valet of the duc de Beaufort (1616–1669), a militant and popular cousin of Louis XIV, who wit-

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nessed the murder of his master (Beaufort) and was taken prisoner to prevent the death's announcement.

Not only have professional scholars researched the identity of the *masque de fer*, but the highest officials of the French eighteenth-century state felt they had a right to know the truth of the matter. Louis XVI (1754–1793) and Napoleon I (1769–1821) sent state officials to the archives for the man's Bastille imprisonment records. Matthioli, an Italian double agent, was officially documented as the masked prisoner (Markale 236). But Matthioli's candidature has been eliminated through archival research done after the French Revolution (Topin 329–30 and Duvivier 62).

Data found in the twentieth century eliminated all possibilities except Eustache Dauger, arrested at the request of Louis XIV near Calais, France, at the end of July 1669 and escorted under guard to Pignerol prison in the Italian Alps.<sup>1</sup> In the summer season the journey from Calais to Pignerol for one prisoner and a small company of guards would have taken about twenty-one to twenty-five days. That approximation is based on the journey to Pignerol of Nicolas Foucquet, prisoner of musketeer Charles d'Artagnan, in winter 1664, which took twenty days from Paris (Petitfils *d'Artagnan* 145). We know that Dauger and his guards arrived at Pignerol on approximately August 21 because Louvois wrote a letter to Saint-Mars on 10 September 1669 that is a reply to a letter from the governor dated 21 August indicating that Pignerol had received the new prisoner. We have the letter of Saint Mars only in a transcription that was made by citizen Pierre Roux-Fazillac in 1801, *Recherches historiques et critiques sur l'Homme au masque de fer, d'où resultent des notions certaines sur ce prisonnier, ouvrage rédigé sur des matériaux authentiques* (Roux-Fazillac 105).

Vergé-Franceschi asked:

Peut-on être aujourd'hui absolument sûr que le prisonnier surnommé Eustache Dauger est bien le Masque de fer?

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<sup>1</sup> Particularly decisive in the election of Dauger as the masked prisoner was the elimination of Matthioli, who had been a primary suspect in nineteenth-century research, but, according to Saint Mars himself in 1681, Matthioli did not accompany Saint-Mars when he left Pignerol to be governor of Exiles, and letters from Louvois to Saint-Mars confirm that there would be only two prisoners going to Exiles with Saint-Mars, one of whom was La Rivière (?–1687), formerly a valet of Foucquet. The other prisoner that the king ordered to go with Saint-Mars, Matthioli, being ruled out, was Dauger. See Topin 329–30 and Vergé-Franceschi 309.

Oui. Quand on dresse la liste de tous les prisonniers de Pinerolo à cette époque, il est le *seul* à y avoir été admis en 1669<sup>2</sup> (Vergé-Franceschi 260).

### Objectives and Spelling

The two objectives of this paper are: (1) to review Louvois's letter and learn why Louvois called Eustache Dauge a valet; (2) to use this answer as support for the thesis that this was the prisoner's real name. In seventeenth-century France names of prisoners listed on official documents were often false names, created by the jailers to limit identities. A nickname might be given to a prisoner based on an instance of his actions in prison, a reference to a previous occupation, where he or she was kept in the building, or a completely fake first and last name might be put in the records. Seekers of the solution to the mystery of the Man in the Iron Mask have never known if Eustache Dauge was the prisoner's name as Louis XIV understood it to be when he ordered him arrested.<sup>3</sup>

Solving the valet puzzle requires a reminder about French seventeenth-century family name spelling practices. There was much more misspelling of names of people in past generations than there is now—or let us call it multispelling, because misspelling means erroneous spelling and we do not discern an authoritarian attitude toward spelling; one did the best one could to write the name so that the reader recognized it, and the exact combination of letters was secondary. It was accepted in the seventeenth century that in one instance a man's last name could be written "Du Vivier" and the next person would write "Duvivier." Meanwhile, the person himself would always sign his name "du Vivier." Then there was the added possibility that a misspelling might occur, where "Duvivier" becomes "Devivier."

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<sup>2</sup> Researchers who have also come to the conclusion that Dauge is the Man in the Iron Mask are Marcel Pagnol, Jules Lair, Andrew Lang, Maurice Duvivier, Rupert Furneaux, Harry Thompson, and Marie-Madeleine Mast, among others.

<sup>3</sup> Bernard Caire in his essay "Eustache et Son Secret," which was included in the white paper resulting from a colloquium of Mask scholars in 1987 (Caire 43), believes the spelling is "Danger." Jean-Christian Petitfils in *L'Homme au masque de fer* also believed this. Other researchers, including Jules Lair, Andrew Lang, and Maurice Duvivier, all having believed Eustache Dauge had an important part in this mystery, write the name "Dauge." The argument presented below about Louvois's characterization of Eustache Dauge as a valet will show that the correct spelling is "Dauge."

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We must loosen for a moment our modern rigidity about *nom et prénom* spelling in order to understand the problem at hand, because the variations of the spelling of the last name of the prisoner, Eustache Dager, are linked to the reason that the marquis de Louvois styled him “*un valet*.”

**François-Michel Le Tellier, the Marquis de Louvois**

Most historians know Louvois as the waster of the German Palatinate in the course of the War of the League of Augsburg (1688–1697). If one were to rebut that statement and say that Louis XIV’s orders to Louvois were responsible for the Palatinate’s devastation, one could reply that by 1688 it was difficult to know if Louis XIV or Louvois was responsible for military decisions (Rousset 6). Louvois was war minister and since wars provided his job security, he made sure that Louis XIV had plenty of them (Mongrédien *Louis XIV* 175, Sonnino *Louis XIV* 5–7, 192).

The marquis de Louvois was Louis XIV’s secretary of war for much of his reign. Today we often title administrators in this high position ministers for defense, but what was called defense by Louis XIV and Louvois was more about thirst for territory and glory than it was about drawing lines beyond which foreign powers could not pass. Rather, it was Louis XIV who passed over the lines of others (Ekberg 175). Louvois and his father, Michel Le Tellier, marquis de Barbezieux, seigneur de Chaville et de Viroflay (1603–1685), created a French army that became the strongest and most feared military power in Europe, supplying Louis XIV’s redundant need for extreme attention. Louis XIV squeezed his people, his court, his nobles, his army, his enemies, and his friends to get a steady supply of glory that was only acceptable in its densest form.

Louvois directed the royal postal system from 1669 to his death in 1691 (Vaillé 7), and following Jean-Baptiste Colbert’s death in 1683 he was the government minister in charge of building projects. Louvois and the Paris chief of police conducted an investigation into a poisoning scandal in the capital in the 1680s, some parts of which touched members of the royal court and Louis XIV’s closest circle. An unpublicized assignment given to Louvois by the king was oversight of the Man in the Iron Mask’s needs, security, location, and treatment.

**Louvois’s Letter to Saint-Mars Dated 19 July 1669**

We do not know who Eustache Dager was, but the reason that many of the most credible specialists in this subject tailor their conclusions to

the prisoner having been a valet—a servant—is that the marquis de Louvois, in a letter dated 19 July 1669 to Monsieur de Saint-Mars, governor of Pignerol prison, to forewarn him that a prisoner named Eustache Dauger would soon be coming to Pignerol, wrote that since the prisoner was only “*un valet*,” his needs for furniture were negligible. The letter carries the earliest date of about 150 extant letters between Louvois, the off-site manager of the prisoner’s incarceration, and Saint-Mars. Saint-Mars had to receive orders from Louvois before he could change the routine of his prisoners, get them medical attention, buy them items, etc. His questions and Louvois’s answers went by couriers between Pignerol and Paris.

In the marquis de Louvois’s communication on 19 July 1669 about the prisoner, Louvois broke all the rules, before there even were any rules about Dauger. There would be hundreds of royal warnings over the next thirty-four years to those who were managing his incarceration that there should be no hint of what the man had been doing before his arrest, and if Dauger said anything at all about his former life to anyone, the jailers had instructions to immediately kill him (Delort *Détention des philosophes* 156; Orléans 187; Petitfils *Homme* 37; Voltaire *Siècle* 311).

This is the very first document that mentions Eustache Dauger by name.

À Saint-Germain en Laye, ce 19 juillet 1669

Monsieur,

Le Roy m’ayant comandé de faire conduire à Pinerolo le nommé Eustache d’Auger, il est de la dernière importance à son service qu’il soit gardé avec une grande seureté, et qu’il ne puisse donner de ses nouvelles en nulle manière, ni par lettres à qui que ce soit. Je vous en donne advis par advance, afin que vous puissiez faire accomoder un chachot où vous le mettrez seurement, observant de faire en sorte que les jours qu’aura le lieu ou [sic] il sera, ne donnent point sur des lieux qui puissent estre abordez de personne, et qu’il y ayt assez de portes fermées, les unes sur les autres, pour que vos sentinelles ne puissent rien entendre. Il faudra que vous portiez vous même à ce misérable, une fois le jour, de quoy vivre toute la journée, et que vous n’escoutiez jamais, sous quelques prétexte que ce puisse estre, ce qu’il voudra vous dire, le menaçant tousjours de le faire mourir s’il vous ouvre jamais la

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bouche pour vous parler d'autre chose que de ses nécessités.

Je mande au sieur Poupart de faire incessamment travailler à ce que vous desirerez, et vous ferez préparer les meubles qui sont nécessaires pour la vie de celui que l'on vous amènera, observant que, comme ce n'est qu'un valet, il ne luy en faut pas de bien considérables, et je vous feray rembourser tant de la dépenses des meubles, que de ce que vous desirerez pour sa nourriture.

Je suis, monsieur, vostre très affectionné serviteur, De Louvois (Delort *Détention des philosophes* 155–56).

**The *Lettre de Cachet* and the Arrest**

On 28 July 1669, nine days after the letter above, a *lettre de cachet*, signed by Louis XIV and co-signed by Michel Le Tellier, Louvois's father, ordered M. de Vauroy, sergeant-major of the citadel and town of Dunkirk, to arrest Eustache Dager and take him to the fortress of Pignerol in the Alps, a prison reserved for political prisoners (Vergé-Franceschi 256). Another letter to Vauroy's superior was signed by the king, also dated 28 July, giving a false excuse for Vauroy's absence from his regular duties (Noone 151, Pagnol 123). No explanation was given in the *lettre de cachet* as to where the sergeant-major would find Dager, so we may assume, since the arrest took place very soon after he received the order, that Vauroy had a separate communication as to the location of his target from either the king or someone else. It is also possible that Vauroy knew where to find Dager without having to be told.

We do not know where Dager was arrested. It may have been Calais. Vergé-Franceschi refers to a certification of reimbursement to Vauroy of travel expenses that researcher Stanislas Brugnon found in the mid 1980s in the *Mélanges Colbert*:

Vauroy commence par aller de Dunkerque à Calais avec trois hommes. A Calais, il récupère le prisonnier.... Stanislas Brugnon a retrouvé dans les *Mélanges Colbert*, à la Bibliothèque nationale, une "conduite," c'est-à-dire un ordre de remboursement de frais de déplacements, comme pour les fonctionnaires d'aujourd'hui. On constate que le roi a payé ces frais à hauteur de trois mille livres pour quatre hommes de Dunkerque à Calais (Vauroy et trois soldats d'escorte); et pour cinq hommes de Calais à

Pignerol (Vauroy, les trois soldats et le Masque de fer); puis trois mille autres livres pour quatre hommes de Pignerol à Calais (une fois le Masque de fer laissé aux mains de Saint-Mars) (Vergé-Franceschi 261).

Vauroy obeyed orders and took Eustache Daugeur to Pignerol where Saint-Mars was waiting.

### **Post Script**

Immediately after 28 July 1669, the date on the arrest warrant, Louis XIV or Louvois or both of them decided that the prisoner's last name should not be spoken or written again because "Eustache" was thereafter not written for nine and a half years in any correspondence that has come down to us, and "Daugeur" was almost never written again. The jailers had nicknames for Daugeur so that they could be clear about which prisoner they were speaking of in a practical situation, but these names are the jailers' inventions, not official ones. If he had to be spoken of, witnesses tell us that his jailers said, "the one whose name is not said aloud" (*le nom ne se dit pas*), or "the longtime prisoner," or "the man who was brought by sergeant Vauroy." For a time he was called "*La Tour*" due to the location of his cell at Pignerol (Iung 40). A false name was given to him on his death certificate and burial record: "Marehiel" or "Marchiel" (Furieux 6).

Considerable thought and many chapters of books have been dedicated to the valet problem. Many authors have taken the marquis de Louvois at his word that the new prisoner was a valet, a manservant of moderate rank, and have eliminated from suspicion anyone who was not a valet. Other writers have been sure these words were deliberately used to hide the identity of the prisoner. But the characterization of the prisoner as a valet is the only mention of his social status by any of the very few people who had contact with him, so we have not ever been able to evade Louvois's description. Historians and sleuths have had to consider the possibility that the Mask was formerly a servant. This has been the biggest stumbling block preventing investigators from believing that the Man in the Iron Mask was a royal relative of Louis XIV—a cousin, a brother, or a twin. If the prisoner had been a valet, he could not have been a prince.

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**Eustache Dauger (? –1703)**

This paper does not attempt an overall answer to the question of the identity of the Man in the Iron Mask but it might be helpful to know a few things about the person described by Louvois as a valet.

The prisoner's life before his arrest in July 1669 is unknown. Toward the end of his life he wore a cloth mask over the top of his face whenever he was outside his cell or when a stranger went into his cell. We are not sure if he wore a mask before that, and we do not know if the report of a metal mask, seen only once while the prisoner was traveling, was accurate. Voltaire's report about the man in 1751 said, "*Ce prisonnier, dans la route, portait un masque dont la mentonnière avait des ressorts d'acier, qui lui laissaient la liberté de manger avec le masque sur son visage*" (Voltaire *Siècle* 311). This is the sentence that started the myth of the iron mask. But Voltaire did not say that the prisoner wore an iron mask, only that he had a mask on that had steel springs in the chin area. He assumed this apparatus had to do with eating because it was located, so he had been told, near his mouth.

Voltaire tells that he got this information from the son-in-law of a doctor who treated the Mask and who had been the doctor of the maréchal de Richelieu (Armand de Vignerot du Plessis 1696–1788). Also testifying to this information, said Voltaire, was, "...*M. de Bernaville, successeur de Saint-Mars, me l'a souvent confirmé*" (Voltaire *Siècle* 312).

He heard regular Catholic mass so he was Catholic, whether from birth or from conversion from Protestantism. We know he could read because he was given as many books as he wanted (Delort *Détention des philosophes* 157). We deduce he could write because after his death his cell walls and floors were taken apart to uncover any writing he might have hidden (Griffet 311). He had lips and teeth, because eyewitnesses tell us they saw them under his mask (Petitfils *Homme* 94–95). We know he spoke French (Duvivier 120). We know that in 1703, not long before his death, he said to an apothecary of the Bastille that he thought he was about 60 years old (Delort *Histoire de l'homme au masque* 71), which indicates he was not sure of his age so we do not know how old he was when he died.

His first eleven years in prison were at Pignerol, where Saint-Mars had been governor since 1664. He was moved to Exiles, not far from Pignerol, when Saint-Mars was transferred there. Then the jailer and prisoner went to the island prison of Sainte-Marguerite, near Cannes, and finally in 1698 Saint-Mars got a promotion to the governorship of the Bastille, and

Dauger went with him, traveling, as before, in the same cavalcade of carriages and soldiers that formed Saint-Mars's moving van. Also following the governor's path through all the stages of his career were his aides: his major, Jacques Rosarges (1633?–1707); his manager of the keys, Antoine Ru (?–1713); and two trusted infantry officers, one of these being a cousin of the governor and the other a childhood friend.<sup>4</sup> No one other than Saint-Mars and these officers ever guarded Dauger. The prisoner, Saint-Mars, and his team of guards were inseparable for thirty-four years.

Eustache Dauger was assigned an extremely high level of security. In 1670 Saint-Mars wrote to Louvois:

Il y a des personnes qui sont quelquefois si curieuses de me demander des nouvelles de mon prisonnier, ou le sujet pourquoi je fais faire tant de retranchements pour sa sûreté, que je suis obligé de leur dire des contes jaunes pour me moquer d'eux (Markale 271).

Some of the precautions were typical for all prisoners, like having three doors to his cell, each closing separately upon the other (Fougeret 27). But there was extra security for Dauger. Not long after Dauger was taken to Pignerol, Louis XIV sent the sieur Vauban (1633–1707), his chief military engineer, to inspect the cell and the fortress to make sure everything was as it should be.

Eustache Dauger died suddenly in his cell in the Bastille on 19 November 1703, probably of a heart attack or stroke, his only sign of impending death being a slight malaise the day before at mass, indicating that he was not in the throes of a wasting disease. He was buried the next afternoon in the Saint-Paul church cemetery, the parish cemetery for the Bastille.<sup>5</sup>

He must have had remarkable inner reserves. Saint-Mars writes more than once that Dauger did not complain of his situation and was polite, accepting his fate from “God and the king” (Thompson 99). He quietly lived thirty-four years in confinement and then died a peaceful, quick death.

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<sup>4</sup> There were an extremely limited number of priests and doctors who saw him, always with his mask on, but these men do not concern us in the limited analysis of the valet problem.

<sup>5</sup> Only a remnant of one of the supports of the church west façade is extant. The west portal of the church would have been approximately 30, rue Saint-Paul, Paris 4ème.

### Playing Cards in the Seventeenth Century

John Noone says that there were many varieties of the spelling of the last name of the Man in the Iron Mask, “Dauger.” Spelling, especially of names of people, was often approximated according to pronunciation. No one seemed to mind if a name was spelled one way in one text but differently in the next one. Here are the other variations of the name that Noone printed: “Daugier, Doger, Dogier, d’Auger, d’Augier, d’Oger, d’Ogier, Auger, Augier, Oger, Ogier” (Noone 212). Maurice Duvivier was the first writer to muse on the many spellings of Dauger (Duvivier 120).

There are an unusually large number of spelling variations that can be made in this last name, especially because the first letters can be O or A or d’O or d’A or D’O or D’A. It can even start with H, as we will see below. In the rest of the name there are also many possible placements of letters. When the “i” in the spelling of Ogier is dropped, it creates Oger. When the name is spelled Doger, there are two deformations, the dropping of both the “i” and the apostrophe.

Since there was a French nobleman in Louis XIV’s court, Eustache d’Auger de Cavoye (also sometimes spelled “Eustache d’Ogier de Cavoye”), who had almost the same name as the famous prisoner, Noone referenced the origin of the d’Auger de Cavoye name to illustrate the many ways in which d’Auger and Dauger could be written. He said the Cavoye family claimed to be “...descended from Oger the Dane (Hogier the Ardennois) one of the twelve peers of Charlemagne” (Noone 212). A biography of Eustache d’Auger de Cavoye’s younger brother, Louis, titled *Le Marquis de Cavoye 1640–1716: Un Grand Maréchal des Logis de la Maison du Roi*, tells that the family believed this was the origin of their family name (Huguet 87).

Then Noone, as an interesting expansion about the Danish companion-at-arms of Charlemagne, noted that in old packs of French playing cards, the face cards, that is, the King, Queen, and Knave (also called Jack) cards, were assigned to an accepted set of famous people from the historical French court. The Knave or Jack of Spades was often personified by Hogier le Danois (sometimes spelled Ogier, sometimes Oger). Hogier probably was a real courtier in the court of emperor Charlemagne, although there are aspects of his story that seem mythical.

The assignment of names of historical characters to the picture cards in decks of playing cards is not practiced now except in imitation of old designs but it was conventional in seventeenth-century Europe. In an article on seventeenth-century card games, Orest Ranum (Ranum 556)

cites an article in *Bulletin du Vieux Papier* that gives 1640 as the time when card makers in the French provinces began to use the same naming practices as Paris card designers, thus giving a general point of French consciousness as to the regularization of the historical characters on the cards.

The Bibliothèque Nationale's online web site *Gallica* has many images of playing cards that show, on the face cards, the names of the historical characters pictured. We are able to see the deck called *Jeu de cartes au portrait de Paris* (Trioullier), made in the early 1760s, which has these assignments for the face cards: the King, Queen, Jack/Knave of Hearts are named Charles (Charlemagne), Judic (Judith), and La Hire (*nom de guerre* of Etienne de Vignolles, knight under Charles VII of France's command (van Rensselaer 167–168); Clubs are marked Alexandre (Alexander the Great), Argine (anagram for *regina*), and the Jack/Knave carries the name of the creator of the card deck, Jean-François Trioullier; Diamonds are marked César (Caesar), Rachel (the *Bible's* Rachel), and Hector (Hector de Galard, captain of the guard to Louis XI of France, although sometimes he is also the Trojan warrior); Spades are David (the *Bible's* King David), Pallas (Pallas Athena), and Hogier.

Card games are ideal entertainment for people who have a sedentary profession, such as prison guards and governors, and also for those people that a government forces to be sedentary: their prisoners. While King Louis XIV and his marshals and chancellors gambled at cards during evening *appartements* at Saint-Germain-en-Laye and Versailles, the people they had put in prison played too. High-ranking prisoners played cards with their jailers when there was an inclination on both sides to do so. We have mostly to rely on our general feeling that this goes without saying because there are few references in scholarly literature to seventeenth-century card playing in prison. Georges Mongrédien says that the prince de Condé (1621–1686), cousin of the king, imprisoned during the Fronde, played cards with his guards (Mongrédien, *Condé* 89).<sup>6</sup> We are also told by Antonia Fraser that François d'Aubigné's (later Madame de Maintenon, Louis XIV's second wife, 1635–1719) father played cards with his jailers at the Niort prison where he was incarcerated and she was born (Fraser 150).

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<sup>6</sup> In particular, Guillaume de Peichpeirou Comminges, Comte de Guitaut (1626–1685), Condé's chief of his personal guards. He was the nephew of comte François de Guitaut-Comminges (1581–1663), captain of guards for Anne of Austria.

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With few actual historical references but with a great deal of confidence, we can say that it is very likely that Saint-Mars, the prison governor to whom the marquis de Louvois wrote a letter about the valet who would soon be coming as a prisoner, would be familiar with cards and would have played his fair share of games, both as a soldier, which he was before he was governor of Pignerol, and as a prison superintendent in charge of a bored staff and a handful of miscreants in an isolated prison in the Alps. He would have seen the face, the weapon, and the name of Hogier the Dane practically every day of his life.

**Who Was the “*Valet*”?**

In French, the Knave or Jack, the third-ranking picture card in a suit of cards, is called the *Valet*.

The Knave of Spades is called the *Valet de Piques*; “*pique*” translated literally as “spade” in English. The remaining three picture cards of the third rank are the *Valet de Coeurs*, the *Valet de Trèfles*, and the *Valet de Carreaux*.

When Louvois said that Eustache Dauger was “*un valet*” in his letter to Saint-Mars, he was making a pun on Dauger’s last name.

A homophonic heterograph is a pun that makes a link between two words that sound the same but are written differently, in this case, Dauger and Hogier. Before even getting that far with this particular pun though, you have to know another connection that is not a sound-alike set of words but which is a set of interchangeable words: *valet* and Hogier. One of the *valets* in a deck of cards is customarily Hogier.

The structure of the joke is that the prisoner’s last name sounds exactly like the historical character (Hogier) anthropomorphized on *Valet* (Jack, Knave) playing cards. Eustache Dauger does not need extravagant furniture because he is only “*un valet*.”

We sense that “*un valet*” carries a pejorative connotation in this joke. There are historical precedents for the use of this word as an insult. One reads in Dr. Héroard’s (1551–1628) diary, the exact record of King Louis XIII’s (1601–1643) health and activities kept by his doctor from his birth, that the most infuriating thing his father Henri IV (1553–1610) could do to his son was to force him to admit he was his father’s valet (Héroard 1: IV). At a critical point in the Grand Condé’s relationship with the king, Anne of Austria, and Mazarin between the Fronde of the Parlement (1648–1649) and the Fronde of the Princes (1650–1653), the Condé family, who were

opposed to Mazarin, began calling their eldest brother a valet of Mazarin to indicate they disdained his alliance with the slippery cardinal (Motteville 422). We have then, in the pun, three passages: Dauger is Hogier; Hogier is a *Valet* in a deck of cards; to be a valet of someone is humiliating. Both Saint-Mars and Louvois lived in sections of society where card playing was popular, so both men knew that Hogier le Danois was a *Valet* and both would enjoy having that connection turned into a laugh by Dauger being verbally dressed as valet.

*Dix-septièmistes* will already have made the connection between this complicated joke and the *préciosité* of the Paris salons. Madame de Rambouillet, whose house had seen so many delicious *conversations d'esprit*, had died only a few years before Louvois wrote the letter we are discussing, but her traditions lived on in the living rooms of her imitators. Writers, poets, *bon vivants*, and an occasional deep thinker came together at the homes of hostesses at regular moments in the week to talk, but more than that, to talk cleverly using historical, mythological, and literary allusions to describe current society matters, preferably current amorous endeavors by members of the society in the house or outside of the house. To belong to *salon* society, one was expected occasionally to launch a *bon mot* for the group. The *précieuses* counted points for wit, shock, and arbitrary connections held together by elaborate lattices of poetry and prose. Saint-Mars knew nothing of the salons other than that they existed, but Louvois had social connections that required him to be a player in these word games:

In a highly conversational and aristocratic milieu their object was to distinguish themselves where possible by originality of thought or expression. It was given to only a few, such as Voiture, to achieve originality of thought, and the others, wisely, concentrated on the art of rendering their ideas more striking by the piquancy of their vocabulary or by the ingenious construction of their phrases (Maland 56-57).

So let us not give credit to Louvois for originality; these plays on words were all the rage in his social circle; he was merely following fashion by inserting clever, hidden messages into communications with friends.<sup>7</sup> As to the execution of this pun, however, we must credit Louvois with a real coup. His play on words juggles Dauger, Hogier, and the miscreant, imaginary valet. It is a beautiful pun. Unfortunately for Louvois, it is this

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<sup>7</sup> Saint-Mars's wife's sister was Louvois's mistress.

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stunning joke which may prove to be the critical weakness in the sturdy barriers the regime built to hide Eustache Dauger that scholars need to make progress in solving the mystery of the man that Louvois was charged with keeping anonymous and hidden.

But there is more historical content in this joke. There are not just three “people” in the joke, but a fourth, who is the protagonist, the most important player: Louis d’Auger de Cavoye.

There is a heretofore little known chapter in the extramarital love life of the marquis de Louvois that is the mainstay of the argument that the minister of war’s “valet” was a personal joke, that Eustache Dauger must have been the famous prisoner’s real name, and further, that the marquis de Louvois, contrary to what has always been assumed, did not have any background knowledge about Eustache Dauger on the date of 19 July 1669—that he was catering to his own sense of humor and to that of the old Musketeer, a *parent* of his mistress.

The married marquis de Louvois, in 1668, the year previous to his 19 July letter, had been attempting to have an affair with a young, beautiful, rich, married girl named Marie Sidonie de Lenoncourt, marquise de Courcelles (1650–1685). His efforts to experience double adultery had not been successful, however.

The marquise de Courcelles had preferred to give her favors to Louis d’Auger de Cavoye (1639–1716), a young noble at court and friend of the king (Pougin 21). We have referenced him above in connection with the history of the d’Auger name. Jacques Hillairet, historian of Paris, said of Louis de Cavoye, “*Le marquis de Cavoye avait été élevé avec Louis XIV; il fut l’un des plus brillants seigneurs de son temps, sut gagner l’affection de Turenne, de Luxembourg, de Racine, mais s’attira l’inimitié de Louvois*” (Hillairet 501). While keeping Louvois on her *boudoir* doorstep, the teenage marquise had an affair with Louis d’Auger de Cavoye, infuriating her husband, the marquis de Courcelles, who challenged de Cavoye to a duel. Dueling was illegal, and both duelists were arrested in the first week of July 1668 and taken to the *Conciergerie* to serve sentences (Pougin 16). In January 1669, six months later, Marie Sidonie appeared to be pregnant. In April, the marquis de Courcelles, while still in jail (as was Louis d’Auger de Cavoye), began a court prosecution against his wife for adultery (Pougin 16). She was taken into custody and gave birth on 5 July to a child that soon died.

What the story above shows is that Louvois and Louis d’Auger de Cavoye were rivals for the sexual favors of Marie Sidonie. Cavoye had

gotten what Louvois had not, Louvois found an excuse to put him in prison, and did so. It would not be unusual in those circumstances for Louvois to have been pleased with his consolation prizes, the incarceration of his rival and the downfall of the girl who had spurned him. These events had been taking place a few months before and even one week before 19 July 1669, when Louvois wrote the letter to Saint-Mars in which he called the prisoner Eustache Dauger a valet.

Louvois was referring to his rival for the attention of Marie Sidonie de Lenoncourt, marquise de Courcelles, more than to Eustache Dauger, an unknown nobody whose name furnished Louvois an opportunity to make fun of Louis d'Auger de Cavoye. D'Auger and Dauger had the same name. Writing the pun to Saint-Mars nursed Louvois's smarting self-confidence, which only someone as spectacular<sup>8</sup> as Marie Sidonie was able to damage, his self-confidence being normally solid. Saint-Mars' wife's sister was Louvois's mistress, so Saint-Mars would have known of the failed pursuit of Marie Sidonie and Louvois's "enmity" for Louis d'Auger de Cavoye.

### Why Has the Explanation of "*Un Valet*" Been Difficult?

We are grateful to previous researchers for highlighting the different spellings of Dauger. Duvivier and Noone came to within a hair's breadth of solving this difficult game of nomenclature, card playing, and male rivalry that Louvois unintentionally set for us.

First of all, a pun like this one is impossible to understand when one does not have the requisite knowledge of the compared items. If there is no knowledge of Louis d'Auger de Cavoye and none of his rivalry with Louvois—if there is no experience looking at a hand of playing cards with Hogier the Dane's face and name printed on one of them, then it is impossible to hear the bell ring when these three items are likened to Eustache Dauger.

But that has not been the only obstacle. Here are some others:

1. We are not accustomed to a family name being interchangeably spelled with a buffet of choices. The multiple possible spellings of the prisoner's last name, Dauger, have confused us.

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<sup>8</sup> Her biography is well worth reading: Paul Pougin, *Mémoires et Correspondance de la Marquise de Courcelles publiés d'après les manuscrits avec une notice des notes et les pièces justificatives* (Paris: P. Jannet, Libraire, MDCCCLV).

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2. Our playing cards are no longer labeled with the names of knights, kings, queens, and famous royal mistresses who lived in myth, ancient history, or distant history. So one key to unlock Louvois's pun has to be knowledge of archaic customs in gaming, a recondite scholarly subject.
3. The design of playing cards is not where scholars would expect to find hard historical data. Seasoned Mask researchers, locked on to facts about prison cell construction and the swollen list of Mask might-have-beens, have not placed enough emphasis on interdisciplinary studies. They have not asked art historians to join their search. Art and architecture historians should be consulted on historical mysteries because creators of history in every era often want to show their *préciosité* by using allusions to ancient or contemporary literature, characters, battle sites, love affairs, and other nests of specialized knowledge in their paintings, poems, stories, and building details. Art historians have the plaintexts for these codes.
4. English-, German-, Spanish-, and Italian-speakers have never used the word "valet" for the third-ranking picture card because the word, at least when used in connection with playing cards, is French. English speakers use the word "valet" only for a servant. Researchers using any language but French have been at a disadvantage.
5. In old English, German, Spanish, and Italian playing cards that follow the tradition of using names of famous people on the picture cards, the historical figures might not be French kings, queens, and heroes, so Hogier the Dane would possibly not appear on cards in non-French card decks, again limiting the number of people who might have understood the joke.

So the connections between Dauge, Hogier, and "*un valet*" have been hidden by haphazard spelling, language barriers, geographical distance, and the discontinuation of a historical tradition in designing playing cards. As for the link between Louis d'Auger de Cavoye and the marquis de Louvois, it is but one small sexual rivalry of Louis XIV's court of which there were thousands, which almost never creep into scholarly research, unless one is studying just such things. Biographies of Louvois, if they

mention her at all, do not connect the restless Marie Sidonie with Louvois's valet.<sup>9</sup>

### Conclusions

First, Louvois's show of his pent-up jealousy for Louis d'Auger de Cavoye in the 19 July letter indicates that, at that first moment of his experience with the prisoner whose name had been given to him as "Eustache Dauger," Louvois had no knowledge of the prisoner other than his name and that he was to be arrested and sent to Pignerol prison, a prison for people who had been on the wrong side of a political matter. If Louvois had known how important this prisoner was to Louis XIV, he would never have dared to joke about him in a written document using a reference to his own failed lechery. He was a young man, just taking on the weight of his position after being tutored by his father, Michel Le Tellier, his predecessor, for many years. His father was still checking his son's job performance and was a stickler for proper conduct. He would not have approved of his son's light-hearted comment about a prisoner, especially one committed to paper that seemed to characterize the prisoner.<sup>10</sup> And the cautious, wily Le Tellier would have been right. We see the consequences of Le Tellier junior's mistake. By this bravado, we have been given information about a very mysterious prisoner for whom the official, royal directive was that we should know absolutely nothing.

The larger picture becomes clear. Louvois was making a joke about someone he knew and hated, not about Eustache Dauger, a man it appears he did not know. And in the beginning there was no reason for Louvois or anyone else to spend two minutes wondering who Eustache Dauger was. There were secret arrests of boring evildoers all the time. Louvois, at this starting line, did not foresee the long race he would run with this particular prisoner, nor the gravity of the case that would gradually be revealed to him. He had been ordered to take care of this fiddling matter by his master, and, as always, he scrambled to obey. His flippant, surly bit of old boys' club humor peddled to Saint-Mars tells us he did not consider the prisoner a challenge or a threat. The threat he minded was Louis d'Auger de Cavoye.

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<sup>9</sup> This paper found the connection d'Auger/Louvois/Courcelles through a book on the history of Paris streets. She is given by Jacques Hillairet, *Dictionnaire des rues de Paris*, 2, 501, as a former mistress and previous owner of Cavoye's hôtel at 52, rue des Saints-Pères.

<sup>10</sup> Vergé-Franceschi also referred to the impropriety of Louvois's joke, 257–58.

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Second, the analysis of Louvois's joke confirms that the spelling of Eustache Dauger's last name is "Dauger" and not "Danger." "Dauger" has been contested by some of the major writers on this subject in favor of "Danger," but Louvois's comparison of the prisoner to two other men, one of whom is Hogier and the other being d'Auger, confirms that the "Dauger" spelling is the correct one.

Third, despite the use of the name in a few official documents, Louvois's letter being one, investigators have never been sure that Eustache Dauger was the prisoner's real name, because often the authorities fabricated names of prisoners. The finding in this paper that Louvois allowed himself to make a pun on the prisoner's name in a communication about official war office business is the basis for the theory that the authority that ordered the arrest of Eustache Dauger, Louis XIV, believed that Eustache Dauger was the name the man had used for himself until then. Eustache Dauger, to the best of Louis XIV's understanding, was the real name of the prisoner he ordered sergeant-major Vauroy to arrest in July 1669 near Calais.

Louis XIV therefore gave this name to Louvois when he asked his minister to instruct the governor of Pignerol to prepare a cell. If Louvois had been told by Louis XIV that there was a problem saying the prisoner's name, Louvois would not have written it to Saint-Mars. He would have given the new prisoner a false name.

It is not likely that Louvois would have made up "Eustache Dauger." The joke would not have had value to Louvois if he himself was making up the name "Dauger" to serve as the nickname of the presumed criminal. The joke was born out of a naturally occurring conflation of names, which was the pattern of *salon* jokes. The subject material had to be a real artifact picked out of the actions or names of others and then appended to another action or event that showed the opinion of the author. Making up the root of the joke would have been cheating. He used the name the king gave him.

Fourth, we see that Louis XIV had a secret that he wished to hide from everyone else, including his closest advisors. Louis XIV's knowledge of the prisoner is part of what must be determined before the mystery of the Man in the Iron Mask can be solved. The solution to the valet problem intensifies that point, which has been made by many writers. Louis XIV kept to himself the nature of the "dissatisfaction" he had about the man he arrested. He gave his colleagues Dauger's name, but not his identity. It begins to appear that Louis XIV did not tell any of the operatives who captured and incarcerated Eustache Dauger anything at all about the man

they arrested and supervised. Probably even the veteran advisor and highly trusted Michel Le Tellier, Louvois's father, who co-signed Dauger's arrest order, was told a fable, as were Saint-Mars, Rosarges, Ru, and the doctors who treated his illnesses. All these characters were in file behind Louvois, the man through whom Louis XIV personally managed Eustache Dauger's imprisonment. It was Louvois who took Louis XIV's directions, sent them to the governor of the prison, who in turn gave orders to his staff. If Louvois was not told who the prisoner was, or at least was not told enough to keep him from being surly and personal in an official communication, then not one of his subordinates knew. At first Saint-Mars was curious. His pride in the fables he was telling people about Dauger attests to that. But instinctively we feel that this braggadocio came from his own lack of knowledge. Was Louvois curious? Eventually, probably, but at the point of arrest, Dauger didn't interest him at all.

It is tempting to say that the discovery of Louvois's pun on the name of Dauger proves that Dauger was not a valet, but we cannot yet be certain of that. He could still have been a valet without Louvois knowing it. But we are closer to that certainty, based on the logical consequences of Louvois's statement being a joke rather than a description of the prisoner. Previously, it was probable enough that he was a valet that all authors on the subject have examined this description at length and many of the most erudite have formed their theories based on the valet. Now we see that Eustache Dauger was as likely a valet as he was a shoemaker or a bureaucrat. We now have no hint as to what his former occupation was and we never really did.

If there is a broad lesson for historical studies in this matter, it is that an interdisciplinary approach to a tough problem is likely to lead to success. Deciphering the marquis de Louvois's letter to Saint-Mars has required knowledge of numerous sidebars of seventeenth-century history. It has also required a generous amount of skepticism about previous strategies and assumptions. Historians studying the Man in the Iron Mask have suspected that the jailers of Eustache Dauger, including Louis XIV, were devious and desired to mislead. They have been aware of M. de Louvois's reputation for cold deceit in other official ministry of war business. But many who have read his July 19, 1669 letter to Saint Mars have credited him with honesty and candor in it. With that credit in place, the problem was not solved.

Jean Markale comes to a conclusion that deeds were done in this matter that is unpleasant to look at:

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Que de cachotteries! Que de duplicité! A la lecture de ces documents parfaitement authentiques et conservés dans les Archives, on a l'impression désagréable de se trouver au fond d'un panier de crabes. Mais les crabes dont il s'agit ici sont ceux qui ont fait la grandeur de la France et dont on vante les mérites aux petits écoliers comme aux grands lycéens de la noble patrie française. (Markale 275)

Théodore Iung, perhaps the most thorough early archival researcher on the Mask, wrote to us in 1873 about the agonizing conclusion he came to after years of research on the Mask in the French archives of war:

On n'est en droit, d'ailleurs de ne négliger aucune dépêche, en apparence insignifiante, car celle-là justement se trouve avoir souvent une importance réelle. Or, par où commencer, dans quel sac puiser? Que de temps perdu! Que de patience! Que de richesses d'ailleurs non classées encore un peu partout! Et l'on pourra conclure avec moi, que, malgré les quatre mille dépêches nouvelles environ que j'ai trouvées concernant cette question, on est encore loin d'avoir obtenu tout ce qu'on est en mesure d'attendre. (Iung 51)

He says to his readers that he could not do everything that has to be done to solve the mystery; he can only provide some leads that will serve others who follow him. "*Aidez-moi,*" he pleads.

### **Issues Raised by the Absence of the Valet**

The argument that has always defended the royal Bourbon family from connection with Eustache Dauger has been that the marquis de Louvois said he was a valet. We have assumed that Louvois knew the details of the man's crime and background. We could not argue a blood connection with the Bourbons when we were told by the war minister that the prisoner was a valet. A valet is a servant, and not even the contemptuous Louvois would call a royal prince a valet; that would be much against the code of respect for royals and nobles. If Louvois wrote in an official document that Dauger was a valet, then he was most certainly not a Bourbon family member. But now we see that Louvois was not describing the prisoner; he was just using an accidental collision of identical names to make fun of a rival.

Now we can begin to ask if Eustache Dauger was a direct threat to Louis XIV and to his reign. If the king was not open with his most trusted

confidants, then this matter must have been illegal. Resolving the valet issue faces us with the possibility that an extremely cruel act was committed by Louis XIV for his personal convenience and possibly for reasons of state. Depending upon the rank of Eustache Dauger, whenever we discover it, the explanation of this crime may have consequences for our basic assumptions about the policies and life of the Sun King, which would lead to some reassessments of Louis XIV's place in the European seventeenth century. For that reason, historians must continue to ask why Louis XIV imprisoned Eustache Dauger.

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