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Madame de Motteville on Mazarin

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Extrait de l'article

Francoise Bertaut, Madame de Motteville, was an unpretentious woman, whose greatest treasure was the good will, not to say friendship, of the queen whom she attended for almost a quarter century : Anne of Austria. Living in retirement after Anne's death, Francoise wrote memoirs. As she explained to her readers, she wanted to let posterity know the real merits, words, and actions of "the late queen, and also to remember happier times and give herself, as it were, "une seconde vie." Surely these were unexceptionable motives. Apparently uninvolved in political intrigues, unlike many of her memoir-writing contemporaries, and therefore presumably with no axe to grind, small wonder that Madame de Motteville has enjoyed great credibility as a historical witness. Her first editor, early in the eighteenth century, hailed her work as a useful source of information on the events of her time, while a hundred years later the preface to the Petitot edition of her memoirs claimed that they presented "the most detailed, the most complete, the most impartial history of the first years of the reign of Louis XIV... ." These judgments became part of French literary tradition, so that in our own time, as respected an authority as Antoine Adam has included Madame de Motteville's work in the list of sixteenth and seventeenth-century memoirs that should interest historians because of the insights they offer into the workings of politics, and into human nature. We may ask, however, how reliable these insights are and whether, in the case of Madame de Motteville for example, personal feelings and prejudices colored the picture she painted. Would a historian agree with the literary expert's evaluation of her work ?

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