

Carrying Class Cues? Contradictions in Eighteenth Century Class Consciousness, as  
Shown Through *Necessaire*.

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Sitting within the Louvre lies an unassuming box with a gold oval plaque. A beautifully scripted M is engraved on the plaque, the monogram of the infamous Queen of France Marie Antoinette. As Queen of France, Marie Antoinette was known for her splendor and fashion. So, although the outside is demure, this box is not just any box. Instead, it is an eighteenth-century *necessaire*: popular early modern travel bags. Like a modern-day toiletry bag that one might bring along on trips, *necessaire* have small compartments and nooks to store the various items necessary for travel. These objects were often toiletries, cutlery, and cooking tools. Some items would be familiar to a modern viewer, but others that were specific to the era. Other items would likely be familiar to modern viewers but not within the travel context. Marie Antoinette's *necessaire* is chalk full of such eighteenth-century travel necessities.

Like many of Marie Antoinette's personal belongings, her *necessaire* is truly a prize to behold. From the outside, her *necessaire* is a square mahogany chest with gilded copper edges, handles, and hinges. Within the centered plaque lies the scripted M, wrapped in a laurel wreath. The front of the *necessaire* has an empty keyhole beneath an indent meant to help open the box.<sup>1</sup> Once opened, the *necessaire* holds a plethora of items, each set in a perfectly shaped spot of carved out mahogany.

All cooking items included in Marie Antionette's *necessaire* are exceedingly beautiful. A sheet metal cooking skillet with spiral detailing and Marie Antoinettes monogram on the lid, for instance, catches the eye. Although it sits alone in the box, the skillet has a removable ebony handle.<sup>2</sup> A silver cooking pot with two beautifully sculpted doves on the lid, two handles, and the

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<sup>1</sup> Jean-Pierre Charpenat, François Joubert, Jean-Charles Lethien, and Jean-Philippe Palma, *nécessaire de voyage dit de Marie Antoinette*, March 1774, silver (cast and chiseled), bone china, mahogany (chest), 82 cm x 19 cm, Louvre, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010113948>.

<sup>2</sup> Jean-Pierre Charpenat, *bassinoire du nécessaire de Marie-Antoinette*, March 1787, silver; ebony; and ivory, Louvre, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010210629>.

MA monogram provides another cooking vessel.<sup>3</sup> To use such cooking devices, a small, three-spoke standing silver cooking stove is inside as well. It has rosette openings so, when put over an open flame, food can cook evenly.<sup>4</sup> The food made with this *necessaire* didn't have to be bland either: a silver mortar and pestle, used to ground herbs and spices, lies inside.<sup>5</sup> To eat from, the *necessaire* has two silver plates with the MA monogram.<sup>6</sup> As for utensils, there are three sets of three small silver spoons with the MA monogram, a larger spoon and fork, and two knives with ivory handles.<sup>7</sup> The reason why the *necessaire* has so many spoons is so they can be used for drinking tea.

Various items needed to make tea are included in Marie Antoinette's *necessaire*. A silver egg-shaped tea infuser with a silver chain to easily steep tea stands out.<sup>8</sup> A simple silver three spoke 'spirit burner' is also inside, meant to heat liquids with the use of alcohol.<sup>9</sup> And the lighters needed to ignite the spirit burner even had their own curved silver box adorned with the MA monogram.<sup>10</sup> The *necessaire* even has a small silver funnel with the MA monogram.<sup>11</sup> And a silver 'bouillon cup' could be used to hold hot liquids; it has a removeable ebony handle, a lid,

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<sup>3</sup> Jean-Pierre Charpenat, *Écuelle*, March 1787, silver, Louvre, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010210631>.

<sup>4</sup> François Joubert, *réchaud*, March 1787, silver and ebony, Louvre, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010210648>.

<sup>5</sup> Jean-Pierre Charpenat, *mortier*, March 1787, silver, Louvre, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010210636>.

<sup>6</sup> Jean-Pierre Charpenat, *Assiette A*, March 1787, silver, Louvre, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010210633>; Jean-Pierre Charpenat, *Assiette B*, March 1787, silver, Louvre, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010210635>.

<sup>7</sup> Jean-Pierre Charpenat, *cuillère*, March 1787, silver, Louvre, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010210616>; Jean-Pierre Charpenat, *fourchette*, March 1787, silver, Louvre, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010210621>; Jean-Pierre Charpenat, *grande cuiller*, March 1787, silver, Louvre, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010210618>; Jean-Charles Lethien, *couteau A*, March 1775, ivory; steel; gold, Louvre, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010211410>; Jean-Charles Lethien, *couteau B*, March 1775, ivory; steel; gold, Louvre, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010211411>.

<sup>8</sup> *Oeuf à thé*, March 1787, silver, Louvre, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010210623>.

<sup>9</sup> *Réchaud à esprit*, March 1787, silver, Louvre, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010210620>.

<sup>10</sup> Jean-Pierre Charpenat, *boîte*, March 1787, silver, Louvre, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010210637>.

<sup>11</sup> Jean-Pierre Charpenat, *entonnoir*, March 1787, silver, Louvre, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010210641>.

and two MA monograms.<sup>12</sup> The simpler silver cup with the MA monogram inside could be used for cool drinks- as could the two crystal cups with floral ribbon detailing and engraved M.<sup>13</sup> Food and drink related items only make up about half of Marie Antoinettes *nécessaire*, though.

The personal grooming tools in Marie Antoinettes *nécessaire* match the splendor of the food-related items. Beside the large skillet lies a silver ewer basin and pitcher, used to hold water for washing.<sup>14</sup> Once the ewer basin is removed, a three-tiered mahogany swivel first-aid kit appears. Perfectly shaped carved out niches for two ivory pocketknives, a knife with an ivory handle, a pair of silver grooming scissors, two thin steel compasses, a flat-sided knife with an ivory handle, an ivory traveling tube with a gold middle trim, an ivory knitting needle, a wood and sable hair paintbrush, and various thin picker-like objects sit on the first level.<sup>15</sup> The compasses are iron, and act more like tracing tools to aid when mapping travel routes.<sup>16</sup> When the first level is swiveled out of the way, more niches holding a measuring tape and a flat ivory paper cutter with rounded edges sit beneath.<sup>17</sup> Several niches on this level remain empty, as well as the third tier on the bottom. But another three-tiered mahogany toiletry organizer sits beneath the ewer basin.

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<sup>12</sup> Jean-Pierre Charpenat, *gobelet à bouillon*, March 1787, silver and ebony, Louvre, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010210642>.

<sup>13</sup> *Gobelet*, March 1787, silver, Louvre, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010210644>; *verre*, March 1787, crystal, Louvre, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010210659>.

<sup>14</sup> Jean-Pierre Charpenat, *aiguère*, March 1787, silver, Louvre, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010210617>; Jean-Pierre Charpenat, *bassin d'aiguère*, March 1787, silver, Louvre, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010210615>.

<sup>15</sup> *Aiguille*, March 1775, ivory, Louvre, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010210650>; *Canif*, March 1775, silver; steel; and ivory, Louvre, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010211403>; *Couteau*, March 1775, ivory; steel; and silver, Louvre, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010211412>; Jean-Pierre Charpenat, François Joubert, Jean-Charles Lethien, and Jean-Philippe Palma. *nécessaire de voyage dit de Marie Antoinette; Étui*, March 1775, gold and ivory, Louvre, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010211408>; *Pinceau*, March 1775, wood and sable hair, Louvre, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010211404>; *Petit Couteau*, March 1775, ivory; silver, Louvre, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010211409>.

<sup>16</sup> *Compas*, March 1787, iron, Louvre, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010210628>.

<sup>17</sup> *Coupe Papier*, 1775, ivory, Louvre, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010211384>; *Pied*, 1775, ivory and silver, Louvre, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010211402>.

The second organizer is much thinner but holds a multitude of small objects. The first level holds four razor blades, two metal knives, and another ivory pocketknife. Two of the niches on this level are empty but are shaped like razor niches.<sup>18</sup> Within the second tier lies another larger set of steel scissors, a red leather honer used to sharpen razors, another measuring tape, a pair of silver tweezers, a gold pen, and more silver face pickers.<sup>19</sup> The third tier of the thinner organizer holds a gold travel fork and spoon, several small brushes, and several other indiscernible items.<sup>20</sup> The Louve kindly provides a separate analysis of many objects within Marie Antoinette's *nécessaire*, providing information on the object name and materials used. Some items, however, are simply shown inside the box and do not have specific notes. Unfortunately, the third tier of the organizer holds many such items. Thankfully, there are still several more personal care items within the *nécessaire*.

The three-tiered organizers only hold a portion of Marie Antoinette's personal hygiene items. A small cylindrical ivory box with an overhead handle can be screwed open to reveal that the handle is part of a shaving brush inside the cylinder.<sup>21</sup> Marie Antoinette's *nécessaire* also has three mirrors. The underside of the *nécessaire* lid holds a rectangular sheet with a mirror backing; gold detailing runs along each side and gold floral details are on each corner.<sup>22</sup> Another mirror hides behind the embedded mirror; it has a mahogany back forming an easel so the mirror could be propped up.<sup>23</sup> A dual-sided, circular, handheld mirror with a removable ivory handle

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<sup>18</sup> Jean-Pierre Charpenat, François Joubert, Jean-Charles Lethien, and Jean-Philippe Palma, *nécessaire de voyage dit de Marie Antoinette*.

<sup>19</sup> *Ciseaux*, March 1775, steel, Louvre, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010211406>; *Demi-Aune*, March 1775, ivory and gold, Louvre, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010211407>.

<sup>20</sup> Jean-Pierre Charpenat, François Joubert, Jean-Charles Lethien, and Jean-Philippe Palma, *nécessaire de voyage dit de Marie Antoinette*.

<sup>21</sup> *Vergette*, March 1775, ivory, Louvre, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010211418>.

<sup>22</sup> Jean-Pierre Charpenat, François Joubert, Jean-Charles Lethien, and Jean-Philippe Palma, *nécessaire de voyage dit de Marie Antoinette*.

<sup>23</sup> *Miroir rectangulaire*, March 1787, silver; mahogany; and mirror, Louvre, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010210627>.

sits right behind the rectangular mirror.<sup>24</sup> These mirrors would come in handy when using other items in the *necessaire*, such as the silver ‘powder box’ with the MA monogram used to hold makeup.<sup>25</sup> Another small, round, silver box with the MA monogram is included, presumably to hold other makeup items.<sup>26</sup> Such empty containers are commonplace within Marie Antoinette’s *necessaire*. In fact, there are thirty-seven empty glass containers inside her *necessaire*.<sup>27</sup> The sheer number of objects included within Marie Antoinette’s *necessaire* is astounding. Miscellaneous objects fill almost all available spaces.

There is certainly an eclectic mix of objects inside Marie Antoinette’s *necessaire*. Five popular travel items of the eighteenth-century called *etui* are inside: small traveling cases to carry when a *necessaire* would be too large. Three of the *etui* are black, made of ivory and ebony.<sup>28</sup> The other two are white and made of just ivory.<sup>29</sup> A small, hand-held, silver bell is also adorned with the MA monogram.<sup>30</sup> And this *necessaire* includes all items for writing letters. Two inkwells, for instance, have crystal bodies and silver lids adorned with the MA monogram.<sup>31</sup> Along with the inkwells, there is a silver stamp of the MA monogram with an ebony handle.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> *Miroir, March 1787*, silver; ivory; and mirror, *Louvre*, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010210624>.

<sup>25</sup> Jean-Pierre Charpenat, *boîte à poudre, March 1787*, silver, *Louvre*, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010210632>.

<sup>26</sup> Jean-Pierre Charpenat, *Petite Boîte, 1788*, Silver, *Louvre*, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010210639>.

<sup>27</sup> Jean-Pierre Charpenat, François Joubert, Jean-Charles Lethien, and Jean-Philippe Palma, *nécessaire de voyage dit de Marie Antoinette*.

<sup>28</sup> *Étui Ébène A, March 1775*, ebony and ivory, *Louvre*, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010211415>; *Étui Ébène B, March 1775*, ebony and ivory, *Louvre*, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010211416>; *Étui Ébène C, March 1775*, ebony and ivory, *Louvre*, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010211414>.

<sup>29</sup> *Étui ivoire A, March 1787*, ivory, *Louvre*, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010211462>;

*Étui ivoire B, March 1787*, ivory, *Louvre*, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010210638>.

<sup>30</sup> Jean-Pierre Charpenat, *petite sonnette, March 1788*, *Louvre*, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010210643>.

<sup>31</sup> *Encrier A, March 1787*, silver and crystal, *Louvre*, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010210645>; *Encrier B, March 1787*, silver and crystal, *Louvre*, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010210647>.

<sup>32</sup> *Cachet, March 1787*, silver and ebony, *Louvre*, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010210649>.

While there are even more items in Marie Antoinette's *necessaire*, those will be described later for clarity. Other *necessaire* are not as robust as Marie Antoinette's.

The Met has several eighteenth-century *necessaires*, one of which serves as an excellent contrast to Antoinette's. This *necessaire* is less opulent than Marie Antoinette's, but it is much more indicative of a typical eighteenth-century *necessaire*. While the owner of this *necessaire* is unknown, specialists at the Met ascertained that it was made in England. Thus, it will be referred to as the "British *Necessaire*" further. From the outside, this *necessaire* is a deep green in color, exemplifying its shagreened make. Gold dots throughout the box's exterior create intricate patterns along all edges and a large sun depiction in the center of the lid. The curves of the gold spiral detailing complement the rounded top of the box. Such gold detailing continues throughout the hinges and the interior. When opened initially, this box does not reveal an array of objects.

Both the inside lid and the inside have covered compartments. Like the outside, these compartments have a deep green face with gold detailing and handles. The only exception to this is the two inkwells on the bottom corners; these items do have gold lids, so they fit in with the compartments nicely. Just above one of the inkwells is a skinny compartment with writing utensils inside. Between the inkwells is another skinny compartment that lies empty. Presumably, the owner could fill this compartment themselves. The middle and largest compartment is also empty but has a gold hinged lock. The compartment on the underside of the lid has two gold hinges that keep the compartment closed; when swiveled, there is just enough room for a medium-sized flat mirror. If one did not notice the small swivel hinges, one might miss the compartment completely. The same is true for the compartment on the underside of the box.

Importantly, the side of this *necessaire* has a gold hinge that might be mistaken for a handle. When pulled, however, a drawer on the underside is revealed. Like the other compartments, the inside has a pink hue. There is a new gold glittering detail on this drawer, though, that lines small, specifically shaped cavities for items. Inside these niches are six razors with gold handles, a pair of scissors with gold loops, three tortoiseshell combs, two steel strops used to sharpen razors, and a glass vile with a gold lid.<sup>33</sup> Although this *necessaire* is less opulent than Marie Antoinette's, it is still exceedingly beautiful. Furthermore, it would be safe to assume that, although the owner of this *necessaire* is unknown, they were a member of high society.

Leisure travel in the eighteenth-century was largely reserved for high class people. For the most part, lower-class people only travelled out of necessity while upper-class people had the opportunity to travel for leisure, entertainment, or education. For instance, during the eighteenth-century sons of noblemen commonly went on a "Grand Tour" of Europe. High society expected young men to visit the places their classical-age education described and gain a well-rounded understanding of the various cultures throughout Europe.<sup>34</sup> The only comparable coming-of-age ritual for lower classes were journeymen, young artisans studying under a few established artisans.<sup>35</sup> High society expected all young noblemen to travel Europe while only certain lower-class Europeans had the opportunity to see other parts of the continent as vocational training. Historian Ueli Gyr describes this era in which "Touristic travel remained confined to a minority of wealthy nobles and educated professionals" as a 'pre-modern tourism' era in his work *The History of Tourism: Structures on the Path to Modernity*.<sup>36</sup> Since travel was almost exclusive to

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<sup>33</sup> *Necessaire* British, London, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/204508>.

<sup>34</sup> William Edward Mead, "The Grand Tour in the Eighteenth Century.", 3.

<sup>35</sup> Gyr Ueli, "The History of Tourism: Structures on the Path to Modernity — EGO.", 8.

<sup>36</sup> Ueli, 13.



the upper echelons of eighteenth-century society, only they had the resources or need for a *necessaire*. And, since *necessaire* are high-class objects, historians rarely analyze them.

One of history's most important issues is that, by basing research on written texts, illiterate or lower-class groups often go ignored. Material history, the study of historical objects, provides an alternative way of learning about the past. Tara Hamling and Caroline Weber are prominent figures in this budding field of history. In *A Day at Home in Early Modern England: Material Culture and Domestic Life* Tara Hamling studies the floorplans of middle-class homes in England historically. Caroline Weber similarly studies Marie Antoinette's clothing in *Queen of Fashion: What Marie Antoinette Wore to the Revolution*. Although both historians draw upon material objects for their research, they rely on them for their arguments to varying degrees. While Caroline Weber is a bona fide material historian, Tara Hamling uses a mix of sources.

Tara Hamling, a prominent material historian, uses a mix of sources in her analysis on the lives of "middling sorts" of peoples in early modern England. Specifically, her chapter, "At the sun rising" articulates their morning routines. Although Hamling uses some court cases as sources, she mainly relies on historic household goods to make her argument. Through studying the material goods meant for bedrooms, Hamling reaches the conclusion that, "Chambers were intended to support inward-looking activities such as devotional meditation and prayer, yet at the same time the nature of investment in the decoration of the walls and furnishings suggest and outward-looking appeal to the regard and admiration of neighbors".<sup>37</sup> Decorating your space does not always mean decorating for others. In the absence of sources on middle-class individuals, however, this argument is convincing. Other than Hamling's bias from her knowledge of modern-day households, there aren't many other possible sources of bias within

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<sup>37</sup> Tara Hamling, *A Day at Home in Early Modern England: Material Culture and Domestic Life, 1500-1700* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 29.

this work because the topic has been so under-studied. In all, Tara Hamling provides a cogent approximation of everyday middle-class life. Caroline Weber makes a similarly strong argument.

Marie Antoinette was a fashion politician; she made political statements through her attire throughout her reign. Thus, Caroline Weber's analysis of Marie Antoinette's fashion choices is extremely fitting, especially since Weber analyzes Marie Antoinette's attire at important moments in her life. In her chapter "The Pouf Ascendent" Webber utilizes secondary sources to paint the picture of Louis XVI's coronation. Surprisingly, Webber also uses secondary sources to discuss Marie Antoinette's dress: "Covered in sapphires, other gemstones, and ornate but fanciful embroidery... The eminent modernity of her ensemble suggested more devotion to of-the-moment sartorial caprices than the dignity of the French throne".<sup>38</sup> I am skeptical that one outfit could showcase Marie Antoinette's apathy towards France, especially since she relied on another historian's account to reach her conclusion. But that is not the only conclusion Weber reached in her investigation into Marie Antoinette's fashion choices.

Caroline Webber's main argument in her piece on Marie Antoinette is that, especially at this time of luxury consumerism in France, fashion has a profound impact on politics and history. To make this argument, Webber rightfully did not let her material sources stand alone; the base of her sources is firsthand accounts of Marie Antoinette's appearance. That is why Webber made the somewhat inordinate decision to utilize secondary sources when describing Antoinette's appearance: she cared more about people's perspectives on the subject than the actual outfits. When reading, this argument is successful. The passionate opinions French people had on Antoinette's appearance that Webber provides make the importance of the Queen's fashion choices difficult to deny. Although, this argument is far from unique; I'd assume Webber

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<sup>38</sup> Caroline Weber, *Queen of Fashion: What Marie Antoinette Wore to the Revolution*, 1st ed (New York: H. Holt, 2006), 95.

was influenced by other historians arguing that Marie Antoinette's luxurious style played a role in the French revolution.

Both historians provided conclusive evidence to support their arguments. So, the degree to which they relied on material objects did not affect their credibility. Caroline Weber's argument had some notes of bias but was an interesting read. Meanwhile, Tara Hamling didn't have much of an argument at all; instead, she sought to describe the daily lives of historic middle-class Englishmen. Just analyzing material goods can lead to flimsy arguments while simply analyzing written texts can lead to dull reading. Thus, Caroline Weber's tactic of utilizing material goods as well as an array of secondary sources seems to be optimal.

My approach to material history is very similar to Caroline Weber's. While material histories are often written about Europe, most focus on the middle or lower class because of the lack of information about such groups. Material histories on the upper class are therefore rare, because there are already swaths of information on the aristocracy. Caroline Weber and I go against the grain by studying Marie Antoinette through her possessions. There is great value within material history for all classes, though. Written sources always have bias that historians must sift through. Think, for instance, about the difference between learning about a person through their personal letters compared to the things they own. The way a historical figure communicates with others is an important perspective on their lives. But material history allows historians to get more personal information on their subjects. So, material histories on upper class people are still incredibly important.

By studying eighteenth-century *necessaire*, I found that monarchical elites often distinguished themselves from other nobilities through material goods. This conclusion challenges a common European historical belief that material objects do not affect status as much

as education, race, ethnicity, and political party.<sup>39</sup> Europe historically had such a clear class divided society that material objects were rarely needed to signify class; a person's class was already showcased the minute they began speaking. While this may be true about Europe more broadly, many monarchical elites sought to distinguish themselves from their nobility through their possessions. Some historians, however, view these distinctions as displays of power.

It has always been clear in European history that monarchical elites had different goods than their aristocracy; this has, however, traditionally been interpreted as displays of power. In *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, historian Maxine Berg uses French King Louis XIV to demonstrate this idea: the court furniture under his rule was extremely high quality, to the point that no one else could possibly imitate it. Such high-quality furniture could last generations, and therefore acts as a display of his family's generational power.<sup>40</sup> While the idea that monarchical goods were always made to exhibit power remains a prevailing historical thought, historian Leora Auslander refutes this idea.

In her work *Taste and Power: Furnishing Modern France*, Leora Auslander studies French court furniture. She found that King Louis XIV undoubtedly had high-quality furniture, but the idea that absolutely no one could imitate it is a bit of an overstatement.<sup>41</sup> Although King Louis XIV may have attempted to make his furniture irreplicable, the effect was not there. Furthermore, Auslander posits that,

The critical importance of furnishings to the constitution of Louis XIV's power- and their fetishization- had resulted in part from the greater conflation of the public and private, the

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<sup>39</sup> Suzanne L Marchand, *Porcelain: A History from the Center of Europe*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2020, 4.

<sup>40</sup> Maxine Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain*. Oxford, UNITED KINGDOM: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2005, 38.

<sup>41</sup> Leora Auslander, *Taste and Power: Furnishing Modern France*. Studies on the History of Society and Culture 24. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, 48.

domestic and the political in seventeenth and early eighteenth-century France. With Louis XV, this system started to change.<sup>42</sup>

According to Auslander, the way King Louis XIV demonstrated familial power through furniture was because of specific historical circumstances. Once these circumstances began to change with King Louis XV, French kings no longer attempted to showcase power through furniture. Since Marie Antoinette's reign was after King Louis XIV, her *necessaire* was likely not intended to be a display of power. Further, it does not match her personality to care about French political power.

Marie Antoinette led a highly influenced life. She was born to a life of luxury as an archduchess of the Holy Roman empire in Austria.<sup>43</sup> Her mother, Empress Maria Theresa, played an oversized role in her life. At just twelve years old, Maria Therea arranged for Marie Antoinette to marry the future King of France Louis XVI.<sup>44</sup> The marriage between Marie Antoinette and Louis XVI famously remained unconsummated for almost three years, to the dismay of both families.<sup>45</sup> Maria Therea sent numerous letters to Marie Antoinette claiming the couples' lack of sexual connection was a personal failure of Antoinette.<sup>46</sup> Clearly, Empress Maria Therea influenced even the most intimate aspects of Marie Antoinette 's life. Further, Maria Therea had a clear motive for making Marie Antoinette the Queen of France.

The Queen of France had a straightforward role: to live in Versailles and spend their time with the royal family and prominent noblewomen. While eighteenth-century royal structures in Spain, England, and Hungary gave women a considerable amount of power, Queens of France typically only unofficially influenced the King.<sup>47</sup> In the absence of any real power Maria

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<sup>42</sup>Auslander, 54.

<sup>43</sup> Antonia Fraser, *Marie Antoinette: The Journey*, 4.

<sup>44</sup> Fraser, 30.

<sup>45</sup> Fraser, 103.

<sup>46</sup> Fraser, 81.

<sup>47</sup> Fraser, 126.

Antoinette could gain as Queen of France, Maria Theresia wanted her to stand out amongst the crowd of women.<sup>48</sup> And Marie Antoinette did not disappoint: throughout her reign, she was often compared to goddesses and nymphs.<sup>49</sup> Marie Antoinette's role as a goddess rather than a politician was fitting. Her close advisors said she was uninterested in politics "Both by principle and inclination".<sup>50</sup> Marie Antonitte's position did not give her much political power, and the people closest to her claimed that she was indifferent to politics. Therefore, Marie Antonitte's *necessaire* is anything but a symbol of political power. Further, her mother pushed her to stand out amongst the crowd of elites in Versailles. So, it is much more convincing that her *necessaire* was made as a symbol of status rather than power. The status displayed through Marie Antoinette's personal possessions might have been detrimental to her life, though.

Marie Antoinette was, of course, the last Queen of France. She struggled to curry favor from the people and from noblemen throughout her reign; many cited her carefree personality. That coupled with Louis XVI's meek personality made the monarchy generally unpopular.<sup>51</sup> While French revolutionaries were fueled by a multitude of grievances, the luxurious lifestyle of the aristocracy was an important factor. Historian Georges Lefebvre claims the French revolution really was, "A Series of Class Revolts". When faced with high prices and low wages,

The people' (artisans, shopkeepers, hired help) as well as proletarians ('the populace'), peasants- small proprietors and sharecroppers who did not raise enough to support themselves or winegrowers who did not raise any grain- as well as townsmen unanimously agreed that the government and upper classes were responsible for these afflictions.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Fraser, 104.

<sup>49</sup> Fraser, 127.

<sup>50</sup> Fraser, 128.

<sup>51</sup> Micah Alpaugh, ed, *The French Revolution: A History in Documents*, Bloomsbury Sourcebooks, London ; New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020, 19.

<sup>52</sup> Georges Lefebvre, "A Series of Class Revolts." In *The French Revolution: Conflicting Interpretations*, edited by Frank A. Kafker, James Michael Laux, and Darline Gay Levy, Malabar, Fla: Krieger Pub. Co, 2002, 22.

The French revolution was a popular revolution. The people of France were starving while Marie Antoinette held multi-day parties.<sup>53</sup> While Marie Antoinette was displaying her high social status through her *necessaire*, the people were plotting to kill her. So, on October 16<sup>th</sup>, 1793, the people had her head.<sup>54</sup> Marie Antoinette's fate is important to keep in mind while discussing her personal possessions, particularly because her lifestyle played such a large role in the French revolution. The way Marie Antoinette's possessions affected history is interesting, especially since such consumerism was new in eighteenth-century France.

Traditional historical thought attributed a rise in consumerism to the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century, but that has changed somewhat recently. Some historians today believe there was a 'consumer revolution' in eighteenth-century Europe. Historian Neil McKendrick was the first to posit such an idea in, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England*. In this work, Neil McKendrick analyzes materialism in 1700s England through advertisements. His chapter on the commercialization of shaving, for example, focuses on the advertisement tactics of a specific shaving company. McKendrick found that the complexity of this company's marketing tactics showcases a sophisticated consumer society that predates industrialization. For example, the shaving company utilized relatively modern advertisement strategies such as jingles, moral messaging, storytelling, and familiarity.<sup>55</sup> By showing such inventive promotional tactics, McKendrick effectively argues the presence of a highly developed consumer society in eighteenth-century England. While the idea of a consumer revolution is far from radical, McKendrick book still is. Instead of industrialization creating a highly consumerist society, demand for consumer goods seemingly facilitated the industrial

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<sup>53</sup> Alpaugh, 23.

<sup>54</sup> Fraser, 440.

<sup>55</sup> Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and John H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Europa Publ. Limited, 1982), 153.

revolution. Beyond advertising tactics, changes in consumer behavior confirm an eighteenth-century ‘consumer revolution’.

Rapid changes in consumer behavior in the eighteenth-century also support the idea of a ‘consumer revolution. ‘Going shopping’ as a leisurely activity started within aristocratic society in the eighteenth-century, for example.<sup>56</sup> Instead of going to a specific shop to buy a specific good, European nobility began to stroll commercial areas aimlessly. Seeking pleasure through consumerism seemingly began here, a shift in consumer behavior that necessitates a name like the consumer revolution. Since Europeans had such complex relationships to material goods in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a material history is fitting.

A person’s personal effects can have a lot to say about a person, but the owner of an object is never the only one interacting with it. Especially in the eighteenth-century, an array of individuals handled the personal items of the aristocracy. Although the literal owner of a *necessaire* was a nobleman, almost all classes enjoyed its beauty in some way. For this reason, the inter-class distinctions monarchial elites attempted to make through their goods seem flimsy. Although these objects distinguished regular aristocratic from monarchial elites, these distinctions were contradictory to those who enjoyed opulent *necessaire*. All eighteenth-century classes were involved in the world of *necessaire*, despite what monarchial elites conveyed. One of the most prominent groups that utilized *necessaire* in the eighteenth-century were servants.

The relationship between masters and servants in eighteenth-century Europe is extremely under researched. Servants are among the class of illiterate groups history often ignores. Even when historians study lower classes, the lack of written sources impedes information-gathering about certain aspects of their lives. Histories of lower or middling people are usually labor

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<sup>56</sup> Michael Kwass, *The Consumer Revolution, 1650-1800*. Euro New Approaches to European History. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2022, 76.



history because business owners and noblemen sometimes kept meticulous accounts of the people they paid. However, historian Cissie Fairchilds believes domestic servants are often excluded from labor history because,

“Labor history... focused on the formation of the modern working class and its eventual emergence into class consciousness and political activity. Historians therefore tended to study artisans, day laborers, and other heroic precursors of the proletariat. Servants simply did not fit this mold. Their work was economically ‘unproductive’; their social attitudes were disappointingly deferential; and they rarely left the domestic sphere to take part in politics. Also, many of them were women, an automatic disincentive for study at a time when history was still largely ‘his story’.”<sup>57</sup>

Labor history is a relatively new field of historical study and is not without its issues. Historians like Fairchilds, however, are working to create histories on servants because they played such a large role in eighteenth-century family structures and society. Her work, *Domestic Enemies: Servants and Their Masters in Old Regime France* seeks to better understand the relationship between masters and servants of the eighteenth-century.

Aristocracy members employed many domestic servants, but they weren't all seen in the same regard. If they could afford one, noblemen had secretaries or *hommes de confiance* to manage their finances. The degree to which a noblemen trusted their secretaries was wide ranging: some noblemen left all monetary decision-making to their secretaries while others preferred to take a more active role in their finances.<sup>58</sup> Distrust of domestic servants was relatively common: in France, domestic servants were sometimes called ‘domestic enemies’ throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>59</sup> Secretaries might have faced less scrutiny than other domestic servants, though. Positions like *hommes de confiance* and tutors were seen as less degrading than other household positions. Most men in such positions preferred to be called

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<sup>57</sup> Cissie Fairchilds, *Domestic Enemies: Servants and Their Masters in Old Regime France*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019, 15.

<sup>58</sup> Fairchilds, 81.

<sup>59</sup> Fairchilds, 14.

'*domestique*' rather than '*serviteur*', a distinction between being a domestic worker and a servant.<sup>60</sup> These men did not see themselves on the same level as other domestic servants, but rather closer socially to their masters. Therefore, a secretary budgeting for a *necessaire* likely held their masters' possessions with less contempt than other domestic servants may have. Another class of servants held in relatively high regard were kitchen staff.

The kitchen staff at an estate could also be described as a '*domestique*' rather than '*serviteur*'. Food was an important status symbol in eighteenth-century Europe: when noblemen held parties, many felt compelled to showcase their wealth through extravagant food. Further, such parties may have eight course meals. So, high class nobility needed quality chefs who could make great quantities of food. By the nature of the job, the kitchen staff at a great estate needed a high level of culinary knowledge and skill. Therefore, kitchen staff, or *gens de bouche*, for grand estates were greatly admired.<sup>61</sup> Thus, they were not ignored when the aristocracy was traveling. When Marie Antoinette traveled from Vienna to Paris for her wedding, she did so with a precession of fifty-seven carriages; and the journey took two weeks.<sup>62</sup> Marie Antoinette did not simply go without a cook for those two weeks- and, it was not like she did not have enough carriages for one. It would be safe to say then, that a *gen de bouche* would have used the cooking items within her *necessaire*. The relationship between a *gen de bouche* and Marie Antoinette's *necessaire* is difficult to ascertain, though. Doubtlessly, Marie Antoinette's *necessaire* has more cooking devices than other *necessaire*. So it might be that a *gen de bouche* using Marie Antoinette's *necessaire* might have appreciated the number of cooking tools at their disposal. A body servant may have also appreciated the ease of use achieved in Antoinette's *necessaire*.

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<sup>60</sup> Fairchilds, 70.

<sup>61</sup> Fairchilds, 88.

<sup>62</sup>Fraser, 4.

Eighteenth-century noblemen were almost constantly surrounded by domestic servants; *Femmes* and *valets de chambre* were like modern-day personal assistants. They accompanied their master almost everywhere and performed various menial tasks: waking up, dressing, and generally taking care of their master. Such servants were likely the primary users of the various items within a *necessaire*, as the first servant a noblemen would call for. The grooming tools especially would have fallen under a body servant's task of getting their master ready for the day. Despite being the primary users of *necessaire*, their opinions on these objects would have been wide-ranging. While some *femmes* and *valets de chambre* were close friends with their masters, others considered their work humiliating.

One might think that the clear power and class distinctions between servant and master would impede close relationships, but *femmes* and *valets de chambre* typically accompanied their master everywhere. Sometimes they were called body servants because of their nearly constant presence alongside their master.<sup>63</sup> It would be exceedingly difficult to build a close relationship with someone that fills you with jealousy and anger. Therefore, body servants that were close to their masters likely didn't think much about the clear financial and social divides between them. Such body servants likely enjoyed using a *necessaire*, appreciated its convenience, and marveled at its beauty. But that was not the case for all body servants.

Not all body servants saw their job as a privilege. Taking care of a fully grown adult and indulging them in their frivolous noble lives was generally considered humiliating.<sup>64</sup> Therefore, a body servant handling an opulent *necessaire* might not have a deep love or appreciation for it, especially if they did not consider themselves especially close to their master. Although the job of a body servant may be demeaning, it was most certainly not the worst domestic job.

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<sup>63</sup> Fairchilds, 86.

<sup>64</sup> Fairchilds, 86.

There were clear class distinctions within domestic servitude. *Femmes* and *valets de chambre* gained respect because of their closeness to their master. *Gens de bouche* gained respect because of their skill. And secretaries gained respect from their literacy and responsibilities within finance. As such, these groups could be considered “The aristocracy of the servant world”. They were paid markedly more than other domestic servants and even had the pleasure of eating in a separate area from other domestic servants.<sup>65</sup> Since these domestic servants gained status from their profession, they likely had less criticisms of their master than more lowly domestic servants. One type of lowly domestic servant who would have used Marie Antoinette’s *necessaire* is a regular *servante*.

Although a *homme de confiance* planned to purchase an item, they rarely actually purchased it. A separate *servante* usually went to town to actually make purchases for aristocratic households. Despite being poorly treated compared to other domestic servants, *servante* usually saw the ability to purchase items for their masters as a privilege. This was especially true because they were sometimes able to profit from their trips to town. At a bakery, for example, the ‘baker’s dozen’ allowed for servants to give the first twelve loaves of bread to their masters and keep one.<sup>66</sup> A *servante* purchasing a *necessaire*, therefore, may even enjoy going to town to pick it up. In all, a servant’s opinion on the luxurious item they handled would have varied depending on how they interacted with the object and their relationship to their master. As would the respect these domestic servants received from their master. Undoubtedly, though, a craftsman participating in the creation of a *necessaire* would have felt a great deal of appreciation for their work.

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<sup>65</sup> Fairchilds, 94.

<sup>66</sup> Fairchilds, 83.

The pre-industrial European economy was almost unrecognizable by modern standards. Before factories, goods were typically made by skilled artisans. And these skilled artisans were typically members of a guild. These guilds were craft-specific: metalwork, furniture-making, and glass manufacturers all had their own guild. The goal of a guild was to standardize levels of craftsmanship and ensure only skilled workers were participating in their craft. Standards were implemented through masters, the owners of a shop who were skilled in all aspects of production. They oversaw apprentices and journeymen creating goods.<sup>67</sup> That means that for each type of product within a *necessaire*, at least two individuals worked to create each item: an artisan and his master. These individuals dedicated their lives to their craft. Unlike factory workers, who only specialize in one aspect of production, these artisans got to see their works at every stage. Therefore, the artisans creating a *necessaire* likely felt much appreciation for its beauty. In the case of Marie Antoinette's *necessaire*, the artisans very likely loved the objects they created.

The primary artisan for Marie Antoinette's *necessaire*, Jean-Pierre Charpenat, was a "court artisan". While not much is known about him individually, he was prominent luxury artisan, creating a multitude of opulent objects stored in the Louve. Such court artisans were specific to France: King Louis XVI had a system of luxury artisans at his disposal.<sup>68</sup> Historian Micheal Sturmer explores the history of luxury court artisans in his work, *An Economy of Delight: Court Artisans of the Eighteenth Century*. According to Sturmer, court artisans were created because King Louis XVI was sick of the inter-guild creation process for his goods.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> David Seth Raizman, *History of Modern Design*. 2nd ed. Upper Saddle River, N.J Pearson Prentice Hall, 2011, 23.

<sup>68</sup> James R Farr, *Artisans in Europe, 1300-1914*, Cambridge University Press, 2000, 79.

<sup>69</sup> Micheal Sturmer, "An Economy of Delight: Court Artisans of the Eighteenth Century." *Business History Review (Pre-1986)* 53, no. 4 (Winter 1979): <https://www.proquest.com/docview/205519356/citation/8D39B72154964BA9PQ/1>, 496.

Various guilds would need to coordinate the creation of items like *necessaire*. Without a "court artisan", Marie Antoinette's *necessaire* would likely need a porcelain artisan, a silversmith, a mahogany master, etc. Coordination between these separate guilds would be difficult, especially since the items needed to fit in specifically shaped nooks. Since, however, Jean-Pierre Charpenat was a "court artisan" he could oversee all artisans. And these "court artisans" fell outside the purview of guilds.

Jean-Pierre Charpenat most certainly loved his job. Micheal Sturmer considers court artisans to be "privileged artisans". One of the main purposes of a guild was to regulate the quality of goods. So, the furniture guild would have the certain standard of furniture quality they would expect. Court artisans, however, could make higher quality furniture. This competition greatly angered guild members.<sup>70</sup> The ability to create goods without much oversight was a luxury within eighteenth-century artisan culture. Another 'privileged' aspect of court artisans was their relationship to the king. The "guild master" among court artisans was the King.<sup>71</sup> Thus, Jean-Pierre Charpenat likely had a close relationship with King Louis XVI. As such, he likely loved creating Marie Antoinette's *necessaire*. But all classes of artisans were involved in the creation of her *necessaire*.

Not all goods within Marie Antoinette's *necessaire* would have been created by court artisans, though. Especially pre-industrialization, high-quality artisans of one specific trade often gathered in established areas. For example, eighteenth-century London was considered the center of glass production.<sup>72</sup> Practically, that meant most glass goods used in Europe had been imported from England. The English artisans creating the glass objects within Marie Antoinette's

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<sup>70</sup> Sturmer, 501.

<sup>71</sup> Sturmer, 503.

<sup>72</sup> Berg, 121.

*necessaire* were not amongst the privileged class of artisans. They likely enjoyed the beauty of their creations, nonetheless. In creating certain goods, however, raw materials had to be imported prior to production; that is the case with eighteenth-century ivory products.

Ivory was a highly coveted material in eighteenth-century Europe. The Dutch East India company had a virtual monopoly over elephant tusks from West Africa.<sup>73</sup> As such, Amsterdam was the “Center of bone craft”, processing ivory into a plethora of luxury items.<sup>74</sup> Some of the most popular ivory items were combs and knife handles.<sup>75</sup> This can be seen in multiple items within Marie Antoinette's *necessaire*: her travel mirror, as well as several knives and grooming tools have ivory handles. The ivory used to create these objects was most likely shipped from West Africa to Amsterdam. Then, once the pieces were created, they were likely fit into the *necessaire* in France. Since the British *necessaire* does not include ivory, it would be safe to say that not all high-class travelers could afford this lengthy process and ivory for their goods. Therefore, by using so much ivory within her *necessaire*, Marie Antoinette showcased her ability to ship her goods all over the world. This ability comes from her place on the very top of social status, even within nobility. As a member of the upmost class, Marie Antoinette imported many high value goods for her *necessaire*.

One of the most spectacular aspects of Marie Antoinettes *necessaire* is her porcelain traveling tea set. Porcelain tea sets were common items owned by eighteenth-century aristocratic society. The material only entered Europe in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, and only entered Northern Europe in the seventeenth century.<sup>76</sup> Therefore, it was a highly coveted material almost exclusively owned by nobility. Characteristically, Marie Antoinette's porcelain tea set is extremely beautiful.

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<sup>73</sup> Rijkelijhuizen, Marloes. “Whales, Walruses, and Elephants: Artisans in Ivory, Baleen, and Other Skeletal Materials in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Amsterdam”.

<sup>74</sup> Rijkelijhuizen.

<sup>75</sup> Rijkelijhuizen.

<sup>76</sup> Marchand, 6.

The pattern throughout the set has gold garlands with pink roses, gold top trimming, blue underlines, and gold MA monograms. Two people could enjoy this spectacular set, as there are two sets of teacups with matching saucers.<sup>77</sup> The matching tea pot is cylindrical shaped with a dainty handle that's thicker on the top to prevent burning, and a removable lid with a circular handle.<sup>78</sup> To sweeten the tea, a matching sugar pot is included with circular faux handles and a truncated cone shape.<sup>79</sup> That marks an end to the porcelain tea set, but there are still more porcelain items inside that will be described later as personal hygiene products. The tea set is especially important, because not all eighteenth-century travelers included porcelain tea sets in their *necessaire*.

Marie Antoinette's proficient use of porcelain within her *necessaire* was far from the norm. Since porcelain was so valuable, most nobility displayed their porcelain items, or only used them on very special occasions.<sup>80</sup> As the Queen of France, however, Marie Antoinette utilized her porcelain items daily. She even brought highly delicate porcelain on tumultuous journeys, which eighteenth-century travel most certainly was. Europe's roads during the eighteenth-century were still largely the roads created by the Roman Empire hundreds of years earlier.<sup>81</sup> Traveling in a carriage on a centuries old road was not smooth sailing. It's safe to say that most nobility did not travel with their porcelain for fear of it breaking on their journey. So, the inclusion of porcelain tea sets within a *necessaire* was unique to not just aristocracy, but the upper echelons of nobility. In this way, Marie Antoinette's almost unmatched status as Queen

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<sup>77</sup> Duke of Orléans, *tasse litron A*, 1775, porcelain, Louvre, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010210630>; Duke of Orléans, *tasse litron B*, 1775, porcelain, Louvre, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010211221>.

<sup>78</sup> Duke of Orléans, *théière*, 1775, porcelain, Louvre, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010211382>.

<sup>79</sup> Duke of Orléans, *pot à sucre*, 1775, porcelain, Louvre, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010211383>.

<sup>80</sup> Marchand, 18.

<sup>81</sup> Mead, 43.



markedly changed the items she owned. It also changed the number of things she brought on her journeys.

Just counting the number of items included in each *necessaire* would reveal the clear class distinctions between the owner of the British *necessaire* and Marie Antoinette. While Marie Antoinette's *necessaire* has 94 objects, the British *necessaire* has 20. Further, Marie Antoinette's *necessaire* has little open space compared to the British *necessaire*. Seemingly, the British *necessaire* has more open space because the owner would have many non-travel-specified objects they needed places for. Marie Antoinette, on the other hand, did not have to bring many of her everyday objects; she was able to have duplicates of almost everything. Not having to pack much of anything, since travel items would have stayed in a *necessaire* when not in use, is a comfortable luxury. The owner of the British *necessaire*, as a regular aristocrat, didn't seem to have that luxury. Although all *necessaires* were convenient, the degree of functionality differentiated monarchy from plain nobility. Interestingly, though, status was not always showcased through convenience thus.

Today, luxury is largely conflated with convenience; but this was not always the case. First class passengers of the 21<sup>st</sup> century get to board planes first, for instance; the convenience of stepping on and off a plane first is something money can buy. Before the eighteenth-century, though, ease of use for household and personal goods did not vary much. So, upper class Europeans could only showcase their status through making their basic goods more beautiful. In the words of historian Michael Kwass, "The discourses of (luxury) producers, traders, consumers, and commentators shifted from renaissance values of magnificence to enlightenment-era comfort<sup>82</sup>." During the renaissance, European society held art and grandeur in

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<sup>82</sup> Kwass, 113.

high regard. The enlightenment then brought new values of reason and practicality. This shift in values can be seen through shifts in luxury goods. Some historians, like Barbara Bettoni, describe this shift in terms of 'old' and 'new' luxury:

Old luxury objects', which were made using materials with high intrinsic value (gold, silver, precious stones), were distinguished by their exclusivity, luxury, excess and the fact that they could be shared only in elitist environments, like the courts. 'New luxury items' were characterized by their functionality, comfort, decorative value, variety, elegance, taste, affordability, and the strong innovative material context<sup>83</sup>

The eighteenth century marked a shift in consumer values from beauty and excess to convenience. So, convenience suddenly marked objects as luxurious. New consumer goods and changing discourses are common examples of this shift.

Shifts in European markets and language exemplify the shift in eighteenth-century luxury values. Fans, canes, snuffboxes, pocket watches, nail clippers, candle snuffers, retractable carriage steps all became fashionable 'convenience items' in eighteenth-century Europe.<sup>84</sup> Suddenly, a person's life could become easier through specific material objects, if they had enough money to purchase them. Etymologist Marie Odile-Bernez showcases this idea in her work, *Comfort, the Acceptable Face of Luxury* in which she argues that the very words 'comfort' and 'luxury' began conflating in the English language in the eighteenth century. Although they are separate terms, people began using the term 'comfortable' to describe luxurious items. Further, the very word 'comfort' entered the French language at this time.<sup>85</sup> As 'convenience items' entered French markets, people needed a word to denote the comfort they provided. The close relationship between comfort and luxury began in the eighteenth century, as shown through

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<sup>83</sup> Bert De Munck and Dries Lyna, *Concepts of Value in European Material Culture, 1500-1900*. 0 ed. Routledge, 2016, 172.

<sup>84</sup> Kwass, 115.

<sup>85</sup> Marie Odile-Bernez, "Comfort, the Acceptable Face of Luxury: An Eighteenth-Century Cultural Etymology: Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies." *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 14, no. 2 (Spring 2014), 1.

European discourses, material use, and language. Marie Antoinette's *necessaire*, with the convenience of not needing to pack anything, therefore, was a status symbol within high-class society. Her *necessaire* even includes popular 'convenience items'.

As the Queen of fashion, Marie Antoinette did not miss the trend in 'convenience items'. Towards the end of the eighteenth century<sup>86</sup> As part of the growing number of 'convenience products' in Europe, pocketknives provided a small, multi-use symbol of fashion and luxury. Thus, Marie Antoinette participated. Her *necessaire* includes three pocketknives while the British *necessaire* does not have any. While other European nobility may walk around with a pocketknife, Marie Antoinette had so many that multiple duplicates were stored in her *necessaire*. By participating in this fashion trend three times over, Marie Antoinette showcased her relatively higher status within noble circles. Moreover, this is not the only instance in which Marie Antoinette participated in fashion trends to differentiate herself from other noblemen.

Anyone who was anyone in the eighteenth century wanted their goods to be produced in France. Levant, Italy was typically the luxury mecca of Europe, but that changed with the consolidation of monarchical governments. Before the eighteenth century, Kings let their noblemen do most of the regional ruling; noblemen were rarely in contact with the crown or each other. Absolute monarchies of the eighteenth-century no longer trusted their noblemen, though. Noblemen were therefore physically brought closer to the monarchy. This phenomenon was most egregious in Versailles, where King Louis XVI housed 5,000 noblemen and their families.<sup>87</sup> Suddenly, noblemen were competing with one another and the crown. As a result, luxury good production skyrocketed in the eighteenth century. Since France specifically had so

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<sup>86</sup> Simon Moore, *Cutlery for the Table: A History of British Table and Pocket Cutlery*. Sheffield: Hallamshire, 1999, 222.

<sup>87</sup> Kwass, 40.

many noblemen looking to showcase their status through material goods, luxury good production shifted from Italy to closer to home.<sup>88</sup> Paris even got a luxury-good mall called the Palais de Justice where noble women were free to buy a range of fine products.<sup>89</sup> Therefore, the fact that a French craftsman created Marie Antoinette's *necessaire* is significant. The British *necessaire*, on the other hand, was produced in Britain. Both items were owned by members of the aristocracy, but the place of production places Marie Antoinette's as more luxurious, befitting for her higher social status. The aristocracy's lack of personal hygiene became very evident as they got closer together, too.

On a global history scale, Europeans are not known for their personal hygiene. For the Middle Ages up until the eighteenth century, soap was heavily taxed and therefore expensive. Full body washing was therefore rare, especially for the lower classes.<sup>90</sup> As such, high class individuals began using cleanliness as a class signifier, especially in the eighteenth century.<sup>91</sup> Since Marie Antoinette's *necessaire* is full of personal hygiene products, this trend is easy to see.

There are multiple porcelain personal hygiene items included in Marie Antoinette's *necessaire*. Two small cylindrical pots with gold circular handles on the lid, for instance, are *pot à pommade*. Various ointments and pomades are meant to go inside.<sup>92</sup> Other porcelain items included are a *Oeillère* and a *Crachoir*. The *Crachoir*, in English, is a spittoon or spit bucket.<sup>93</sup> Despite its gross intended use, Marie Antoinette's spittoon is quite beautiful: the top has a flat

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<sup>88</sup> Kwass, 43.

<sup>89</sup> Kwass, 80.

<sup>90</sup> Kirstin Olsen, *Daily Life in 18th-Century England / Kirstin Olsen*. Second edition. The Greenwood Press Daily Life through History Series. Santa Barbara, California: Greenwood, an imprint of ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2017, 59.

<sup>91</sup> Kwass, 120.

<sup>92</sup> Duke of Orléans, *pot à pommade* A, 1775, porcelain, Louvre, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010211359>; Duke of Orléans. *pot à pommade* B. 1775, porcelain, Louvre. <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010211380>.

<sup>93</sup> "The Hygienic Spittoon Question In France." *The British Medical Journal* 1, no. 2143 (1902): 223–223. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20271044>.

wide rim, leading to a bottom-heavy body connected to a medium-sized handle.<sup>94</sup> The *Oeillère* may be mistaken for an egg cup: a half oval resting upon a short pole connected to a small base.<sup>95</sup> But the *Oeillère* is an eyebath.<sup>96</sup> All three items were considered part of 'good hygiene' in the eighteenth century.

The *Oeillère* and *Crachoir* were both included in Marie Antoinette's *necessaire* as class signifiers. A spit bucket is far from a necessary part of personal hygiene today, but chewing tobacco was very popular in eighteenth-century Europe; so, people needed to spit. Since spitting was seen as 'uncivilized', it was customary to do so in a spittoon.<sup>97</sup> Seemingly, spitting without the use of a spittoon was too gross for high-class eighteenth-century Europeans. Since good hygiene was now part of being a high-class lady, Marie Antoinette could not have been seen as 'uncivilized' or gross. In this way, the inclusion of a spittoon is Marie Antoinette participating in the personal hygiene trend of eighteenth-century Europe. Since the British *necessaire* does not include a spittoon, the owner was not participating in this trend to the extent that Marie Antoinette was. That is especially true because of the porcelain eyebath included. Medical professions of the eighteenth-century recommended eyebaths as a remedy for any eye inflammation. As such, silver, porcelain, and glass eyebaths became popular elitist circles.<sup>98</sup> Thus marks yet another trend Marie Antoinette participated in within her *necessaire* that the owner of the British *necessaire* did not. Following such trends, when other elites could not, was

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<sup>94</sup> Duke of Orléans, *crachoir*, 1775, porcelain, Louvre, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010211381>.

<sup>95</sup> Duke of Orléans, *oeillère*, March 1775, porcelain, Louvre, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010211413>.

<sup>96</sup> Bill Bynum and Helen Bynum, "Silver Eye Bath." *The Lancet* 388, no. 10056 (October 29, 2016): 2107. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(16\)31926-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(16)31926-2).

<sup>97</sup> Michiel H. Bartels, "The Van Lidth de Jeude Family and the Waste from Their Privy: Material Culture of a Wealthy Family in 18th-Century Tiel, the Netherlands.", 40.

<sup>98</sup> Bynum.

an important way Marie Antoinette distinguished herself from other elites. Another trend Marie Antoinette participated in within her *necessaire* is chocolate.

Chocolate was a meaningful food trend in eighteenth century. While people in Mesoamerica have been enjoying chocolate since 2,000 BC, Europeans have only had chocolate since the seventeenth century. Traditionally, chocolate drinks were consumed cold. Spanish colonizers preferred the drink hot, though, so they spread hot chocolate throughout Europe upon their return.<sup>99</sup> Ever since, chocolate drinks have been considered a luxury because of the need to import beans and a difficult creation process. Firstly, the beans are difficult to cultivate; then they must be fermented, dried, winnowed, and roasted before being exported from Mesoamerica to Europe. Once in Europe, the beans must be processed into a ‘coco liquor’ then made into blocks.<sup>100</sup> That arduous process cemented hot chocolate as a symbol of eighteenth-century luxury, especially since Europeans still needed to use the chocolate blocks to make hot chocolate. The way most eighteenth-century Europeans made hot chocolate was through a *chocolaitere*. These items were used to aerate chocolate drinks.<sup>101</sup> Thankfully, Marie Antoinette was not without a *chocolaitere* whilst on her travels.

Marie Antoinette continuously partook in the eighteenth-century chocolate trend while other aristocrats could not. Her *necessaire* includes a typical eighteenth century *chocolaitere*. Silver in construction, her *chocolaitere* has a small hole on the lid so that the ebony *molinillo* or whisk could fit inside the vessel.<sup>102</sup> That way, one could mix a hot chocolate drink within the cup, creating little mess. Since the British *necessaire* does not include a *chocolaitere*, it would be

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<sup>99</sup> James Symonds, *Table Settings: The Material Culture and Social Context of Dining, AD 1700-1900*. Havertown, UNITED STATES: Oxbow Books, Limited, 2010, 35.

<sup>100</sup> Symonds, 36.

<sup>101</sup> Symonds, 38.

<sup>102</sup> Jean-Pierre Charpenat, *chocolatière*, March 1787, silver and ebony, Louvre, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010210613>; Lisa McDonald, “Video: Chocolate Pots—Serving Luxury in the 17th and 18th Centuries.” *Ceramic Tech Today* [BLOG], October 25, 2023.

safe to say that other noblemen did not consider *chocolaitere* to be a travel necessity. By perpetually participating in the chocolate trend, Marie Antoinette projected her status among other high-class travelers. Further, even if a nobleman without a *chocolaitere* in their *neccessaire* wanted to bring one along their journey, they would have likely packed their normal *chocolaitere*. Marie Antoinette, on the other hand, doubtless had a travel *chocolaitere* and an at-home *chocolaitere*. This would have been obvious when Marie Antoinette used her silver *chocolaitere*, since it matches the several other silver cooking tools included in her *neccessaire*. While not all noblemen considered a *chocolaitere* a necessity, Marie Antoinette did; and she was even able to have multiple, demonstrating the opulent lifestyle only the very top of nobility could enjoy. The absence of high-class items within the British *neccessaire* is not the only reason why it is markedly lower quality, though.

The very construction of the two *neccessaire* pins Marie Antoinette's as superior. Firstly, the wood within Marie Antoinette's *neccessaire* is mahogany while the British *neccessaire* is made of an indiscernible wood. Mahogany is stronger and more durable than most woods. As a result, however, the material is extremely heavy.<sup>103</sup> Since mahogany is native to the Caribbean, this added weight also made the material more expensive to ship to European markets.<sup>104</sup> That only made mahogany more desirable, though, as a status symbol. In *Mahogany: The Costs of Luxury in Early America*, historian Jennifer L. Anderson posits that mahogany became a status symbol in Europe because, "Its aesthetic qualities coincided with eighteenth-century Anglo concepts of beauty, gentility, refinement".<sup>105</sup> In the eighteenth century, mahogany was a symbol of enlightened values and expensive taste. Marie Antoinette's *neccessaire* was made of mahogany,

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<sup>103</sup> Jennifer L. Anderson, *Mahogany: The Costs of Luxury in Early America*. Cambridge, UNITED STATES: Harvard University Press, 2012, 10.

<sup>104</sup> Anderson, 27

<sup>105</sup> Anderson, 13.

making the item a status symbol to other eighteenth century travelers. In comparison, the British *necessaire* was just plain firewood. Although both items were used in a high-class context, Marie Antoinette pinned herself as objectively better than other noblemen through her objectively better *necessaire*. The use of such superior materials was far from practical, too.

The very weight of Marie Antoinette's *necessaire* firmly places it as a status symbol. When traveling, most people today try to 'pack light'; that was not possible for Marie Antoinette, as her *necessaire* weighs almost 50 kilograms empty. One of the reasons for the added weight on Marie Antoinette's *necessaire* is its mahogany construction. As stated, mahogany is an especially heavy wood. Since most aristocrats of the eighteenth century traveled primarily by wheeled carriage, the heavy weight of Marie-Antoinette's *necessaire* must have been a considerable challenge.<sup>106</sup> Marie Antoinette always had servants by her side to physically put her *necessaire* in her carriage, so what did she care? At almost half the size of Marie Antoinette's *necessaire*, it would be safe to say that the British *necessaire* weighs far less. Other aristocrats, as it seems, at least attempted to pack practically. Marie Antoinette purposefully used mahogany in her *necessaire*, despite its impracticality, because she wanted to distinguish herself from more pragmatic aristocrats. All *necessaire* at this time attempted to use status symbol materials, though.

The owner of the British *necessaire* attempted to use status symbol materials to no avail. One high value material used within the British *necessaire* is the pink silk. In the seventeenth century, silk was considered an "Expensive and exclusive fabric".<sup>107</sup> That was partially due to sumptuary legislation, though, which regulated the clothing lower classes could wear. As the

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<sup>106</sup> Mead, 32.

<sup>107</sup> Johanna Ilmakunnas and Jon Stobart, *A Taste for Luxury in Early Modern Europe: Display, Acquisition and Boundaries*. London, UNITED KINGDOM, 33.



incomes of middling households generally grew in the seventeenth century, and non-aristocratic people could suddenly afford formerly high-class goods, sumptuary laws were put into effect.<sup>108</sup> So many non-aristocratic people could afford silk that legislatures felt compelled to exclude them from purchasing it. Although the British *necessaire* includes a categorically luxury good, the effect is somewhat lost. It may be for that reason that Marie Antoinette's *necessaire* does not include any use of silk: yesterday's luxury material would not help solidify her untouchable status.

The biggest issue within history is ensuring truth behind statements. Historians are tasked with the impossible job of analyzing written texts which are always skewed. Perspectives, points of view, bias, knowledge, and inferences are hard to sift through. And these written texts only represent a portion of society: throughout much of European history, only the aristocracy had access to even grade-school level education, meaning only high-class people had the privilege of cementing themselves into popular history. To combat some of these issues, material history seeks to establish historical truths through the analysis of material goods. Such an approach to history allows us to study previously unrepresented groups. As such, much of material history focuses on the lower and middle classes. My analysis, however, focused on high class goods, *necessaire*.

*Necessaire* were exclusive, high-class goods. As a historical travel bag, only individuals accustomed to regular travel owned *necessaire*. Regular travel, in the eighteenth century, was reserved for high-class individuals. Despite being representative of an already extensively researched population, my analysis of eighteenth century *necessaire* led me to dispel a popular historical thought: that European society rarely used material goods as status symbols. Even

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<sup>108</sup> Ilmakunnas, 33

though all *necessaire* are high-class goods, there are extreme differences between the *necessaire* of the aristocracy and the *necessaire* of the monarch. The juxtaposition between Marie-Antoinette's *necessaire* and a typical eighteenth-century British *necessaire* showcases this.

Differences in social standing are clear to see by comparing the British *necessaire* to Marie Antoinette's. The use of ivory and mahogany within Marie Antoinette's *necessaire* clearly sets hers as higher quality. These materials were expensive, luxurious status symbols in the eighteenth century; using such materials in a *necessaire* was meant to showcase Marie-Antoinette's ability to acquire such materials in great quantities. Similarly, her porcelain tea set is far from a practical within a *necessaire*; her use of such an expensive, delicate material was a deliberate show. And, such displays of wealth could only be seen by other high-class eighteenth-century travelers, meaning Marie-Antoinette was distinguishing herself from other aristocracy rather than from other classes. Another way she did so was by participating in eighteenth century trends. Pocketknives, hot chocolate, and personal hygiene were popular trends at the time; thus, Marie Antoinette had to participate. Other nobility, like the owner of the British *necessaire*, may have participated in such trends but to a lesser degree. Perpetual participation in popular trends was one way Marie-Antoinette distinguished herself from other high-class trend participants. The British *necessaire* did attempt to participate in trends by using the popular material, silk. However, they were late to the game, and the use of such an outdated trend only solidified their lesser status. Aristocratic displays of wealth were extremely complex in the eighteenth century in this way.

Eighteenth century *necessaires* were clearly used as inter-class status symbols. Funnily enough, though, *necessaire* weren't inter-class goods, at least in use. Even though *necessaire* were used as a inter-class status tool for nobility, it was lower-class servants using and carrying them around. Further, middle-class craftsmen and journeymen put the work into creating these

high-class goods. So, although eighteenth century *necessaire* established inter-class distinctions, all classes could enjoy the beauty and splendor of such objects. It begs the question, then, how effective these inter-class distinctions were when class was not necessarily a barrier to *necessaire* enjoyment.

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