

## Maria de' Medici

**M**aria de' Medici (French Marie de Médicis) (April 26, 1573 - July 3, 1642) was Queen and later Regent of France.

Born in Florence, Italy, she was the daughter of Francis, Grand Duke of Tuscany. In October 1600 she married Henri IV of France, as his second wife. She brought as part of her dowry, 600,000 crowns. Her eldest son, the future king Louis XIII, was born at Fontainebleau the following year.

The marriage was not a successful one. The queen feuded with Henri's mistresses, in language that shocked French courtiers. During her husband's lifetime Marie showed little sign of political taste or ability. Hours after Henri's assassination in 1610 she was confirmed as Regent by the Parlement of Paris.



Not very bright, stubborn and growing obese, she was soon entirely under the influence of her unscrupulous Italian favourite, Concino Concini, who was created Marquis d'Ancre and Marshal of France. They dismissed Henri IV's able minister the duc de Sully. Through Concini and the Regent, Italian representatives of the Roman Catholic Church hoped to force the suppression of Protestantism in France. Half Hapsburg herself, she abandoned the traditional anti-Hapsburg French policy.

Throwing her support with Spain, she arranged the marriage of both the future king Louis and his sister Elizabeth to members of the Spanish Hapsburg royal family.

Under the regent's lax and capricious rule, the princes of the blood and the great nobles of the kingdom revolted, and the queen, too weak to assert her authority, consented (May 15, 1614) to buy off the discontented princes. The opposition was led by Henri de Bourbon-Condé, Duc D'Enghien, who pressured Marie into convoking the Estates General (1614-15), the last time they would meet in France until the opening events of the French Revolution.

**I**n 1616 her policy was strengthened by the accession to her councils of Richelieu, who had come to the fore at the meeting of the Estates General. However, in 1617 her son Louis XIII, already several years into his legal majority, asserted his authority, ordering the assassination of Concini, and exiling the Queen to the Chateau Blois and Richelieu to his bishopric.

After two years of virtual imprisonment "in the wilderness" as she put it, she escaped from Blois in the night of 21/22 February 1619 and became the figurehead of a new aristocratic revolt headed by Gaston d'Orleans, which Louis' forces easily dispersed.

Through the mediation of Richelieu the king was reconciled with his mother, who was allowed to hold a small court at Angers, and resumed her place in the royal council in 1621.

After the death of his favorite, the duke of Luynes, Louis turned increasingly for guidance to Richelieu. Marie de Medici's attempts to displace Richelieu ultimately led to her attempted coup; for a single day, the *journée des dupes*, November 12, 1630, she seemed to have succeeded; but the triumph of Richelieu was followed by her exile to Compiègne in 1630, from where she escaped to Brussels in 1631, and later to Cologne, where she died in 1642, scheming against Richelieu to the end.

Honoré de Balzac encapsulated the Romantic generation's negative view:

"Marie de' Medici, all of whose actions were prejudicial to France, has escaped the shame which

ought to cover her name. Marie de' Medici wasted the wealth amassed by Henri IV.; she never purged herself of the charge of having known of the king's assassination; her /intimate/ was d'Epernon, who did not ward off Ravailac's blow, and who was proved to have known the murderer personally for a long time.

Marie's conduct was such that she forced her son to banish her from France, where she was encouraging her other son, Gaston, to rebel; and the victory Richelieu at last won over her (on the Day of the Dupes) was due solely to the discovery the cardinal made, and imparted to Louis XIII., of secret documents relating to the death of Henri IV." (—Essay "Catherine de Medicis")