

Chapter 17 Primary Source Activity

The elaborate court of Louis XIV (textbook pages 428–429) seemed very foreign to Liselotte (Elisabeth Charlotte) von der Pfalz (1652–1722), a 19-year-old German princess who married the king's brother in 1671. Homesick for her own country, Liselotte wrote frequent letters home. This one is to her brother's wife. ♦ *As you read, think about how the nobility lived in this period. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

A Busy Day at the Sun King's Court

Versailles, 6 December 1682—

My dearest sister . . . Today I gave an audience to an envoy of Parma, thereafter I had to write a long letter to the Queen of Spain, and at eight I must go to see a new play with Madame la Dauphine. So I have only this hour to write, for tomorrow, right after the King's mass, I must go hunting with His Majesty and after the hunt it will be a bit late to write, for it is again *jour d'appartement*.

And so that Your Grace can understand what this is, . . . Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays are *jours d'appartement*. Then all the men of the court assemble in the King's antechamber and all the women meet at six in the Queen's room. Thereupon everyone goes to . . . a large room where there is music for those who want to dance. From there one goes to a room where the King's throne stands. There one finds various kinds of music, concerts, and singing. From there one goes into the bedchamber, where three tables for playing at cards are set up, one for the King, one for the Queen, and one for Monsieur [her husband]. From there one goes to a room that could be called a hall, where more than



twenty tables, covered with green velvet cloth with a gold fringe, have been put up for all kinds of games. From there one goes to a large antechamber containing the King's billiard table, and then to another room with four large tables for the collation, all kinds of things like fruit cakes and preserves. This looks just like the children's table on Christmas eve. . . .

After one is done with the collation, which is taken standing up, one goes back to the room with the many tables; now everyone sits down to a different game, and it is unbelievable how many varieties of games are being played: lansquenet, trictrac, picquet, l'hombre, chess. . . . When the King and Queen come into the room, no one gets up from the game. Those who do not play, like myself and a great many others, just stroll from room to room. . . this lasts from six until ten, when one goes to supper. But if I should now tell Your Grace how magnificently these rooms are furnished and what great quantity of silver dishes are in them, I should never finish.

Source: *A Woman's Life in the Court of the Sun King*, trans. Elborg Forster (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984).

ILLUSTRATION/PHOTO CREDIT: BETTMANN.

Questions to Think About

1. What were some of Liselotte's activities during a normal day at court?
2. How did the courtiers entertain themselves at the special *jours d'appartement*?
3. This letter was written when Liselotte had been at court for ten years. What do you think her attitudes toward the court are?
4. **Activity** Put yourself in the place of Liselotte, who at 19 was sent to live in a foreign country whose ways were strange to her. Think how you would feel in this situation and write a letter "home" about it.