

La Maison du Roi

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The Royal Household

Of Offices in general

In the French monarchy, the King possessed all power and authority. He did not exercise it all himself, but delegated it to various individuals. There were three forms of delegation: fief, office, commission.

- **Fief** — The fief was a permanent form of delegation, establishing a contract between the king and his vassal, with obligations on both sides. The fief was hereditary, and its transmission subject to a body of rules. The fief was a form of property. The fief, as a delegation of royal authority, dated to the very beginnings of the Middle Ages, and by the end of the Old Regime it existed as a delegation of public authority mainly in vestigial form, as a minor aspect of titles of nobility.
- **Commission** — At the opposite, a commission was an indefinite delegation that lasted only as long as the king's pleasure; it did not create any obligations on the part of the king, and could be revoked at any time; it was not a form of property. It was a modern form of delegation of authority, and was employed for those positions that most resemble modern functions (ministers, ambassadors, administrators of provinces).
- **Office** — The office fell somewhere in between. Originally office-holders served at the king's pleasure, but by the late 15th century their right to serve for life, subject to good behavior, had become established. Whether it was a form of property (and if so, whether it was moveable or immoveable, that is, real or personal property) was still debated by jurists at the end of the Old Regime. It was a dignity, a station in the hierarchy of society, that carried with it the exercise of public authority or power. It was used for the kinds of positions that emerged in the later part of the Middle Ages, more specialized than the earls or dukes of the High Middle Ages: those linked to justice, police, tax collection, and the king's household.

Composition of the Maison du Roi

The King's Household can be divided between the ecclesiastical part (priests and chapel, including, until 1761, performers of religious music) and the lay or civil part.

Maison Civile

The civil part took care of the king's needs in various ways:

- *la bouche*: food and wine (under the grand-maître or steward)
- *la chambre*: bedchamber (under the grand-chambellan or chamberlain)
- *la robe*: wardrobe (under the grand-maître de la garde-robe or master of the wardrobe)
- *la faculté*: health
- *le cabinet*: reading, writing, books

- *la musique*: musical entertainment
- *garde-meuble*
- *menus plaisirs*
- *c+¬r+¬monies*: ceremonies
- *ogements de cour et suite*: lodging while travelling
- *+¬curie*: stables (under the grand-+¬cuyer or master of the horse)
- *v+¬nerie*: hunting (under the grand-veneur or master of the hounds)
- *B+ótiments*: the royal buildings

Positions

1. *le Grand Ma+«tre* —The lay part of the household was headed by the Grand Ma+«tre de France (High Stewart or Master of the Household). His insignia is a staff of gilded silver ending in a crown-shaped ornament. — 1740-90: Louis Joseph de Bourbon, prince de Cond+¬ (1736-1818)
2. *Premier Ma+«tre d'h+|tel* (Master of the Household) — runs the seven departments under the *grand ma+«tre*. He brings the king's *bouillon* in the morning and takes the orders relative to meals for the day, handing him his napkin after taking communion at mass. When unavailable, he is replaced by the *Ma+«tre d'h+|tel ordinaire*.
3. *ma+«tres d'h+|tel par quartier* and 36 *gentilshommes* servants

Maison Eccl+¬sastique

The ecclesiastical part of the Household was headed by the *Grand Aum+|nier de France* (Great Almoner), the highest ecclesiastical honor in France, and considered by some as one of the Great Officers of the Crown.

1. *Grand Aum+|nier de France* (the Great Almoner) —The Grand Aum+|nier was originally the cleric in charge of administering the king's alms, as his name indicates. Around 1550 he acquired the functions previously held by the arch-chaplain, and became head of the ecclesiastical part of the king's household. — He was the pastor of the king and the bishop of the court, wherever it might be located. He could be present for the king's morning and evening prayers, and at the king's meals for saying grace. He gave the king the sacraments, baptized his children, married the royal princes, held the Gospels for the king whenever he took a solemn oath, dispatched the oaths of loyalty to the king of all bishops. — Among his privileges were: membership ex officio in the Order of the Saint-Esprit, administration of the hospital called Quinze-Vingts in Paris (until 1671 he also supervised all leprosy houses and other hospitals), and until 1621 supervision of all abbeys and convents in France. At the king's death he received the silverware of the king's chapel. — He receives 1200L in gages, a 1200L pension, 6000L plat et livr+¬e, 6000L as member of the Order of the Saint-Esprit.
2. *Premier aum+|nier* (the First Almoner) — Performing most of the duties of the Great Almoner, he receives 1200L in gages, 3000L pension, 6000L plate et livr+¬e.
3. *ma+«tre de l'oratoire* (Master of the Oratory) — The position was created in 1523 by Fran+°ois Ier to head the chaplains of the Oratory (see below). His powers were transferred in 1671 to the Great Almoner, but the position survived. He received 120 livres + 3600 livres pour ses liveries and his bouche +á cour (bouche of court, an allowance given to officers required to live at court).
4. *Confesseur du Roi* (King's Confessor)
5. *Pr+¬dicateur du Roi* (King's Preacher)
6. The rest of the clerical household consisted of *aum+|niers*, *chapelains* (chaplains) and *clercs de*

chapelle (chapel clerics).

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