

‘...but the Vatican says no!’ by Ezio Pasero. The book is about Luzius Russel, a Swiss lumberjack who claims to be heir to the French throne – he is allegedly a descendant of Louis XVII, the son of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette.

Here is a translation of the main passages into German:

...but the Vatican says no!

Part 1

Is a Swiss woodcutter, Luzius Russel, the heir to the King of France? Witness statements in his possession and documents confirming his story state: Il Delfino [the heir to the throne] did not die as a child in the Temple prison during the French Revolution, but was rescued in dramatic circumstances and taken to England. There he began a quiet life as an ordinary man. He married and had children. The story has come down to our time mainly through an elderly gentleman who died a few years ago: Dr Moritz Isenschmid. He claimed that Russel was in fact the rightful heir to the French throne.

But the Vatican says no.

According to Russel, a secret will belonging to the Dauphin’s sister, Maria Theresia Carlotta, is said to be kept in the Vatican, which confirms his version of events. She died in 1951. But not only has the Holy See never admitted to the existence of such a document, it has also refused for years to grant Russel even an audience with the Pope, let alone hand over the evidence allegedly held in the Vatican.

And yet there are many claims that contradict the statements coming from the Holy See...

1795 – A child dies in the Temple prison, but another manages to escape

What would happen if Luzius Russel were recognised and actually had every right to lay claim to the French throne? Twenty years ago, one might have said: nothing. Today, when the Church’s intrigues no longer even stop at the principles of the Church itself, anything is possible.

Isenschmid has been requesting an audience with the Pope for years – to no avail. He is calling for a serious investigation. The response he has received to this day is: ‘There is nothing to investigate. The story is clear.’

1979 – A woodcutter searches for his crown in the Vatican

Luzius Russel is Swiss and leads a secluded life. He claims to be a direct descendant of Franz Russel, who died in 1834. This Franz Russel, in turn, is said to have been the son of Louis XVII – the child who, according to official historical accounts, died in the Temple Prison in 1795.

According to Isenschmid, dozens of documents prove that the Dauphin was rescued and came to Switzerland under the name Franz Russel. The Vatican is said to possess evidence, but refuses to comment.

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Dr Isenschmid: "Perhaps I was a little mistaken. I don't know whether the story is true. But I know for certain that no one from the Vatican has ever told me: 'That's not true.' I was promised evidence. But I was never shown anything."

In brief:

A Swiss man named Luzius Russel claims to be the last heir of the French House of Bourbon. Louis Charles, the son of Louis XVI, is said not to have died in prison in 1795, but to have been rescued. As proof, there is reportedly a secret will in the Vatican. The Vatican denies everything and refuses to provide any information.

The text has a rather conspiratorial tone and is based on research carried out by the journalist Ezio Pasero in 1979.

1795 – A child dies in prison

At the Russian court, Tsarina Augusta recounts what has happened to Tsar Nicholas I, her husband, in the presence of Count Smirnov, Governor of Saint Petersburg, Countess Smirnov, Lady-in-Waiting, and a chamberlain. 'I shall tell you,' replied Nicholas, 'what my brother Alexander told me...' And the Tsar recounted his visit to Joséphine:

"It was I," said Joséphine, "who, in agreement with Barras, rescued the Dauphin from the Temple, thanks to my young servant, who was from Martinique and had been appointed guard of the Temple through my influence... Barras replaced the Dauphin with a mute, sickly and pockmarked child in order to avoid any trouble with the revolutionary committees. The Dauphin was held captive for four years in the tower of the Château de Vincennes."

This is a witness statement that is not corroborated anywhere else, as there are no other witness accounts. Such as that of Morel de Saint Didier from 1854, who recounts what his mother saw. On page 137 it reads:

"At that time, there was a secret agent of the Austrian court in Paris, the Count de la Mark, who was tasked with monitoring the fate of the prisoners in the Temple. He received the account of the escape and, before taking it to Vienna, showed it to several people, including Mrs Morel de Saint-Didier."

And on the same page is the statement by Mr Brémont from 1837: "One of my friends was Mr Pellenc, former secretary to Mirabeau, whom His Excellency Mr Thugut employed as his private secretary in 1795. He told me that he had held this document in his hands, in that minister's office. It was a record of the abduction of the young Dauphin from the Temple."

Incidentally, there are numerous historians, even in more recent times, who attest to the escape and survival of Louis XVI's son and provide evidence and witness statements. Here are a few brief examples, as we look back in time and come across unambiguous titles, even if they may sound melodramatic, almost operetta-like, today:

'The Divine Tragedy of Louis XVII', Dr Fontbrune, Paris 1949: 'What revelations did the Duchess of Angoulême, Madame Royale, daughter of Louis XVI, who died at the age of seventy-three in Vienna after three

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consecutive periods of exile totalling forty years, in her famous will, much to the surprise of posterity? A secret will, which is said to still be in the Vatican and which she handed over to the papal nuncio, Monsignor Viale, to be opened only a hundred years later – a period that expressly expires on 19 October 1951...”

‘The Lost King (Louis XVII Rediscovered)’, subtitle: ‘Unpublished Memoirs of the Count of Vaiso (1780–1873)’, Octave Aubry, Paris 1924: ‘The account which we are presenting to the public, thanks to the kindness of Mr B... and his awareness of the duties that the heir to a weighty secret owes to history, sheds light on...’

Simon and the Double Game

Simon even took him up to the tower to get some fresh air. But other contemporary witnesses dispute that the cobbler was really some sort of torturer. They add that his wife, in any case, took conscientious care of the Dauphin, frequently gave him baths and paid particular attention to the cleanliness of his clothes and his diet.

There is, in fact, a more intriguing hypothesis regarding the origin of Simon’s misfortune, with some viewing him as the protagonist of a full-blown double-dealing scheme in favour of the monarchists. Certain measures taken against him – which became increasingly severe towards the end of his assignment – would prove that his duplicity had been discovered, or at least suspected.

‘He is no longer permitted to go down to the garden, except under the supervision of a municipal commissioner,’ state the documents held in the French National Archives and cited in an extensive study

King Louis XVI and the Mystery of the Temple, published by Lenôtre in Paris in 1921. “Shortly afterwards, he was refused a pass to move about outside the Temple and return at will. One day, when he expressed a wish to go home to fetch a few belongings, he was granted permission, but on condition that he be accompanied by two commissioners. Finally, when, on 27 December 1793, he requested permission to attend the celebrations to be held to mark the capture of Toulon, his request was refused.”

Over time, the jailer’s freedom of movement is not much greater than that of the prisoner. “His comings and goings,” claims Louis Hastier (“The Double Death of Louis XVII”, January 1951), “are so closely monitored that he has the greatest difficulty in communicating with the royalist leaders: the Spanish government’s secret agent explains this in no uncertain terms.”

The opportunity to remove the Dauphin from Simon’s care without causing a stir – for the cobbler already enjoyed a reputation as an outstanding Republican and a brave patriot – arose on 2 January 1794 thanks to a law that had been passed a month earlier but had remained a dead letter until then. It prohibited anyone holding an elected office from occupying a government post. And Simon found himself in precisely this situation, as he was a member of the General Council of the Paris Commune and, at the same time, a guard at the Temple Prison.

On 2 January itself, a motion was tabled calling for the immediate application of the law

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demanded. And the following day, the General Council ordered, with surprising haste, that all members of the Assembly who held a position that required them to be absent during sitting hours were obliged to choose between the two duties.

The **Moniteur**, the official organ of the Revolutionary Government, lists a series of resignations: Coru steps down from his post as treasurer at the Temple; Lamiral resigns from his position at the Post Office; Véron and Legrand each resign from their posts as justice of the peace and registrar respectively. And on 5 January: 'in order to retain the post', the newspaper reports, 'which the trust of the people has bestowed upon him.'

The changing of the guard – or: is there no one left?

Shortly afterwards, as Louis Hastier emphasises in the work already cited, the General Council, in an apparent contradiction, appoints five of its members – including Coru and Véron, who nevertheless remain part of the Council – as regularly paid registrars. The sole victim, all too obviously, is therefore Simon.

How will they replace him? This is a very interesting detail, for the General Council, after consulting the Welfare Committee and the General Security Committee – which have declared their willingness to comply with the Paris City Council – decides not to replace him at all.

The **Moniteur** also reports that 'the committee considers special supervision unnecessary: four commissioners taking turns to visit the prison are sufficient.' A sudden lack of interest that is, to say the least, surprising: perhaps because there is no one important left to keep an eye on?

In any case, as mentioned, Simon's resignations date from 5 January: angered by the move he had been forced to make, the guard left immediately with his wife and did not return to the tower until the 19th to collect his belongings. As for the General Council's decision to appoint four commissioners, this was taken on 16 January.

This means that the Dauphin would have remained unguarded for about two weeks. As we learn from the **Moniteur** of 19 January, each of the commissioners was then permitted to show their face at the Temple only 'once every forty days'. Is any further evidence really needed to convince oneself that the son of Louis XVI was no longer a prisoner during those days?

The one person who has no doubts – as I said – is Marie-Jeanne Aladame, widow of Simon: she stands by the account of the escape, against all odds, despite the threats and attempts – all in vain – to portray her as a liar, a visionary, or even as mad.

According to the woman, the Dauphin was taken out of the Temple in a basket of dirty laundry and carted away. Did she organise this herself? This is a detail for which there is no confirmation, even though the authors report what the widow Simon is said to have confided to a nun who cared for her at the Hospice for the Incurables: Namely, that when the guards wanted to inspect the contents of the cart, she herself had stood up and rebuked them, saying that it was her dirty laundry and they should let it pass without making a fuss.

According to the woman, a sickly, indeed even deaf-mute child had been brought

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brought into the prison, intended to take the place of the Dauphin whilst his distracted jailers were distracted.

What does Part 2 tell us?

The text cites further 'evidence' and witness statements intended to support the escape theory:

1. The Russian imperial family: Nicholas I is said to have recounted that Joséphine de Beauharnais, together with Barras, swapped the Dauphin for a mute, sickly child.
2. Austrian spy: Count de la Mark is said to have seen a record of the escape.
3. Secret will in the Vatican: Madame Royale is said to have arranged for a document revealing the truth to be released 100 years after her death – deadline: 19 October 1951.
4. Simon as a double agent: The shoemaker Simon was allegedly a royalist and helped with the escape. That is why he was dismissed.
5. No guards: Following Simon's dismissal, there were no guards for two weeks, and thereafter checks were carried out only every 40 days – an indication that the real Dauphin had already left.
6. Statement by the widow Simon: She maintained, right up into her old age, that the Dauphin had been smuggled out of the Temple in a laundry basket.

1795 – A child dies in prison

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Witnesses to the escape: the Russian court and the secret protocol

At the Russian court, Tsarina Augusta, in the presence of Count Smirnov, Governor of St Petersburg, Countess Smirnov, Lady-in-Waiting, and a chamberlain, asked Tsar Nicholas I, her husband, what he thought of the matter. "I shall tell you," replied Nicholas, "what my brother Alexander has told me..." And the Tsar recounted what Joséphine had confided in him:

"It was I," said Joséphine, "who, in agreement with Barras, rescued the Dauphin from the Temple, thanks to my young servant, who was from Martinique and had been appointed guard of the Temple through my influence... Barras replaced the Dauphin with a mute, sickly and pockmarked child in order to avoid any trouble with the revolutionary committees. The Dauphin was held captive for four years in the tower of the Château de Vincennes."

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And on the same page is a statement by Mr Brémont from 1837: "One of my friends was Mr Pellenc, former secretary to Mirabeau, whom His Excellency Mr Thugut employed as his private secretary in 1795. He told me that he had held this document in his hands in the office of this

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minister's office. It was a record of the abduction of the young Louis XVII from the Temple."

Historians and books attesting to the escape

Incidentally, there are numerous writers and historians, even in more recent times, who bear witness to the escape and survival of Louis XVI's son and provide evidence and eyewitness accounts. Here are a few brief examples, as we look back in time and come across unambiguous titles, even if they may sound melodramatic, almost operetta-like, today:

'The Divine Tragedy of Louis XVII', Dr Fontbrune, Paris 1949: 'What revelations did the Duchess of Angoulême, Madame Royale, daughter of Louis XVI – who died in Vienna at the age of seventy-three after three successive periods of exile lasting a total of forty years – seal in her famous will, to the great surprise of posterity? A secret will, which is said to still be held in the Vatican and which she entrusted to the papal nuncio, Monsignor Viale, to be opened only a hundred years later – a period that expressly expires on 19 October 1951..."

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Simon and the double-dealing: Was the cobbler a Royalist?

Simon took him up to the tower to get some fresh air. But other contemporary witnesses dispute the claim that the cobbler was in fact some sort of torturer. They add that his wife, in any case, looked after the Dauphin conscientiously, frequently gave him baths and took particular care to ensure his clothes were clean and that he was well fed.

There is, in fact, a more intriguing hypothesis regarding the origin of Simon's misfortune, with some viewing him as the protagonist of a full-blown double-cross in favour of the monarchists. Certain measures taken against him – which became increasingly severe towards the end of his assignment – are said to prove that his duplicity had been discovered, or at least suspected.

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King Louis XVI and the Mystery of the Temple, published by Lenôtre in Paris in 1921. "Shortly afterwards, he was refused a pass to move about outside the Temple and return at will..."

The widow Simon: 'The Dauphin was saved in a laundry basket'

The one person who has no doubts – as mentioned – is Marie-Jeanne Aladame, widow of Simon: she stands by the account of the escape, against all odds, despite the threats and attempts – all to no avail – to portray her as a liar, a visionary, or even as mad.

According to the woman, the Dauphin had been taken out of the Temple in a basket of dirty laundry and carted away. When the guards tried to check the contents of the cart, she stood up and

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rebuked them, saying that it was her dirty laundry and that they should let her through without making a fuss.

Using the same method, the woman claimed, a sickly, indeed even deaf-mute child had been brought into the prison, intended to take the Dauphin's place whilst the prison guards' attention was diverted.

In her 1816 interrogation by the police, at the age of 71, as recorded in the minutes held in the French National Archives, she stated:

"Simon's widow explains that the young and unfortunate son of Louis XVI was in good health when he left the Temple fortress, and that whilst she was looking after him, he had been severely afflicted by a worm infection, from which he later recovered well. She says his features are so etched in her heart that she would recognise him if he were to appear before her. He had an indelible scar at the base of his left jaw, caused by the bite of a white rabbit which the prince had been rearing whilst he was living in the Tuileries Palace. She is absolutely convinced that the young prince did not die in the Temple Tower, as was announced at the time, and that this conviction runs so deep that nothing could dissuade her from it..."

The trail leads to Switzerland: St Antönien and the stranger Franz Joseph Russel

Isenschmid is searching for evidence in St. Antönien in the canton of Graubünden. It is said that the Dauphin was naturalised there as Franz Joseph Russel. The trail leads to Anton Theophil von Sprecher from Maienfeld, a bank director. He is a descendant of one of Russel's godparent families.

However: The famous 'Register of Secrets' from St Antönien, which is passed down from father to son in a prominent family, cannot be found. The narrator says: 'I don't know, I don't think so. I'd have to search through the family papers, do some research, but I don't have the time. Write to me, tell me exactly what you're looking for, and I'll see if I can provide you with any information.' But nothing more was ever heard of it.

Conclusion of Part 3:

The text gathers further evidence: witness statements from the Russian court, secret minutes in Vienna, books on Madame Royale's will in the Vatican, Simon's suspicious dismissal and, above all, the detailed testimony of Simon's widow. The trail ends in St Antönien, where the Dauphin is said to have lived as 'Franz Joseph Russel' – yet the crucial documents remain missing.

With pleasure! Here is the translation of [Il_vaticano_dice_no_4Teil.pdf](#) – the final part of Ezio Pasero's article.

...but the Vatican says no! Part 4

1851 – The will of Madame Royale

Circumstances have changed. The fifty years to which the will refers would have been completed in 1936 (1886–1936). The First World War broke out in 1914. In 1917, following the failure of the peace negotiations, the defeat of the Austrian monarchy was becoming apparent. So the only option left for the official in charge at the Imperial Court in Vienna was the Vatican – an absolutely

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neutral, secure and discreet place – as the repository for the ‘papers’.

All the more so as I was informed that, around 1950, a letter from America was received by His Eminence Cardinal Mercati, stating that a Prince of Parma had deposited ‘documents’ at the Vatican concerning the Duchess of Angoulême (aunt of the Countess of Chambord).

With regard to this very interesting letter, the Countess of Chambord stipulated in her will that significant bequests should be left to her nephew Robert, Duke of Parma (clause 7 of the will). As Dr Isenschmid discovered a document in Italian in the archives of Frohsdorf Castle a few days ago, referring to a cash deposit made following Italy’s declaration of war, there is a strong possibility that, for security reasons, a cash deposit was entrusted to the Vatican before the ‘documents’ were deposited.

As the Count of Chambord is my uncle, I feel obliged, following my brother’s death as heiress to Frohsdorf Castle, to humbly request Your Holiness to have the matter set out above examined by Your Holiness’s Secretariat and by His Eminence Cardinal Canali, President of the Vatican’s Financial Administration:

Should this enquiry yield a favourable result, I would take the liberty of asking Your Holiness to have my authorised representatives informed accordingly: Dr Moritz Isenschmid, Schötz, Canton of Lucerne, Switzerland, and University Professor Dr Erenbert Schächer, O.S.B., Salzburg, both of whom enjoy my full confidence.

Your Holiness would be so kind as to send me the relevant reply via Switzerland through my authorised representative, Dr Moritz Isenschmid.

Humbly prostrate at Your Holiness’s feet, I ask, with a heart full of gratitude, for the Apostolic Blessing and assure Your Holiness of my most respectful submission.

Frohsdorf, 16 December 1954.
Beatrix de Bourbon Massimo

The Vatican’s response? Arrogant silence.

Although somewhat convoluted in places, Princess Massimo’s request to the Pope is, in other respects, crystal clear and well-documented: her aunt left behind money and documents which must have ended up in the Vatican. Excuse me, Holy Father, would you mind having someone look into this?

But she will never receive a reply, neither positive nor negative: her letter will, quite simply, be arrogantly ignored.

What is the whole article trying to tell us?

All four parts together make up the story: Luzius Russel from Switzerland is said to be the last Bourbon heir. The Dauphin Louis Charles allegedly did not die in the Temple in 1795, but was rescued and came to St. Antönien in Graubünden.

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The evidence?

1. A secret will by Madame Royale, which has been held in the Vatican since 1951 and was to be opened 100 years after her death.
2. Letters in the Vatican Archives exchanged between the Count of Chambord and the Pope – but two letters are missing.
3. Witness statements: Mrs Simon, Joséphine de Beauharnais, the Russian Tsar, Austrian spies.
4. Traces in Switzerland: naturalisation in St. Antönien, a missing register, the name 'Franz Joseph' – like the Habsburg emperors.

And the Vatican? Remains silent. Despite letters from Isenschmid and Princess Beatrix Massimo. No 'yes', no 'no' – just silence.

In 1979, the journalist Ezio Pasero concluded: Either the story is true and the Vatican is covering it up, or it is all made up – but in that case, the Vatican could simply deny it. Why doesn't it?

...but the Vatican says no! Part 5

The trail to St Antönien: The missing secret register

The documents can only be accessed by opening the bricked-up chamber – except during major renovation work on the church. As a rule, there is a register listing the documents stored there, which is passed down from father to son in one of the village's prominent families. But this is a rule that is being broken more and more often; even these old mountain traditions are now struggling to survive.

And you won't find it in St. Antönien. An old man in the village who knows everything, Hans Flutsch, says it might belong to a certain Anton Theophil von Sprecher, who lives in Maienfeld – further down the valley – and is a bank manager.

Sprecher is descended from a family that were among the godparents. In terms of rank, just like Joseph Franz: "Who, oh, is in that famous secret register of St Antönien? Oh, I don't know, I don't think so. I'd have to look through the family papers, do some research, but I don't have the time. Write to me, tell me exactly what you're looking for, and I'll see if I can provide you with any information."

But nothing more was ever heard from him.

Who knows whether the vicissitudes of Russel's life are recorded here in the Campanile? Who knows whether there is any document, any record, any written agreement stating how this stranger managed to obtain naturalisation – there were no recommendations: he would not have been accepted so easily on his own.

Once again, Moritz Isenschmid has had no luck.

Franz Joseph Russel: Who was the stranger from St. Antönien?

Karl von Bourbon, son of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, Dauphin of France. He changes his adopted name – that of the mountain people – and, depending on the occasion, even adopts a Swiss one. The latter, however, is not a common German surname, certainly not in the canton of Graubünden.

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As for the two first names, they may well have been chosen at random. But what a coincidence: they are precisely those of two emperors – namely Joseph's maternal grandfather and his first cousin, Joseph I, who ascended the imperial throne in 1790 and reigned for 43 years.

There are strange, inexplicable circumstances that only the Vatican could clarify once and for all. It is said to be a young man of about twenty-five, this unknown stranger who descends from the mountains marking the border with Austria.

When will he arrive? No one knows for certain, but apparently some time before he is granted citizenship by the St Antönien local council: a few months, perhaps a year. The age fits perfectly: the Dauphin was ten years old in 1795, the year of his alleged death.

1851 – The Will of Madame Royale

The circumstances have changed. The fifty years to which the will refers would have expired in 1936 (1886–1936). The First World War broke out in 1914 and, in 1917, following the failure of the peace talks, foreshadowed the defeat of the Austrian monarchy.

Thus, for the official in charge at the Imperial Court in Vienna, the only option left was the Vatican – an absolutely neutral, secure and discreet location – as a place to store the 'papers'.

All the more so as I was informed that, around 1950, a letter from America was received by His Eminence Cardinal Mercati, stating that a Prince of Parma had deposited 'documents' at the Vatican concerning the Duchess of Angoulême (aunt of the Countess of Chambord).

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The conclusion of the article: Silence in the Vatican

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Madame Royale's will: what does it contain?

The Duchess, who knew of her brother's illegitimate origins, would always have opposed his recognition in order to block his path to the throne. That, of course, is the interpretation put forward by the heirs of the watchmaker Naundorff.

But it is equally possible that the Duchess's will contains a solemn refutation of her claims.

In any case, for this and other reasons, researchers are awaiting the opening of the will with a certain impatience. It is not even worth addressing the far-fetched interpretation put forward by Naundorff's heirs regarding the Dauphin's true paternity.

It is much simpler: the Duchess of Angoulême did not recognise Naundorff as her brother because she knew full well that he was not her brother.

It is important to note that Naundorff's heirs are also aware of the existence of a secret will, even though the article in the **Messaggero** makes no mention of the fact that it has been in the Vatican for a long time now.

The Duchess of Angoulême wrote this will shortly before her death, which occurred on 19 October 1851. She wrote and handed it over – or perhaps even dictated it – to her confessor, the Apostolic Nuncio Monsignor Michele Viale Prelà, who held the post of Apostolic Nuncio to Austria from 1845 to 1856.

The instruction, as we now know, was that the seal on these secret dispositions was not to be broken until one hundred years after her death.

But there is also a proper will: and in this will, Madame Royale, a widow with no children, names her nephew, the Count of Chambord – the son of her husband's brother – as her sole heir.

The Count of Chambord is thus bequeathed Frohsdorf Castle, twelve kilometres from Vienna, where Madame Royale lived. And it was in this castle that the secret will was written; and it is always from this castle that the clues and evidence emerge as to its existence and the fact that the document must be in the Vatican.

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Overall summary of all 5 parts:

The article tells the story of Luzius Russel / Franz Joseph Russel, who, as the Dauphin Louis Charles, is said not to have died in the Temple in 1795, but to have fled to St Antönien in Graubünden. Dr Moritz Isenschmid has been searching for evidence for decades: wills in the Vatican, letters, church registers.

All clues point to the Vatican – but it remains silent. Neither to Isenschmid nor to Princess Beatrix Massimo, who made an official enquiry in 1954. The 1979 article ends with an open question: Is the story true? If so, the Vatican is covering it up. Is it false? Then the Vatican could deny it in a single sentence. Why doesn't it?

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The crown of Louis XVI is in the Vatican

The fact is: the estates must also contain details of the bequests, with the relevant references to the identity of the persons concerned. Therefore, the reason for refusal mentioned above seems all the more unjustified and incomprehensible, as it not only nullifies credible claims but also makes it impossible for the descendants of Franz Joseph Russel to prove their own high status.

As things stand, in light of these facts and considerations, diplomatic intervention by the Swiss authorities with the Vatican seems necessary regarding the fate and publication of this important will.

This is all the more so given that the descendants of Franz Joseph Russel constitute a considerable number of Swiss citizens who are represented in the relevant bodies of the Federal Government.

There is indecision; there is hesitation – in practice, the Swiss are exercising caution so as not to disrupt diplomatic relations with the Vatican. And, above all, so as not to jeopardise their own financial interests in an inheritance that has been lying dormant for forty years.

For reasons of state and commercial interests, then, Isenschmid – in the name of reason – refrained from allowing Luzius Russel, when he was abandoned by the Swiss authorities at the time, to lose his head: he no longer knew whom to turn to.

On 28 March, he wrote a letter to the Vatican's Secretary of State:

"Your Eminence Reyma, please allow me to address Your Eminence once more with a matter of great and delicate importance, concerning a person linked to the Holy Testament of Louis XVII. In view of the fact that I wish to present this text to the Holy Father, for reasons of conscience."

The Secretary of State did not even reply – it is truly astonishing.

On 28 May, Isenschmid wrote to the Secretary of State once more, quoting directly from an article published by a Swiss newspaper:

"Please forgive me, Your Eminence, for addressing you on an urgent and very serious matter which could cause a major scandal for the Holy See. The attached text entitled..."

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The Vatican remains silent. Forever?

In 1977, Isenschmid expressed his concern because, three days earlier, Monsignor Marchioni had told him that he had received instructions from the Secretariat of State to cease dealing with the matter of the Dauphin altogether.

He then requests an audience with the Pope himself.

“But there are facts,” he adds, “which, for reasons of conscience, I can only communicate to the Holy Father.”

The Secretary of State does not even reply – it is truly astonishing by now.

The final stand: 1977–1978

Isenschmid does not give up. He writes to the bishops of Chur, Solothurn and Fribourg. Then, on two occasions, to the Apostolic Nuncio in Bern: he is left in the lurch.

Next, he writes to the Secretary of State: the letter, dated 28 March 1977, is moving. Isenschmid expresses his concern because the Nuncio had told him that he had been instructed by the Secretariat of State to cease dealing with the matter.

In the end, only the Pope remains. But Paul VI dies in 1978. John Paul I reigns for just 33 days – not long enough to deal with it.

John Paul II is elected. Isenschmid writes immediately: December 1978. No reply.

He tries his luck via a Swiss prelate, Don Dziwisz, the Pope’s private secretary. Don Dziwisz does not hesitate for a moment. He promises to inform the Pope. Isenschmid is to ring on Friday, 14 December, at 11 am.

He could hardly believe his ears: after such speed and all that effort – was it a dream?

Or is it just a nightmare, a cruel joke? Unfortunately, it is a joke: the cruelest, almost fatal one. Isenschmid is on the phone, but he is told that the Pope is unwell.

The final audience: a farce

Isenschmid does not give up. He travels to Rome, trusting in God. At the hotel, a few days later, he receives a note setting the date for his audience with the Pope in the coming days.

Is this the right appointment, or is it a joke? Quite simply: a disappointment. The audience is, in fact, not a private audience at all, but one of those collective audiences, just like the one he’d had many years earlier with John XXIII, to no avail.

No sooner had he arrived at the Vatican than he was ushered into the audience chamber along with dozens of members of the diplomatic corps. Moreover, the Master of Ceremonies glanced at Isenschmid’s invitation with a grimace and told him to take a seat right at the back: *‘There are many guests here more important than you.’*

The meeting lasts only a few minutes. The Pope enters, greets everyone, exchanges a few words with someone in the front rows, and leaves again. Isenschmid, who is neither standing at the front nor able to peer over the heads of those in front of him on tiptoe

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, sees only a white shadow, which soon vanishes along with his last illusion.

Convinced that he has been made a fool of, the lawyer returns to Monsignor Pinci. This time, Monsignor Pinci tries to dash his last hopes: there's nothing to be done, he says, essentially; that's all that can be done.

He adds that this is also because it is possible that Cardinal Benelli carried out an investigation at the time and presented the findings to the Pope – who then instructed him to sign a final decree stipulating that the matter concerning the King of France was no longer to be discussed.

A plausible assumption: one that would explain all subsequent resistance to continuing the investigations – as is the case with definitively archived trials bearing an irrevocable judgement.

Isenschmid, of course, has no way of verifying this hypothesis. After a week, convinced that he has played his hand, he returns to Switzerland to fulfil his assignment. He settles back down at his desk.

The elderly lawyer has one last hope: after so many years of struggle, he has knocked on every door and tried every avenue. Too many years – far too many, in fact – to raise the white flag in the face of the power of an institution like the Vatican, which might – through the intervention of someone truly close to the Pope – bring the truth about this story to light.

Perhaps one day someone who is truly close to the Pope will find the courage to break the silence.

Isenschmid has dedicated his life to this cause, without ever receiving support from the Swiss government, which never dared to venture onto the popes' desks.

The end of the story?

This is how Ezio Pasero's 1979 article ends. What remains:

- A Swiss lawyer who fought for 30 years but was thwarted by the Vatican.
- A secret heir to the French throne who allegedly lived in Graubünden as Franz Joseph Russel.
- A will in the Vatican that should have been opened in 1951 – but never was.
- A Pope who remains silent. Always.

The final line of the article:

“Tanto per ragion di stato e di quella del business, in short, in the name of reasons of state and business, Isenschmid...”

“For reasons of state and business interests, in short, in the name of reasons of state and business, Isenschmid...” – the sentence trails off. Just like hope.

...but the Vatican says no! Ezio Pasero, with additions by Roland Bonadurer

The story in 1 minute: The Swiss king who was never meant to be

1. The claim:

A woodcutter from Graubünden, Luzius Russel, claimed in 1979: *"I am the last heir to the French throne."* His ancestor, Franz Joseph Russel from St. Antönien, is said to have actually been Louis Charles – the son of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette. The Dauphin did not die in the Temple prison in 1795, but was secretly rescued.

2. The evidence, according to Dr Moritz Isenschmid, a lawyer from Lucerne:

- Swap at the Temple: The Dauphin was swapped for a mute, sick child. Smuggled out in a laundry basket by the widow Simon.
- Witnesses: Joséphine de Beauharnais, the Russian Tsar, Austrian spies – all speak of an escape.
- The trail: Via England and Moscow, the Dauphin arrived in St Antönien, in the canton of Graubünden, as 'Franz Joseph Russel', and was naturalised in 1800.
- The secret will: Madame Royale, the Dauphin's sister, drew up a will in 1851. It was to be opened 100 years after her death – that is, on 19 October 1951 – and has been held in the Vatican ever since. It allegedly proves that her brother survived.

3. The hunt for evidence: 1950–1979

Lawyer Moritz Isenschmid spent 30 years trying to prove the truth. He discovered:

- Letters in the Vatican: The Count of Chambord corresponded with the Pope. Two letters are missing from the archives.
- Frohsdorf Castle: This is where the secret will was written. In 1954, the heiress, Princess Beatrix Massimo, officially asked the Pope for access to it – but received no reply.
- St Antönien: The village register, which could prove Russel's naturalisation, has disappeared. Bank director von Sprecher stonewalls.

4. The Vatican remains silent

Isenschmid writes to three popes: Pius XII, John XXIII and Paul VI. The response: nothing. No confirmation, no denial. Just silence.

In 1978, he finally secures an audience with John Paul II – but it is a mass gathering. He sees the Pope only as a 'white shadow' from behind.

The Vatican even issued an internal ban on dealing with the case. Monsignor Marchioni told Isenschmid: *'I have been instructed by the Secretariat of State not to concern myself with the Dauphin's case at all any longer.'*

5. Why the silence? The three theories:

1. It is true: the Dauphin survived, and the Bourbon line still exists. The Vatican is protecting a state secret so as not to destabilise Europe.
2. It is false: but the Vatican does not want to admit that it has been keeping documents belonging to an impostor for decades.
3. It's all about money: Madame Royale's will also concerns a huge inheritance. After 130 years of interest and compound interest, that would amount to a fortune worth billions. It is up to the Vatican to decide who gets it.

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6. The end of 1979:

Isenschmid is old, ill, at the end of his tether. The Vatican has won. The final line of the article:

“For reasons of state and business interests, in short, in the name of state and business, Isenschmid...” – the sentence trails off. Just like hope.

The three big questions that remain:

Question	What speaks in favour	What speaks against it
Did Louis Charles die in the Temple in 1795?	Official death certificate. The body was seen.	Madame Royale was never shown the body. The doctor did not recognise the deceased. The grave was empty.
Was ‘Franz Joseph Russel’ the Dauphin?	The age fits perfectly. Name = Emperor Franz Joseph. He came from Austria.	No documents. Registers have disappeared.
Does the truth lie in the Vatican?	The will should have been opened in 1951. Princess Massimo officially requested this in 1954.	The Vatican does not even deny its existence. It simply ignores everything.

Conclusion:

The article is a historical crime story set during the Cold War. Pasero believed Isenschmid. Is the story true? Who knows. But one thing is certain: if the Vatican could settle the matter with a single sentence, why hasn’t it done so in the last 70 years?

An overview of the 6 parts

Part	Key points
Part 1	The woodcutter Luzius Russel claims to be heir to the French throne. His lawyer, Dr Moritz Isenschmid, finds documents: the Dauphin was allegedly rescued. A secret will by Madame Royale in the Vatican is said to prove it. Deadline: 19 October 1951. The Vatican refuses to provide any information.
Part 2	The escape from the Temple: Joséphine de Beauharnais, Barras and a servant from Martinique smuggle the Dauphin out. He is replaced by a sick, mute child. Witnesses: The Russian Tsar, Austrian spies, Mrs Simon. Mrs Simon says: <i>‘He was carried out in a laundry basket. I have a scar on his chin – from the rabbit bite in the Tuileries.’</i>
Part 3	The Swiss lead: The Dauphin arrives as Franz Joseph Russel

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Part	Key points
	St. Antönien, Graubünden. Naturalised around 1810. Problem: the village's 'secret register' has disappeared. Suspicious name: Franz Joseph = the name of Emperor Franz Joseph I of Austria. Isenschmid searches for 30 years – in vain.
Part 4	The Vatican stonewalls: In 1954, Princess Beatrix Massimo, heiress to Frohsdorf Castle, wrote to Pope Pius XII: <i>'My aunt has deposited money and documents in the Vatican. Please look into it.'</i> Response: None. Neither yes nor no. Just silence. All subsequent popes also ignored her letters.
Part 5	Madame Royale's will: written in 1851, sealed for 100 years. It was due to be opened in 1951. Its contents are said to be: the Dauphin has survived. Where? In the Vatican. But: the deadline passes, and the Vatican opens nothing. Reason: for 'reasons of state' and because of money. The Duchess of Angoulême's inheritance would be enormous – after 100 years of compound interest.
Part 6	The Finale 1951–1979: Deadline expired, will remains sealed. Isenschmid fights until his death. 1978: Last hope – an audience with John Paul II. Result: only a general audience, right at the back; the Pope walks past. Final sentence: <i>'So, for reasons of state and business interests, in the name of reasons of state and business, Isenschmid...'</i> – breaks off.

The three main pieces of evidence according to the article

1. Madame Royale's will
Written in 1851, deposited in the Vatican, due to be opened in 1951. Intended to confirm:
"My brother did not die in the Temple." The Vatican remains silent.
2. The statement made by the widow Simon
to the police in 1816: *"The Dauphin was in good health when he left. He had a scar on his chin from a rabbit bite. The dead child found in the Temple was not him."*
3. The Swiss lead
Naturalisation of a *'Franz Joseph Russel'* in St Antönien around 1810. The age fits perfectly. Name = Habsburg Emperor. Records have disappeared.

Why does the Vatican say no? 3 theories from the article

1. Money: The Duchess of Angoulême's inheritance has been held by the Vatican since 1851. After over 100 years of compound interest = a colossal sum.
2. Politics: 1951 = the Cold War. France is a republic. A Bourbon heir could destabilise Europe.
3. Prestige: If the Vatican had covered up a lie for 150 years, it would be a scandal.

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What became of the protagonists?

Person	Fate
Luzius Russel death:	Died in the 1950s, without recognition. Said shortly before his <i>"It'll never work out."</i>
Dr Moritz Isenschmid	Fought for over 30 years, wrote hundreds of letters to popes. Died without a reply.
The will ignored.	Still under lock and key to this day. The 1951 deadline was
The Vatican	Remains silent to this day. No denial, no confirmation.

Conclusion: Conspiracy or cover-up?

The article leaves the question
open. Facts:

- There was indeed a Franz Joseph Russel in St. Antönien.
- Madame Royale really did write a secret will.
- The Vatican has indeed ignored all enquiries.

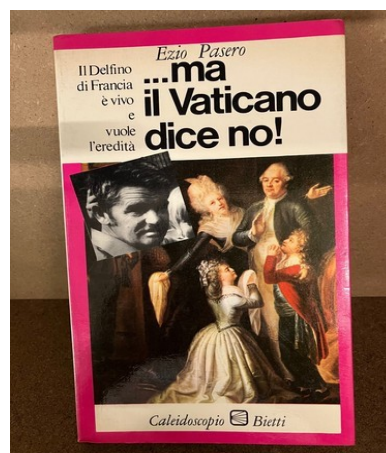
Unanswered questions:

- Why doesn't the Vatican simply deny it if it's all made up?
- Where is the St Antönien register?
- Why have two letters disappeared from the Chambord archive?

The author Ezio Pasero's final sentence:

"Perhaps someone who is truly close to the Pope will one day find the courage to break the silence."

The original book ...ma il Vaticano dice no is on my bookshelf.



**Compiled and revised by Roland Bonadurer, 30
June 2026**