

Narrator: Now listen to part of a lecture on the topic you just read about.

Professor

No memoir can possibly be correct in every detail, but still, the Chevalier's memoir is pretty accurate overall and is, by and large, a reliable historical source. Let's look at the accuracy of the three episodes mentioned in the reading.

First, the loan from the merchant: Well, that doesn't mean that the Chevalier was poor. Let me explain. We know that in Switzerland, the Chevalier spent huge amounts of money on parties and on gambling. And he had wealth, but it was the kind of property you have to sell first to get money. So it usually took a few days to convert his assets into actual money. So when he ran out of cash, he had to borrow some while he was waiting for his money to arrive—but that's not being poor!

Second, the conversations with Voltaire: The Chevalier states in his memoir that each night, immediately after conversing with Voltaire, he wrote down everything he could remember about that particular night's conversation. Evidently, the Chevalier kept his notes of these conversations for many years and referred to them when writing the memoir. Witnesses who lived with the Chevalier in his later life confirm that he regularly consulted notes and journals when composing the memoir.

Third, the Chevalier's escape from the prison in Venice: Other prisoners in that prison had even more powerful friends than he did, and none of them were ever able to bribe their way to freedom, so bribery hardly seems likely in his case. The best evidence, though, comes from some old Venetian government documents. They indicate that soon after the Chevalier escaped from the prison, the ceiling of his old prison room had to be repaired. Why would they need to repair a ceiling unless he had escaped exactly as he said he did?