

## A Day in the Life of the Sun King

Louis XIV at the  
Palace of Versailles

## The Setting: Versailles



## The Sun King: Louis XIV



## Court Regulated Like Clockwork

- A king's day had to be perfectly timed so that the officers serving the monarch knew exactly what they should do. The court was regulated like clockwork.

## Levee: Ceremonial Rising

- 8:30 am: 'It is time, Sire', declares the First Valet de Chambre, waking the king. The levee, or ceremonial rising, thus begins.



## Washed, Combed, and Shaven

- Doctors, family and a few favored friends successively enter the King's Bedchamber where he is washed, combed, and -- every other day --shaven.

## Dressed and Served Breakfast

- The Officers of the Chamber and the Wardrobe then enter in turn for full levee, during which the king is dressed and has a breakfast of broth.

## Sees Officials of the Kingdom

- The most important officials of the kingdom are admitted; it is estimated that the usual number of people attending numbered one hundred, all male.



The King in his Bedchamber

## Goes to Mass

- 10 am: On leaving the king's apartment, a procession forms in the Hall of Mirrors. The king leads the procession of courtiers through the Grand Apartment. The public can now see the king and even petition him with a written request.



Hall of Mirrors



Grand Apartment

## Listens to Choir

- In the Chapel Royal, the king occupies the tribune. Mass lasts roughly thirty minutes. The choir known as the Chapel Music, famous throughout Europe, always sings new music composed by Lully, Lalande, and others.



## Holds Council

- 11 am: Returning to his apartments, the king holds council in his cabinet.
- Sundays and Wednesdays are devoted to Councils of State
- Tuesdays and Saturdays: finances
- Mondays, Thursdays, and Fridays: another Council of State, a Dispatch Council on domestic affairs, a Religious Council, or focus on the king's building program.



The King in Council

## Makes Decisions

- Five or six ministers usually advise the monarch who speaks little, listens a great deal, and always decides.



Minister of Finance Colbert

## Dinner

- 1 pm: The king dines alone in his bed-chamber, at a table facing the windows. This meal is theoretically private, but Louis XIV admits the men at court, making attendance similar to the levee.



Oyster Lunch

## The Afternoon Program

- 2 pm: The king always announces the afternoon program in the morning.

## Promenade

- If he has decided on a promenade, it might be taken on foot in the gardens or in a carriage with ladies.



## Hunting

- Hunting activities, the Bourbons' favorite pastime, will take place on the grounds or in the surrounding forests.



The King Hunting

## Social Gathering or Work

- 6 pm: Louis XIV often allows his son to preside over the private social gatherings known as *soirées d'appartement*.



## Signs Letters

- The king himself might sign the many letters prepared by his secretary...

## Visits Madame de Maintenon

- ... then go to Madame de Maintenon's quarters where he might study an important file with one of his four secretaries of state.



## Supper

- 10 pm: A crowd fills the ante-chamber of the King's Suite to witness this public supper. The king is joined at table by the princes and princesses of the royal family.



The King Surrounded by Courtiers

## Conversation

- Once the meal is over, the king retires to his cabinet where he can indulge in conversation with his close acquaintances.

## Couchee

- 11.30 pm: The couchee, or public ritual of retiring, is a reverse, shortened version of the levee.

## The Splendors of Versailles

- 2,000 acres of grounds
- 12 miles of roads
- 27 miles of trellises
- 200,000 trees
- 210,000 flowers planted every year
- 80 miles of rows of trees
- 55 acres: surface area of the Grand Canal
- 3.3 miles: perimeter of the Grand Canal
- 12 miles of enclosing walls
- 50 fountains
- 620 fountain nozzles
- 21 miles of water conduits

- 3,600 cubic meters per hour: water consumed during Full Play of Fountains
- 26 acres of roof
- 51,210 square meters of floors
- 2,153 windows
- 700 rooms
- 67 staircases
- 6,000 paintings
- 1,500 drawings and 15,000 engravings
- 2,100 sculptures
- 5,000 items of furniture and objets d'art
- 150 varieties of apple and peach trees in the Vegetable Garden

## Facts About Versailles

- In the early days of Versailles, fountain guards were ordered to whistle when Louis XIV approached, so that the fountains could be fully turned on.

■ A hat and a sword could be hired at the front gate in order to be properly attired to visit the Grand Apartment. Monks were not allowed in.

■ Thefts were frequent at Versailles, despite the guards and staff. Once during the king's levee the royal doctor had his watch stolen.

■ A secret passage ran from the queen's private cabinets to those of the king. It enabled Marie-Antoinette to escape revolutionary rioters in October 1789.