



*Louis XIV:
The Sun King*
(1643-1715)

An Overview

- Louis XIV, France's Sun King, had the longest reign in European history (1643-1715).
- During this time, he:
 - Brought absolute monarchy to its height
 - Established a glittering court at Versailles
 - Waged war with most countries of Europe

The Sun King

- Louis XIV chose the sun as his emblem.
- The sun was associated with Apollo, the god of peace and arts.
- It was also the heavenly body which:
 - Gives life to all things
 - Regulates everything as it rises and sets



Solar Symbolism

- The regularity of his work habits and his ritual risings and retirings (levee and couche) were another point of solar comparison.
- Throughout Versailles, decoration combines images and attributes of Apollo with the king's portraits and emblems.

Reign

- Louis' reign may be divided into three parts:
 - The early years (1643-61) were dominated by the chief minister Cardinal Mazarin.
 - In the middle period (1661-85), Louis reigned personally and innovatively.
 - The last years (1685-1715) were beset with problems.

Minority

- Born on September 5, 1638, Louis was the first child of Louis XIII and his Hapsburg wife, Anne of Austria.
- He succeeded his father on the throne at the age of four. However, he was also a neglected child cared for by servants.
 - Once he almost drowned in a pond because no one was watching him.
 - His mother, an extremely religious woman, instilled in him a lasting fear of "crimes committed against God."



Louis XIII, his father



Louis XIV as a baby with his mother, Anne of Austria

The Fronde

- While his mother was regent, the great nobles and judges of the parlement of Paris launched a major revolt (the Fronde) in reaction to the centralizing policies of the government.
 - The royal family was twice driven out of Paris and later put under arrest at the royal palace.
 - This civil war brought Louis XIV poverty, fear, humiliation, cold, and hunger. It shaped his character and he would never forgive either Paris, the nobles, or the common people.

Peace

- Cardinal Mazarin finally suppressed the Fronde in 1653 and restored internal order.
- External order was restored when France signed:
 - The Peace of Westphalia (1648), which ended the Thirty Years' War.
 - The Peace of Pyrenees (1659), which ended warfare with Spain and made France the leading European power.
 - Louis XIV sealed the latter treaty with his marriage in 1660 to Marie Therese, the daughter of Philip IV of Spain.



Marie Therese



Cardinal Mazarin

Personal Administration

- When Mazarin died in 1661, Louis astounded his court by becoming his own chief minister.
 - The king controlled his own government, acting through his high state council and a few select ministers.
 - The most powerful of the ministers were Jean Baptiste Colbert in internal affairs and the marquis de Louvois in military matters.

Nobility of the Robe

- Breaking with tradition, Louis excluded from his council members of his immediate family, great princes, and others of the old military nobility (nobility of the sword).
- His reliance on the newer judicial nobility (nobility of the robe) led the duc de Saint Simon to call this “the reign of the lowborn bourgeoisie.”
- Local government was increasingly placed under removable intendants.

Period of Glory

- The early personal reign of Louis was highly successful in both internal and foreign affairs.
 - At home the parlements lost their traditional power to obstruct legislation.
 - The judicial structure was reformed by the codes of civil procedure and criminal procedure.
 - Urban law enforcement was improved by the office of lieutenant general of police for Paris.

Colbert

- Under Colbert, commerce, industry, and overseas colonies were developed by state subsidies, tight control over standards of quality, and high protective tariffs.
 - Colbert sharply reduced the annual treasury deficit by economies and more equitable, efficient taxation.
 - However, tax exemptions for the nobility, clergy, and some members of the bourgeoisie continued.

The Arts

- Colbert and the king shared the idea of glorifying the monarch and monarchy through the arts.
- Louis was a discriminating patron of the great literary and artistic figures of France's classical age: Moliere, Le Brun, LeVau, Mansart, Lully.
- His state established academies for arts and sciences and put the literary Academie Francaise under formal royal control in 1671.

Building

- Money was lavished on buildings.
 - In Paris, the Louvre was essentially completed with the classical colonnade by Claude Perrault.
 - In Versailles, Louis XIII's hunting lodge was transformed into a remarkable palace and park, copied by monarchs all over Europe.

Versailles

- When the king moved permanently to Versailles in 1682, an elaborate court etiquette was established that had the aristocracy, including former rebel princes, vying to participate in Louis's rising (levee) and retiring (couchee).
- These ceremonies led to the saying that, at a distance, one could tell what was happening at the palace merely by glancing at an almanac and a watch.

The War of Devolution

- In foreign affairs, the young Louis XIV launched the War of Devolution (1667-68) against the Spanish Netherlands, claiming that those provinces had "devolved" by succession to this Spanish wife rather than to her half brother Charles II, who had inherited the Spanish crown.
- The war brought him some valuable frontier towns in Flanders.

The Anglo-Dutch War

- Louis turned next against the United Provinces of the Netherlands in the third Anglo-Dutch War (1672-78).
- The intent this time was to take revenge against Dutch intervention in the previous war and to break Dutch trade.
- By the Peace of Nijmegen, he gained more territory in Flanders and the formerly Spanish Franche-Comte.

Territorial Gains

- Now at the height of his power, the king set up “courts of reunion” to provide legal pretexts for the annexation of a series of towns along the Franco-German border.
- More blatantly, he seized both the Alsatian city of Strasbourg and Casale in northern Italy in 1681

Period of Decline

- The turning point in Louis’s reign between the earlier grandeur and the later disasters came after Colbert’s death.
- In 1685, the king took the disastrous step of revoking the Protestant (Huguenot) minority’s right to worship by his Edict of Fontainebleau, often called the revocation of the Edict of Nantes.
 - Many Huguenots – who constituted an industrious segment of French society – left the country, taking with them considerable capital as well as skills.
 - In addition, Louis’s display of religious intolerance helped unite the Protestant powers of Europe against the Sun King.

War of the Grand Alliance

- In September 1688, Louis sent French troops into the Palatinate, hoping to disrupt his enemies who had formed the League of Augsburg against him.
 - The 9-year war of the Grand Alliance ensued. France barely held its own against the United Provinces, England, Austria, Spain, and minor powers.
 - The Treaty of Rijswijk (1697) preserved Strasbourg and Louis’s “reunion” acquisitions along the Franco-German border.

The War of Spanish Succession

- The aging ruler was almost immediately drawn into the disastrous War of the Spanish Succession (1701-14), in which he defended his grandson Philip V’s inheritance of Spain and its empire on the death of Charles II.
- By the peace of Utrecht:
 - France retained most of its earlier conquests.
 - The Spanish empire was divided between Philip V (who received Spain and its overseas colonies) and the Holy roman Emperor Charles VI (who acquired the Spanish Netherlands and Spain’s Italian possessions).
 - Louis was forced to agree that the crowns of France and Spain would remain separate despite the dynastic connection.

Reconciliation with the Papacy

- During the post-1685 period, the once personal monarchy became increasingly bureaucratized.
- A long and bitter quarrel with the pope was concluded when the king withdrew the French clergy’s *Four Gallican Articles* which claimed quasi-independence from the papacy for the French church.
 - Reconciliation with the papacy aided Louis’s attempt to suppress Jansenism.
 - The Jansenist convents of Port-Royal were closed and the pope issued, at Louis’s request, the anti-Jansenist bull *Unigenitus*.

The Death of the Sun King

- After a series of celebrated liaisons with mistresses, notably Louise de la Valliere and Madame de Montespan, Louis settled down to a more sedate life with Madame de Maintenon, whom he secretly married in 1683.
- She shared with Louis the grief of lost battles and the successive deaths of all but two of his direct descendants.
- The two who survived him were his grandson Philip V of Spain and a great-grandson who became Louis XV when the Sun King died on September 1, 1715.



Death of the Sun King