

★ **King of the World: The Life of Louis XIV**

Philip Mansel

University of Chicago Press (Mar 23, 2020)

Hardcover \$35.00 (608pp)

978-0-226-69089-6

France's Louis XIV, known as "The Sun King," has long been an enigma. On the one hand, he was visionary, practical, and probably the greatest patron of the arts the world has ever known. On the other, he was ruthless, vain, susceptible to flattery, and inclined to make devastating mistakes.

Philip Mansel's *King of the World* chronicles Louis's seventy-two-year reign, the longest of any monarch in history, revealing how the young boy once described as kind, modest, and intelligent grew into the tyrannical despot who, obsessed with his own glory, ravaged much of Europe, savagely persecuted his Huguenot subjects, and taxed France into misery, starvation, and revolt.

Comprehensive and eminently readable, the book is enlivened by surprising facts about Louis, including how his voracious appetite in infancy (he is reported to have thoroughly exhausted eight wet nurses) foreshadowed his cult of self-glorification. And it lays the cause of the French Revolution to his having left behind a faulty financial system that prioritized palace building and continual warfare over the needs of French citizens. Among his gravest errors, Louis's 1685 revocation of the Edict of Nantes, which had granted rights of worship to the Huguenots, caused severe social and economic consequences, as French Protestants fled massive killing and destruction to bring their skills and work ethic to neighboring countries.

Enhanced by lavish, full-color illustrations and meticulous notes and references regarding France's turbulent history and the lifestyle of its royal court, Mansel's book reveals both the glory and depravity of Louis XIV's reign. Despite his lofty goals to expand the borders of France "from the Mississippi to the Mekong" and become the ruler of worldwide Christendom, it is now only his most opulent creation, the Palace of Versailles, that reflects the glory of the man who wanted to be "king of the world."

KRISTINE MORRIS (March / April 2020)

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