

*King of the World: The Life of Louis XIV.* Philip Mansel.

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020. xxxvi + 604 pp. \$35.

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Louis XIV's seventy-seven years of life and the extent of his power, steeped in myth, marks him as a challenging figure to assess. *King of the World* artfully uncovers the many facets of his reign beneath the image that the Sun King himself worked to achieve. Mansel traces the king's transformation from the persona of the young Apollo who mythically established the French absolutist state out of his palace of Versailles to an aging figure whose "love of war and lack of judgement" (444) diminished French power.

The first half draws attention to Louis's appealing, charismatic youth and his legendary work ethic and discipline. Notably, the work shows the changes in France over the course of the Sun King's long rule. France under Louis XIV transforms from a state of rebellious nobles to a stable court system that embarks on ambitious state-building projects at home, such as the building of a strong army, the growth of ports, patronage of the arts and sciences, and colonial projects abroad. Mansel allows his readers to consume the vision of the youthful, charismatic prince while exposing the system of violence, warfare, and slavery that supported him.

The book attributes much of Louis XIV's success in the early years of the reign to the endeavors of his mother, Anne of Austria, who worked to maintain royal strength and forge his mythic aura. Women figure prominently in the book, their power clearly derived from the king. The chapter "The Power of Queens" reveals female success at court and abroad, as women could shine politically despite the patriarchy and prevalent misogyny. Other than his mother, Louis XIV's queen, Maria Theresa, and his many mistresses played important roles in Louis's life. Some women, like his cousin, the Princesse de Montpensier, challenged the king's ambitions and proved to be some of the best sources on Louis XIV's inner world. Although the court remained a masculine place where the king could dismiss women, readers learn that the king promoted French princesses as servants of the state, especially through marriages and diplomatic offices. Yet, the king could thwart their power when they no longer pleased him, as in the case of several of his mistresses.

Mansel's chapters on the king's ambitious wars move beyond the walls of Versailles to the battlefields and offer an alternative image to the fatherly, princely king portrayed in other chapters. The descriptions of the battles to extend French territory and dynastic ambitions recount the atrocities Louis XIV's armies committed across Europe, burning villages and killing innocent civilians.

While much of the book is spent on domestic politics and conflicts with other European powers, Mansel folds in French global aspirations. Early in the discussion of French domestic affairs under Louis XIV's regency, references to French global ambitions appear sporadically, as in the case of the *Surintendent* of Finances, Nicolas Fouquet, who planned to control French trade with America in the late 1650s. In "Making France Work," foreigners emerge domestically as enslaved workers on

French galleys. The book shifts from domestic affairs to a focus on international affairs with the chapter “The Global King: From the Mississippi to the Mekong,” which neatly encapsulates French international ambitions and covers French ventures in the Americas, Africa, the Ottoman Empire, and Asia. Foreigners play a role as diplomats and formidable potential international allies. Yet, the one succinct chapter on French efforts abroad suggests that Louis XIV was not quite the King of the World that he aspired to be.

The biography of Louis XIV offers a captivating account of the Sun King rich in details that only an expert in the primary and secondary materials, like Mansel, could offer. The book undoubtedly will serve as an essential guide, reference book, and fascinating read on Louis XIV’s long life for scholars and anyone interested in the world inside as well as far beyond the golden gates of Versailles.

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*The French Monarchical Commonwealth, 1356–1560.* James B. Collins.  
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In this important book, James Collins integrates a vast array of municipal, regional, and national economic, judicial, and legislative sources with better-known works of political theory such as Nicole Oresme’s vernacular translations of Aristotle’s *Ethics* and *Politics* (1370–73) to present an authoritative analysis of the development of political language in France. Covering the two centuries between King John II’s capture at Poitiers and the meeting of the Estates General of Languedoil in 1356 and Vincent Sertenas’s printing of key commonwealth texts and the meeting of the Estates General in 1560, *The French Monarchical Commonwealth* moves the historiography of political theory toward a socio-political history of political ideas that will benefit many historians.

In a compelling introduction, Collins seeks to understand the relationship between the language of political theory, the rhetoric of politics, and the “constellation of power relations” (26) in France from 1356 to 1560. He starts by explaining how the traditional assumption that the state and the republic are the same has distorted analysis of the French monarchy and obscured the primacy of commonwealth discourse in this period. Instead of offering a teleological reading that looks for the origins of seventeenth-century developments in the Middle Ages, Collins evaluates the political system and its language as they were and on their own merits. He acknowledges that “many of the basic elements of the early modern monarchical State took root in this period—permanent taxation, a standing army, an ever-expanding royal officialdom” (24) while showing how public discourse shifted from using the terms *bien public* and *chose publique* to *republique*.