

portrait of Louis XIV in 1701 shows a supremely confident and powerful king standing in a regal pose, wearing luxurious coronation robes, clutching his staff of authority, and looking with condescension at the viewer—his subject.

Absolutism in France

Absolutist France became the strongest state in early modern Europe. Francis I and Henry IV had extended the effective reach of monarchical authority (see Chapter 4). Louis XIII's invaluable minister Cardinal Richelieu had used provincial "intendants" to centralize and further extend monarchical authority. Richelieu's policies led to the doubling of taxes between 1630 and 1650, sparking four major waves of peasant resistance, including one uprising in the southwest in 1636 in which about 60,000 peasants took up arms, some shouting the impossible demand, "Long live the king without taxes!" Upon Louis XIII's death in 1643, the stage was set for Louis XIV to rule as a divine-right king of an absolute state. But before the young Louis could take control of the government, France would first experience the regency of his mother and the revolt known as the Fronde.

The Fronde: Taming "Overmighty Subjects"

Louis XIV was four years old at the time of his accession to the throne. His mother, Anne of Austria (1601–1666), served as regent. She depended on Cardinal Jules Mazarin (1602–1661) for advice. Mazarin, a worldly, charming, and witty Italian, always dressed in the finest red silk and was well known for his love of money. A master of intrigue, rumor had it that he and Anne had secretly married.

During the Regency period, Anne and Mazarin kept French armies in the field, prolonging the Thirty Years' War, which had become a struggle pitting the dynastic interests of France against the Austrian and Spanish Habsburgs (see Chapter 4). Most nobles, with much to lose from civil disturbances, remained loyal to the monarchy. But Mazarin's prolongation of the victorious struggle against Spain generated a political crisis.

Resistance to royal authority culminated in a revolt that shook the Bourbon monarchy at mid-century. Between 1648 and 1653, powerful "nobles of the sword" (those nobles who held ancient titles and whose forebears had gathered retainers to fight for the king) tried to regain the influence lost during the reign of Louis XIII. Ordinary people entered the fray, demanding lower taxes because of deteriorating economic conditions. The revolt became known as the Fronde—named for a slingshot boys in Paris used to hurl rocks.

Mazarin, whom many nobles considered a "foreign plotter" and an outsider like Anne of Austria, had borrowed money for the state from financiers. He did so against expected revenue from new taxes or the sale of offices.

Nobles were willing to suffer extraordinary levies in times of war. But now they complained bitterly that since the wars had ended supplementary impositions were needless. Furthermore, some of the oldest noble families had claimed for some time that they had been systematically excluded from the highest and most lucrative and prestigious offices. In fact, there was some truth in this claim, as the king feared the power of disloyal "overmighty subjects," preferring lesser nobles for military offices and skilled bureaucrats for some civil posts. Now nobles of the sword denounced Mazarin, his system of patronage, and his financier friends, some of whom had made fortunes supplying the royal armies.

In 1648, Mazarin attempted to secure the approval of the Parlement of Paris for increased taxes. The Parlement of Paris, the chief law court in France, was made up of nobles who had purchased their positions from the crown. Wanting to safeguard their privileges and power, the Parlement of Paris defied the Regency by calling for an assembly of the four sovereign courts of Paris to consider the financial crisis. Meeting without royal permission, the assembly proposed that the courts elect delegates to consider financial reforms in the realm. The provincial parlements joined the protest against what seemed to be unchecked royal authority. Financiers who had earlier purchased titles from the crown now refused to loan the state any more money.

When Mazarin ordered the arrest of some of the defiant members of the parlement in August 1648, barricades went up in Paris in support of the parlement. From inside the Louvre palace, Louis XIV, now nine years of age, heard the angry shouts of the crowds. Popular discontent forced the royal court to flee Paris in January 1649.

The role of the prince of Condé (Louis de Bourbon, 1621–1686), head of the junior branch of the Bourbon family, was crucial in the Fronde. Condé's great victory in 1643 over the Spanish at the battle of Rocroi in northern France, which ended any possibility of a successful Spanish invasion of the country, earned him the name of "the Great Condé." But as long as Mazarin had met Condé's demands for money and offices, the latter remained loyal to the young king and in 1648 marched to Paris with his army to defend him. Short-lived tax reforms bought time. But major uprisings against taxes, which had doubled in two decades as Richelieu and Mazarin had in turn raised money to wage war, broke out in several provinces. Relatively poor nobles, who resented that wealthy commoners were able to purchase titles, led other revolts. Condé himself changed sides in 1649 and supported the *frondeurs*.

Fearing Condé's influence, a Spanish invasion, and further insurrections, Anne and Mazarin found noble allies against Condé and early in 1650 ordered him imprisoned. Condé's arrest further mobilized opposition to Mazarin, whose enemies forced the minister to flee the country early the next year. A year later, Condé was released from prison at the demand of the Parlement of Paris. In September 1651, Louis XIV declared his majority

and right to rule, although he was only thirteen. But he faced an immediate challenge from Condé, who marched to Paris in 1652 with the goals of reestablishing the great nobles' political influence and of getting rid of Mazarin (who continued to sway royal policy from his exile in Germany). However, finding insufficient support from the parlement, the municipal government, or ordinary Parisians, Condé fled to Spain. The boy-king recalled Mazarin to Paris.

Louis XIV restored monarchical authority by ending the nobles' rebellion and putting down peasant resistance against taxation. Louis made clear that henceforth the Parlement of Paris could not meddle in the king's business. And in 1673 the king deprived the twelve parlements of their right to issue remonstrances (formal objections to the registration of new royal ordinances, edicts, or declarations, which could be overridden by the king) before they registered an edict. The king also disbanded the private armies of headstrong nobles and tightened royal control over provincial governors.

Unlike the English Parliament's successful rebellion against the crown in defense of constitutional rule (see Chapter 6), royal victory in the Fronde broke French noble resistance to absolute rule. The king's predecessors had frequently consulted with prominent nobles about important matters. Louis XIV felt no obligation to do so. Yet the Fronde also demonstrated that the crown had to rule more subtly with respect to noble interests.

Mercantilism under Louis XIV

Following Mazarin's death in 1661, Louis XIV, now twenty-two years of age, assumed more personal responsibility. The state's firmer financial footing owed much to the cool calculations of Jean-Baptiste Colbert (1619–1683), controller-general of the realm, who directed administration, taxation, and public works. The grandson of a provincial merchant of modest standing, Colbert endured the hostility of the old noble families. His frosty personality led him to be dubbed "the North." He employed surveyors and mapmakers to assess the economic resources of the provinces. Whereas formerly only about a quarter of revenues reached royal coffers, now as much as four-fifths of what was collected poured into the royal treasury. Even though the direct royal tax on land (the *taille*) had been reduced, state revenues doubled, despite abuses and privileged exemptions (nobles and clergy did not pay the land tax).

Mercantilism underlay the economy of absolutist France, as it did royal economic policies in Europe. Mercantilists posited that all resources should be put into the service of the state and that a state's wealth was measured by its ability to import more gold and silver than it exported. Jealous of English and Dutch prosperity, Colbert became the chief proponent of French mercantilist policies, which emphasized economic self-sufficiency. He founded commercial trading companies to which the king granted monopolies on colonial trade, and levied high protective tariffs on Dutch and English

imports. Louis XIV established the royal Gobelins tapestry manufacture on the edge of Paris and encouraged the textile industry and the manufacture of other goods that could be exported. He improved roads and oversaw the extension of France's network of canals, including the Languedoc Canal (Canal du Midi), which links the Mediterranean to the Garonne River and thus to the Atlantic Ocean.

Yet despite the growth of the French merchant fleet and navy, the French East India Company, established by Colbert in 1664, could not effectively compete with its more efficient and adventurous Dutch and English rivals in the quest for global trade. The monarchy had to bail out the company and later took away its trading monopoly. Moreover, trade within France remained hamstrung by a bewildering variety of restrictions and internal tariffs that in some places were not much different from those that characterized the hodgepodge of German states.

At the same time, while the king was a master of extracting revenue from his subjects, his greatest talent was for emptying the royal coffers with dizzying speed. Louis XIV and his successors plunged the monarchy into an ever-deepening and eventually disastrous financial crisis.

The Absolute Louis XIV

As Louis XIV grew into manhood, he looked the part of a great king and played it superbly. Handsome, proud, energetic, and decisive, the king's love of gambling, hunting, and women sometimes took precedence over matters of state. But he also supervised the work of the high council of his prominent officials, and, although a spendthrift, he closely monitored the accounts of his realm.

The king became a shrewd judge of character, surrounding himself with men of talent. He consciously avoided being dependent on any single person, the way Louis XIII had been on Richelieu, or his mother on Mazarin. During a visit to the château of Vaux-le-Vicomte, built by the unpopular minister of finance Nicolas Fouquet, Louis was served with solid gold tableware and viewed large pools filled with seawater and even saltwater fish. The king promptly ordered Fouquet arrested and took the magnificent château for himself.

Having affirmed his authority over Paris, Louis dissolved any remaining pretensions of autonomy held by the elites in the major provincial towns. One result of the Fronde was that the monarchy expanded the narrow social base on which state power had previously rested. Louis selected governors, intendants, and bishops who would be loyal to him. Mayors became officials of the state who had to purchase their titles in exchange for fidelity to the king. Wealthy merchants now preferred to seek ennoblement rather than try to maintain municipal privileges that seemed increasingly archaic. The presence of royal garrisons, which towns once resisted, not only affirmed the sovereign's authority but were welcomed by local elites as protection against

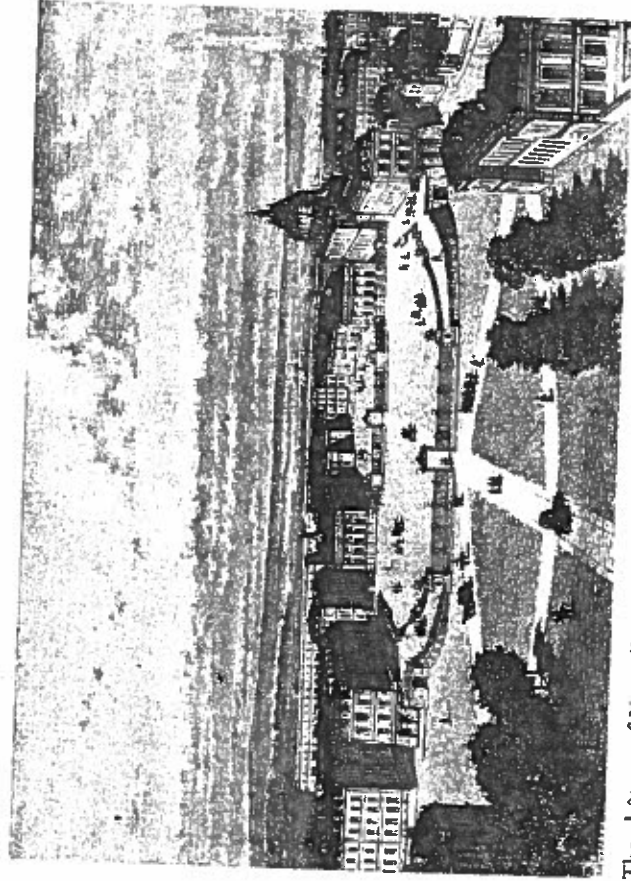
plebeian insurrection. Troops were also good for local business. In 1667, Louis took another important step in affirming his authority by appointing a lieutenant-general of police for Paris, who was given extensive authority ranging from powers of arrest to responsibility for street cleaning and fire fighting. Paris soon had street lighting—thousands of glass-enclosed candles—during the early evening hours.

Louis XIV portrayed himself as God's representative, charged with maintaining earthly order. "*L'état, c'est moi*" ("I am the state"), he is said to have remarked. The royal propaganda machine provided ideological legitimacy by cranking out images of the king as a glorious monarch. At the same time, royal censors suppressed publications, prohibited imported books, and limited the number of printers. The goal of censorship was to protect the honor and reputation of the king and religion.

Louis XIV created the first French ministry of war and shaped it into an effective bureaucracy. The king and his ministers brought the noble-dominated officer corps under royal control, making seniority the determinant of rank and charging wealthy nobles handsome sums for the privilege of commanding their own regiments or companies. The ministry of war ordered the construction of military academies, barracks, and drilling grounds, and ordered the brilliant military engineer Sébastien le Prestre de Vauban (1633–1707) to fortify key border towns.

Louis XIV described himself as first seigneur of the realm. Nobles still insisted more than ever—though more quietly than at the time of the Fronde—that institutionalized noble privileges were necessary to counter the excesses of absolute authority. Nobles were almost completely immune from royal taxes (basically paying only indirect taxes) until Louis made them subject to two additional taxes (the *capitation*, a head tax, and the *vingtième*, a tax of 5 percent, usually only on land). They benefited from the economic development the monarchy encouraged, such as the construction of better roads and networks of canals that were largely underwritten by the state.

Since the time of Henry IV, offices had effectively become forms of hereditary property. Louis XIV's lavish sale of offices and titles—500 sold with a single edict in 1696—expanded the nobility. As one minister put it, "as soon as the crown creates an office God creates a fool willing to buy it." Few noble families now could trace their titles back more than several generations. This accentuated differences between nobles of the sword and nobles of the robe (many of whom had purchased their offices). The nobles of the sword dominated court life, but the king did not hesitate to dip into the ranks of commoners to find efficient, loyal officials, exempting them from taxation and providing lucrative posts for their offspring. A noble of the sword denounced the "reign of the vile bourgeoisie," that is, nobles of recent title and other relative upstarts he viewed as unworthy of prominent posts.



The chateau of Versailles, built by Louis XIV between 1669 and 1686.

Louis XIV at Versailles

Louis XIV never forgot hearing the howling Parisian mob from his room in the royal palace. Resolving to move his court to Versailles, twelve miles west of Paris, he visited Paris only four times during the seventy-two years of his reign. Realizing that an adequately fed population would be less likely to riot, Louis XIV and his successors worked to assure the sufficient provisioning of the capital.

The Sun King followed Colbert's admonition that "nothing marks the greatness of princes better than the buildings that compel the people to look on them with awe, and all posterity judges them by the superb palaces they have built during their lifetime." The staging ground for royal ceremonies was the monumental chateau of Versailles (constructed 1669–1686), surrounded by geometrically arranged formal gardens, interspersed by 1,400 fountains supplied by the largest hydraulic pumps in the Western world. Sculptures in the gardens made clear the identification of Louis XIV with the Greek and Roman sun god Apollo. In the vast chateau, the royal dining room was so far from the kitchen that the king's food often arrived at his table cold and, during one particularly cold winter, the wine froze before Louis could taste it. The chateau's corridors were so long that some nobles used them as urinals, instead of continuing the lengthy trek to a more appropriate place.

Louis summoned the greatest nobles of the realm to Versailles to share in his glory. There they could be honored, but none could become too powerful. More than 10,000 nobles, officials, and servants lived in or near the château. Each day began with the elaborate routine of dressing the king in the company of the richest and most powerful nobles. The ultimate reward for a loyal noble was to be named to a post within the royal household. Louis XIV allowed the nobles to form cabals and conspire, but only against each other.

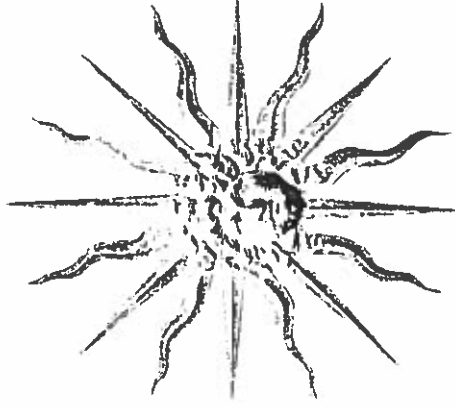
For nobles at Versailles there was little else to do except eat, drink, hunt—in the company of the king, if they were favored—gamble, and chase around each other's wives and mistresses. Nobles also attended the expensive theatrical and operatic productions put on at royal expense. These included the works of Jean-Baptiste Molière (1622–1673) and Jean Racine (1639–1699), master of the tragic dramatic style, who drew themes from the classical Greek poets. Both Molière and Racine wrote effusive praise for the king into some of their plays, the latter dedicating his first great success, *Alexander the Great*, to Louis XIV.

Social struggles mark the plays of Molière. The son of an upholsterer, the playwright started a traveling theatrical company before settling in Paris. The lonely, unhappy Molière poked fun at the pretensions of aristocratic and ecclesiastical society, depicting the private, cruel dramas of upper-class family life. But his popular works also helped reaffirm the boundaries between social classes. He ridiculed burghers, whose wealth could purchase titles but not teach them how to behave as nobles. In *The Bourgeois Gentleman* (1670), the parvenu gives himself away with a social gaffe. Molière also detested hypocrisy, which he depicted in *Tartuffe* (1664), a tale of the unfortunate effects of unrestrained religious enthusiasm on a family. *Tartuffe* brought Molière the wrath of the Church, but he had an even more powerful protector in the king.

Louis XIV believed that his court stood as the center and apex of civilization. Indeed, French arts and literature had an enormous influence in Europe. Foreign monarchs, nobles, and writers still considered French the language of high culture. The château of Versailles encouraged imitation. Philip V of Spain, among others, ordered a similar palace built. The duke of Saxony rebuilt his capital of Dresden along neoclassical lines. The château of Versailles also served as a model for noble estates and townhouses built in the classical style.

Louis XIV's Persecution of Religious Minorities

One of the most salient results of the victory of absolute rule in Catholic states was the persecution of religious minorities. Such campaigns in part served to placate the papacy and the Church hierarchy in each Catholic state. Louis XIV had little interest in theology, although he was relatively pious. But as he grew older, the king brought into his inner circle a number



(Left) The symbol of the sun used to glorify the absolute ruler, Louis XIV. (Right) This caricature shows Louis XIV, the Sun King, as the exterminator of Protestantism.

of extremely devout advisers, and into his bedroom a fervently religious mistress.

Reversing the tolerant policies of Henry IV and Louis XIII, Louis XIV launched a vigorous campaign of persecution against Huguenots, closing most Protestant churches and initiating attempts to force conversions to Catholicism. In 1685, he revoked the Edict of Nantes, by which Henry IV in 1598 had extended religious tolerance to Protestants. This pleased the provincial estates in regions where Protestants were a forceful minority and memories of the wars of religion were still fresh. But the economic cost to France was considerable in the long run. Although the king forbade Huguenots from leaving France, many merchants and skilled craftsmen were among the 200,000 Huguenots who emigrated during the next forty years. Many went to England, Prussia, the Dutch United Provinces, and even South Africa.

With the motto "one king, one law, one faith," Louis XIV also persecuted Jansenists in his quest for religious orthodoxy. Jansenists were followers of Cornelis Jansen, bishop of Ypres in the Southern Netherlands (Belgium), who died in 1638. They could be found in France, the Netherlands, Austria, and several Italian states. Seeking reforms within the Church, Jansenists emphasized the role of faith and divine grace in the pursuit of salvation. Believing mankind to be fallen and hapless, incapable of understanding the will of God, Jansenists came close to accepting a Calvinist doctrine of predestination. Their enemies called them "Calvinists who go to Mass." However, Jansenists believed that one should completely withdraw from the world, given the certainty of sin and mankind's ignorance of God's will.

Notoriously ascetic, they criticized the Church for encouraging a lax morality by holding out the possibility of repeated penance and deathbed conversion.

The pope had condemned Jansenism in 1653, perhaps at the insistence of the Jesuits, the Jansenists' most determined enemy. Louis XIV began to persecute them in the name of "one faith" in 1709; he ordered the Jansenist community at Port-Royal outside of Paris evicted and its abbey burned to the ground. He convinced Pope Clement XI to issue a papal bull, *Unigenitus* (1713), which condemned Jansenism. The Parlement of Paris, however, refused to register the edict. Louis was still trying to force compliance two years later when he died. The king's attempt to impose religious orthodoxy in France fell short, indicating that absolute rule had its limits.

The Limits of French Absolutism

France, like other countries, was far from being a nation-state in which most people thought of themselves as French, as well as or instead of Norman, Breton, or Provençal, or from other regions with their own traditions. More than half the population did not speak French. Inadequate roads isolated mountain regions, in particular, limiting the effective reach of absolute rule. The absolute monarchy stood at the top of a complex network of patronage based on personal ties that reached into every province and every town. But Louis XIV's intendants still had to take local networks of influence into consideration, using intimidation, cajoling, and negotiation to gain their ends in what was then Western Europe's most populous state.

The king played off against one another the jurisdictions and interests of the Estates, parlements, and other provincial institutions dominated by nobles. The provincial Estates were assemblies of nobles of the *pays d'état* (regions more recently integrated into France and retaining a degree of fiscal autonomy, including Brittany, Provence, Burgundy, and Languedoc), which represented each province. The Estates oversaw the collection of taxes and tended to the details of provincial administration and spending. They met annually amid great pageantry and carefully orchestrated ceremony that, like those at Versailles, reaffirmed social hierarchy. In principle, the Estates could refuse to provide the crown with the annual "free grant" (a subsidy provided by each region to the monarch), which was hardly "free," since the king informed the Estates of the amount of money he wanted. Louis XIV abolished the custom of allowing the Estates to express grievances before voting the amount of their "gift" to the monarchy.

The interests of the nobles also prevailed in the parlements, the sovereign law courts that registered, publicized, and carried out royal laws. The parlements, most of whose members were nobles, claimed to speak for their province in legal matters, asserting the right to issue binding commands in cases of emergencies. But, unlike the English Parliament, no national representative political institution existed in France. The Estates-General, which

had met four times between 1560 and 1593, had not been convoked since 1614.

Even the king of France was not as omnipotent or omniscient as he would have liked to think. Jean Bodin had expressed his view that a ruler would be wise to avoid exercising full power—for example, to avoid interfering with his subjects' property. This seeming paradox is perhaps best symbolized by the king's phrase to the Estates of a province: "We entreat you but we also command you. . . ." Even the powerful Bourbons were bound by the so-called fundamental laws of the realm, as well as by those they believed God had established.

THE BALANCE OF POWER

During the century beginning about 1650, the concept of a balance of power between states gradually took hold in many of the courts of Europe. Like the evolving European state system itself, the emergence of the concept arose in part out of the decline of religious antagonisms as a dominant cause of warfare. The quest of absolute rulers to add to their dynastic territories and the growing global commercial rivalry between the great powers increasingly shaped European warfare.

A diplomatic concept dating from the time of the Renaissance city-states of fifteenth-century Italy, the balance of power principle held that great powers should be in equilibrium, and that one power should not be allowed to become too powerful. The decline of one power could threaten the balance of power if, as a result, another power considerably enhanced its strength. Now the main threat to peace ceased to be religious division but rather the power of Louis XIV of France.

The Origins of International Law

Horrified by the Thirty Years' War, two northern European political theorists systematically analyzed questions of international relations, drawing on the recent history of Europe. They helped lay the foundations for the evolution of modern diplomacy. In 1625, the Dutch jurist Hugo Grotius (1583–1645) sought to establish the foundations of international law by arguing that laws to which nations were subject followed from nature and not from God. Samuel von Pufendorf (1632–1694), a German Protestant, found himself under arrest for eight months when he was caught up in the war between Sweden and Denmark. Pufendorf's *Of the Law of Nature and Nations* (1672) postulated legal principles for times of peace—which he argued should be the natural state—and for times of war. He claimed that only a defensive war was justified, pending international arbitration to resolve crises. The problem was, of course, that unless there existed some powerful, impartial body to adjudicate disputes between nations, each side