



The Age of Louis XIV - and the War of the Spanish Succession (Illustrated)

Arthur Hassall, Adolphus Ward

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The Age of Louis XIV focuses on Europe at the time of his ascension to the throne of France. By far one of the most dynamic and aggressive monarchs in the 17th and 18th centuries, and the longest reigning monarch in history, Louis XIV's ambitions knew no bounds. He sought by any means possible to promote the House of Bourbon to a level that would eclipse the rival Habsburgs. After embarking on successive wars against neighbors, Louis saw an opportunity to gain power that would make France dominant on the global stage. This power play turned into the War of the Spanish Succession.

At the heart of the conflict was the inheritance of the Habsburg Kingdom of Spain and its territorial possessions. With the death of the childless King Charles II, there arose rival claimants to the throne of Spain and thereby to the Spanish possessions both in Europe and throughout the world. The royal Houses of Europe, specifically the House of Bourbon (France), the House of Habsburg (Austria), and the House of Wittelsbach (Bavaria), sought to partition the Spanish empire, but the negotiations setting about the terms of division failed.

On his deathbed, Charles II willed the entire Spanish realm to Philip, the Duke of Anjou, a member of the House of Bourbon. Philip was the second grandson of King Louis XIV of France, who sought to increase the prestige and power of the Kingdom of France by placing his grandson on the Spanish throne. With Philip firmly established in Spain, King Louis XIV would have a significant advantages over his rival Houses in the European balance of power, as Spain was a very active empire. European statesmen, however, viewed a dominant House of Bourbon as an unwelcome threat to the stability in Europe, commonly called the "Balance of Power".

Louis XIV was one of the most important figures in European and world history in terms of the development of absolute power. He was far and away the most powerful monarch of his time and ruled his subjects and terrified his neighbors with equal vigor.

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