of the paintings and sculpture of Rubens and Bernini. An important innovation of this period was the striking of sets of medals summarizing the significant events of a ruler’s career—so-called medalllic histories—the first being a series of three hundred medals proclaiming the achievements and victories of Louis XIV, issued in 1702. This became the precedent for numerous medallic histories of monarchs, governments, and institutions, often bound together in booklike volumes with accompanying text, produced during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

See also Cellini, Benvenuto; Money and Coinage.

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COLBERT, JEAN-BAPTISTE (1619–1683), French statesman. Colbert, the leading minister during the initial decades of Louis XIV’s (ruled 1643–1715) personal reign, was born at Reims, the son of a drapery merchant, on 29 August 1619. Exploiting familial ties with Michel le Tellier, Colbert obtained a royal appointment at a relatively young age in 1643. During the chaos of the Fronde (1648–1653), he served as agent for Jules Mazarin’s (1602–1661) affairs while the cardinal was exiled from Paris (1651). Colbert’s diligence and business acumen resulted in hefty rewards upon Mazarin’s return. On his deathbed (1661), the cardinal recommended Colbert to Louis XIV. To secure his position with Louis, Colbert played a notable role in the denouement of Nicolas Fouquet (1615–1680), the powerful albeit corrupt superintendent of finance.

Colbert was a leading proponent of mercantilism. Among other things, this theory postulated a finite amount of wealth determined by the amount of bullion a country controlled; a positive flow of gold and silver could in turn be facilitated by a favorable balance of trade, especially in manufactured goods and overseas products, with the state heavily involved in both directing and encouraging such activities. From 1661 to 1665 Colbert utilized a chambre de justice to correct abuses in the French fiscal system and the collection of royal payments. Several thousand subjects were condemned by this tribunal, and these transgressors were relieved of their ill-gotten windfalls. Colbert also improved the level of crown debt by repudiating some obligations outright and paying off others at a discounted rate. At the same time he sought to increase the king’s revenues by revising provisions of the main direct tax, the taille, while increasing indirect taxes. To assist the internal economy, Colbert granted subsidies to select industries. He also oversaw impressive infrastructure improvements involving roads and canals. To help French manufacturers compete against English and Dutch products, Colbert erected protectionist tariffs, particularly in 1667. He sought, generally without success, to abolish the onerous medieval system of internal tolls and tariffs that undermined the competitiveness of French manufactured goods. The so-called Five Great Farms constituted a marginal victory in this campaign. Thanks to these reforms, Louis XIV’s revenues probably doubled between 1661 and 1672.

Colbert’s mercantilist theories attached pivotal importance to securing a powerful position in European colonial competition in the New World and the Indian Ocean basin. To that end, as secretary of state for the navy (1665), he rebuilt the moribund French fleet from a force of less than a dozen ships to a powerful weapon of about 120 royal ships with thriving shipyards and arsenals at Brest, Toulon, and Rochefort. To accomplish this, he increased yearly expenditures on the navy from about 300,000 livres to nearly 13 million livres. To exploit overseas trade, Colbert also founded a series of state-backed monopoly joint-stock companies, including the East India Company (1664), the West India Company (1664), and the Company for the Levant (1670). Despite problems and competition with the Portuguese, Dutch, and English, these companies man-
aged to entrench a French presence overseas, particularly in North America.

Colbert believed the arts and sciences existed in large part to pay homage to the “Grand Monarchy.” He formed the nucleus of the Academy of Royal Architecture (1667) by bringing together Louis Le Vau, Claude Perrault, François Mansart, and François Blondel. In painting he established a French academy in Rome and reorganized the academy of painting and sculpture of Cardinal Richelieu. Colbert also helped establish the Academy of Inscriptions and Medals (1663), the Academy of Sciences (1666), and the Academy of Music (1669). As superintendent for public buildings, he oversaw significant additions to the Louvre as well as the expansion of the palace complex at Versailles.

In these impressive achievements, Colbert demonstrated remarkable energy and industry. He was in fact the perfect bureaucrat for the growing Bourbon state. In public life his personality was indeed cold and dour, conforming to the dictum of Madame de Sévigné, who described him as “the North Star.” In private life, however, he revealed a more human side of his character. Colbert’s accomplish-
ments were undermined beginning with the Dutch War of 1672, a war he supported since it was directed against his arch commercial and imperial rival, the Dutch. Unfortunately, a glorious start in this war soon gave way to diplomatic and military setbacks. These problems forced Colbert to forsake many of his earlier reforms. Politically the shift to a bellicose foreign policy also witnessed the rise of his rival, the marquis de Louvois (François-Michel Le Tellier; 1639–1691). Created marquis de Seignelay, Colbert died in 1683 an extremely rich man with vast estates, leaving a significant legacy for Louis’s reign and France.

See also Academies, Learned; Academies of Art; Architecture; Louis XIV (France); Louvois, François Le Tellier, marquis de; Mazarin, Jules; Mercantilism; Trading Companies; Versailles.

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COLIGNY FAMILY. The Coligny brothers were the among the most zealous and consistent aristocratic supporters of Protestantism in sixteenth-century France. Descended from a Burgundian lineage, they had an important landed base in Brittany and its marches. Gaspard de Coligny (1470–1522), seigneur of Châtillon, fought with distinction in the Italian Wars under kings Charles VIII, Louis XII, and Francis I, becoming marshal of France in 1516. He married Louise de Montmorency, sister of the constable of France; this union produced three sons: Odet de Coligny (1517–1571), count-bishop of Beauvais and cardinal of Châtillon; Gaspard II de Coligny (1519–1572), seigneur of Châtillon and admiral of France; and François de Coligny (1521–1569), seigneur of Andelot and colonel-general of the Royal Infantry.