

# LondonTown.com: British Museum gets its medals out for the great French Sun King



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## **Free exhibition at the museum showcases remarkable 17th-century emblems of Louis XIV's reign**

LONDON, June 08, 2015 -- /[EPR NETWORK](#)/ -- The British Museum is holding a new exhibition that looks at the medals drawn from the reign of the great French Sun King, Louis XIV. Triumph and disaster: medals of the Sun King runs from 4 June to 15 November and marks the tercentenary year of the death of Louis XIV. It is one of several free exhibitions that are held at the British Museum every year to draw attention to the many easily overlooked marvels within its collection and to present them in new ways to mark anniversaries or to reinterpret the material. For more information on the full programme of exhibitions at the British Museum, see [LondonTown.com](#), where you can also find the latest information on cheap [hotels in London](#).

The Louis XIV medals are preserved as they were in Louis XIV's own day and includes contributions from the British Library which has a unique manuscript scrapbook of drawings and notes on the creation of the history, and the V&A. The medals were a way for the king to portray his reign and the greatest writers (including Jean Racine), historians, artists and medalists of the day were brought together by the king to ensure that posterity would see his rule as Louis wished it to be seen: the reign of an ideal and ever victorious monarch.

The early medals portray a dazzling image of a 'Sun King,' who is represented as hard-working, accessible, generous and just; a king that worked for the benefit of the people, glorifying as much in their

happiness as in victory over his enemies. The picture changed as war succeeded war and defeat succeeded victory. The later medals, though careful to represent only French successes, are so numerous that they give the impression not of victory but of endless and draining warfare.

Elsewhere in Europe, particularly in the Netherlands, medals were produced that mocked and satirized the official French medals. These rival medals showed the French sun eclipsed by the zodiacal signs of his enemies, and Louis as an old man being roundly beaten by Queen Anne. Collectively, these medals and attendant literature present a fascinating and unique self-portrait of a regime which dominated Europe for nearly sixty years, and which established the primacy of French taste and French culture for over a century.

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