

# The Crowning Example: The Unparalleled Exemplarity of Louis XIV

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In this paper, I propose to approach some perplexing paradoxes of political exemplarity under absolutism. My corpus is a set of curious publications from the mid-1680s by Claude-Charles Guyonnet de Vertron, official historiographer of Louis XIV and a proponent of the moderns in the *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*. I will particularly focus on a little book which is normally deemed too excessive and exuberant, too over the top, to be taken seriously by modern scholars, namely his 1685 *Parallele de Louis le Grand avec les princes qui ont esté surnommez grands* (“Parallel between Louis the Great and [other] princes who have been called great”). The work will certainly appear as excessive to a modern reader, but it does so, I will argue, by pushing to the limit a logic which is everywhere at the time. For that reason, I will only turn to Vertron in the second half of the paper, after sections about the specificity of absolutist exemplarity from a historical point of view (section 2) and on royal exemplarity from a conceptual point of view (section 3). The goal of the paper is thus dual: I am suggesting, first, that the exploration of the limits of absolutist exemplarity can add a dimension to our thinking about the working of exemplarity at a more general level; second, that this reflection can contribute to our understanding of a turning point in the *ancien régime* cultural construction of authority.