

THE ANCIEN RÉGIME

At the beginning of the 18th Century most of European countries were under the ***Ancien régime***.

The ***Ancien régime*** (French for the **Old Order or Rule**) was the political and social system adopted by most of the European Kingdoms at the end of the Middle Ages.



Lois XIV. Public Domain

Society was based on the medieval social system where people were divided into estates, social status was based on your birth not on your wealth nor your capacities.

Agriculture and livestock breeding were the main economic activities.

Absolute Monarchy was its political system

1 Economy



[Centpacr. *Le Couronnement de Louis XVI 1775* \(CC BY-SA\)](#)

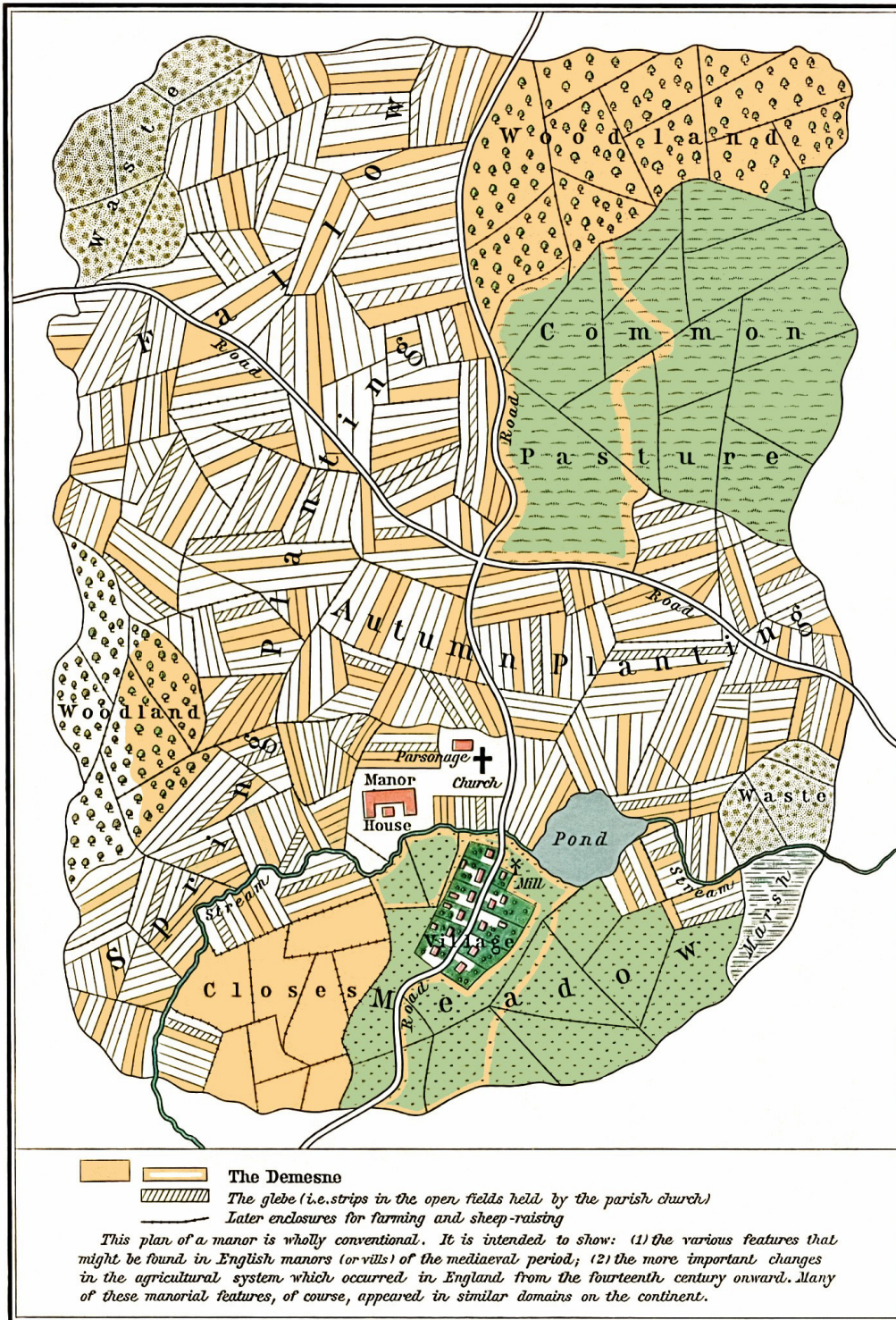
1.1 Rural Economy

Farming was the main economic activity, specifically, subsistence farming. There was little to trade with. They still used the three field system, a crop rotation system from the Middle Ages.

Farming depended completely on the weather and the fertility of the land. A severe drought or a specially cold year could mean the loss of most of the harvest, a series of lost harvests led to a subsistence crisis -a great famine- that could lead to a social and political crisis, wars, or even plagues.

The land was owned by nobility and clergy. Most of the population was peasants who worked for nobles and clergy in their large estates. They also had to pay high taxes and tithes

Plan of a Mediaeval Manor.



Plan mediaeval manor Public Domain

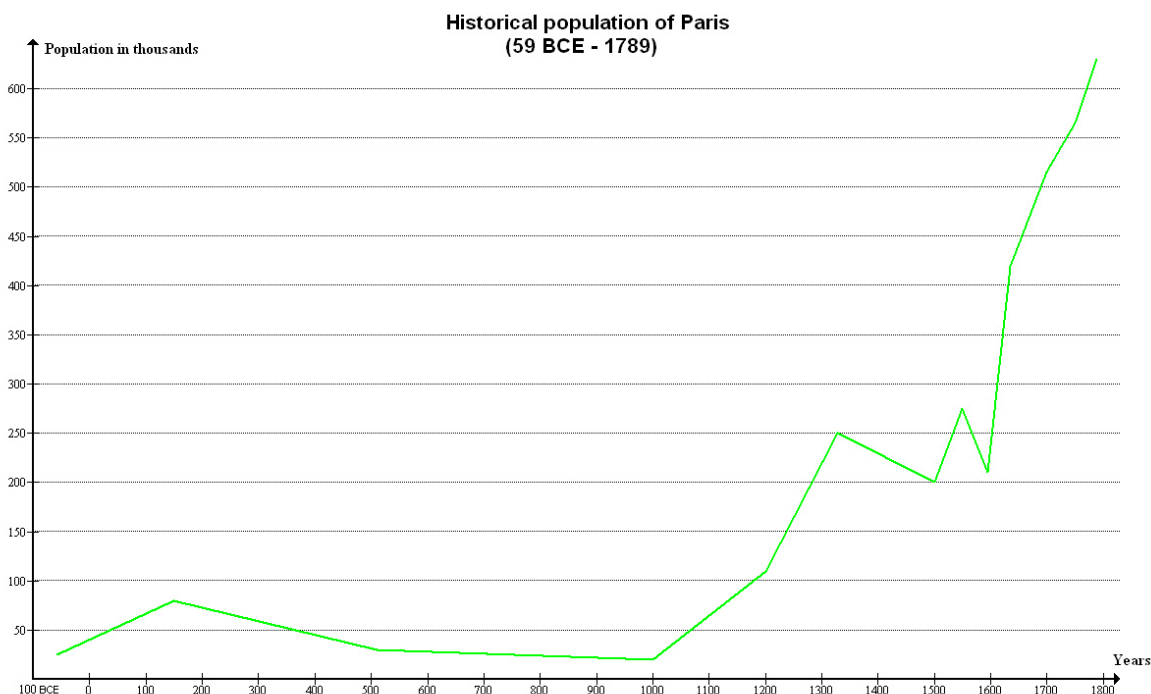
But on the other hand there were some places where harvest improved for a number of reasons:

- agricultural techniques like crop rotation were more widely used. improved agricultural machinery increased farmers' production.
- New crops were introduced, such as potatoes and corn The repopulation of uninhabited areas increased production

1.2 Demographic growth

During the 18th century the population grew steadily from 110 million in 1700 up to 190 million in 1800.

This growth was mostly due to scientific advances, improvements in nutrition and hygiene and the reduction of epidemics thanks to the discovery of the first vaccine (it was discovered by Jenner in 1796 to fight against smallpox) or the use of quinine to fight malaria.



1.3 Industry and trade

Due to the population growth in the 18th century demand for goods grew too

The domestic system increased its importance in rural areas, mostly with the textile industry. Craftsmen could not increase their production due to the restrictions that were still imposed by the guilds.

Some monarchs promoted industry by opening Royal Manufactories as Louis XIV of France had done in the 17th century.

- They mostly produced luxury goods such as crystal lamps, cloth, tapestries, silk,
- china, or clocks. Their products mostly adorned the European royal palaces and were bought by some bourgeois and noble people too.

Concerning internal trade there was a huge development due to the bigger agricultural and artisan production. New roads and canals were built to enhance internal trade.

External trade increased since there were more discovered areas and in the Atlantic Ocean the triangular trade prevailed:

- Colonies provided raw materials, precious metals, and plantation products; whilst they bought manufactured products from their metropolises and slaves from Africa.
- European metropolises exported manufactured goods both to their colonies and to Africa, whilst they imported raw materials and slaves from the colonies and Africa.
- Africa imported manufactured goods from Europe and exported slaves to Europe and their colonies.

2 Society: estates of the realm

Describe the image below. Who are these three men?



[Cleric-Knight-Workman](#) (Public Domain)

2.1 Privileged people

Nobility or aristocracy:

- They lived on the rural income obtained from their estates.
- They accumulated riches but some of them were not rich because of their very expensive way of life, actually most of them had big debts with bankers and traders.
- They enjoyed honors, economic favors and tax exemptions (did not pay most taxes or at least not the most common ones)

Clergy:

- They lived on the benefits of their land, their possessions and the tithe.
- Because monarchy was given by divine right, the Church and priests played a main role in supporting the absolute monarchy and Ancien Régime.
- The clergy was not equal, it could be divided into two different groups:
 - High Clergy. They came from aristocracy (They often were second sons and daughters of noble families) They enjoyed the same privileges as the nobility.
 - Low Clergy. They lived a humble life without luxuries. Some of them were on the side of the third estate.

2.2 Underprivileged people (the third state)

They made up 95% of the population They were divided into economic groups:

Bourgeoisie

- They had economic power, they were traders, bankers, manufacturers and professionals (lawyers and medical doctors for instance).
- They paid taxes and had no political representation.

Popular class.

- Urban workers, small traders and artisans, servants, workshop workers.

Peasants.

- They were the main group, most of the population before the Industrial Revolution worked as peasants, farmers without land who worked for a noble or a bishop.
- Their lives were very hard, they paid taxes, did not get paid for their work and always on the verge of starvation.

The system was so closed that social ascension was almost impossible, however it does not mean that some members of the bourgeoisie didn't become nobles by marriage or by the king's favour.

3 Absolute Monarchy

The king had absolute power that came from God itself, this was called his divine right. He had no powers above him, he unified the three powers of the State: executive, legislative and judiciary.

There were not citizens but subjects, they had no rights. However, nobility and clergy had some privileges

Although the king had absolute power he was helped in his duties by secretaries and councils. He also had parliaments for relevant matters, but they were rarely called together. Absolute kings avoided them.

4 The Enlightenment

During the 18th century there was a new intellectual movement that grew in France and spread all across Europe and some American areas, it was the so-called Enlightenment.

The main ideas of the Enlightenment were:

- Faith in human reason. Reason is essential and cannot be an ally of all the traditional principles based on mere faith.
- Progress must be achieved through education, scientific advances whose final target is human happiness. This was a criticism of the Ancien Régime (Old Regime), since it was a major threat against happiness and progress.
- The enlightened thinkers attacked social inequality and religious intolerance. Hence, they promoted a fair social order where equality and liberty are key elements. Nonetheless they did not agree about what the best social solution was.

- New moral values based on reason, science, and culture should be developed. Rulers had achieve their subjects' happiness.
- Critical thinking. To have an independent point of view creates free and educated people.
- Learning and teaching are essential since the new knowledge gives freedom and creates an enlightened society.
- Traditional religious beliefs were strongly criticised and a new type of natural religion developed: deism. Its main principle was based on the fact that God created the Universe and that it works according to scientific laws.

The Enlightenment just affected intellectual elites and its thinkers were a minority. There were several means by which it grew:

- Salons. They were meetings in private where intellectuals gathered in order to exchange social and cultural ideas.
- Media. New newspapers, magazines or printed pamphlets became essential means to spread the ideas of Enlightenment to other places.
- The Encyclopaedia. It was a compendium of the knowledge of that time

4.1 Philosophers

Montesquieu

He developed the idea of separation of powers (executive, legislature and judiciary) in his masterwork was "The spirit of the laws" ("De le spirit des lois")

Rousseau

He defined the notion of "Social Contract" as a deal between all citizens recorded into a Constitution. He brought up the idea of national sovereignty expressed by suffrage.

Voltaire

He defended the necessity of a parliament that controlled royal power. He also believed in an equal tax system where the third estate was not the only taxpayer.

4.2 Economic thinking

Until the Age of Enlightenment, the most common economic trend was mercantilism, based on the accumulation of precious metals.

Enlightenment thinkers, however, defended physiocracy (Quesnay) , which saw agriculture as the primary source of wealth, and economic liberalism (Adam Smith).

Adam Smith, following the physiocrat's ideas, developed free trade theory. Countries should not raise barriers for trade or intervene in economic matters such market prices, those must be set by the supply and demand rules. This was the origin of capitalism..

4.3 Enlightened despotism

Some monarchs introduced some of the Enlightenment's proposals. This became known as enlightenment despotism. The motto for enlightened despotism was "everything for the people, nothing by the people". The idea of enlightened monarchs was to yield in some areas but to keep their power intact.

Political measures:

- These monarchs centralised government to consolidate their
- powers. They made important reforms in national administration.
- They had an important corps of civil servants that applied these principles.

Social measures:

- Some countries applied some measures in order to abolish servitude and to reduce the privileges of nobility.

Economic measures:

- Agriculture, industry, and trade were often promoted.
- New lands were colonised to be farmed and irrigation
- grew. National banks were also created.

Cultural measures:

- Education developed by the creation of schools and academies.
- Some new institutions were created to promote the scientific developments.

Religious measures

- There was more religious tolerance.
- It limited the powers of the clergy and Papacy.

The main enlightened monarchs were Joseph II and Maria Theresa of Austria, Catherine II of Russia, Friedrich II of Prussia, Joseph I of Portugal, and Charles III of Spain.

5 The English Revolution

In England the monarch's power was limited by the two houses of Parliament (the House of Lords and the House of Commons). He needed their approval to start a war or set new taxes up.

- Nobles and high clergy. House of Lords.
- Middle class. House of Commons.

In the 17th century a new dynasty, the Stuarts, tried to rule without the parliament like the king of France. This caused a major conflict between Parliament, specially the House of Commons, and king Charles I that ended in a Civil War between:

- Defenders of parliament
- Defenders of absolutism.

In the end parliament's supporters won the war and Charles I was accused of treason against the people of Britain and beheaded. Great Britain became a republic ruled by a Lord Protector, Oliver Cromwell.

Oliver Cromwell's power grew and grew until he became himself a dictator. When he died parliament reinstated the monarchy. The new king, Charles II, son of the late Charles I, swore the new Bill of Rights that limited the power of the king and submitted his decisions to Parliament. But the next king, James II tried to get his royal powers back and was overthrown and replaced by William III who accepted to share his powers with parliament. Britain became the first parliamentary monarchy inspiring the following enlightened thinkers

6 The American Revolution

The thirteen British colonies established on the east coast of North America were responsible at 18th century for the first colonial insurrection against a metropolis. Some colonists, inspired by the ideas of the Enlightenment that came from Europe, even from the metropolis itself, started to consider self government or, at least, at least, the same rights as the British.

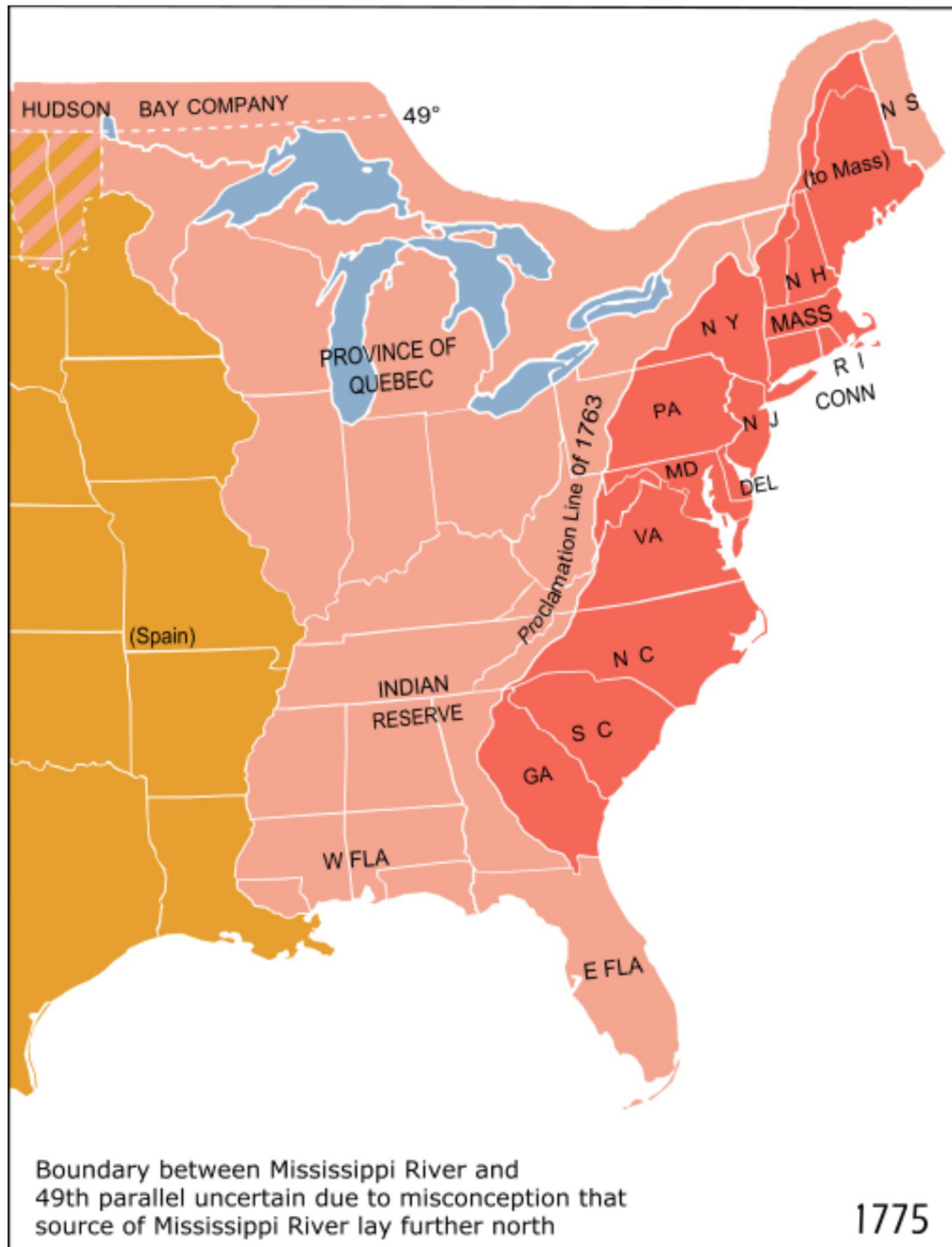
The main problem was excessive taxation without match, "Taxation without representation" was one of their main mottos. After some incidents (the Boston Massacre, 1770 and the Boston Tea Party, 1773) delegates from every colony met at Philadelphia in a so-called Continental Congress trying to get some rights from the British Crown. The Crown not only refused their reclamations but sent an army to stop them.

On 4th July 1776, after a series of hard debates, the delegates of the colonies signed The Declaration of Independence, which was written by Thomas Jefferson. The influence of this text would be bigger than its author thought, becoming one of the cornerstones of liberalism and democracy.

The Declaration of 1776 led to a long war won by the Americans with some help from France and Spain, enemies of Britain at that time. The War finished in 1783 and George Washington was declared first president of the United States while their parliament, Congress, was writing its constitution.

In 1787 the Constitution was finished. It was the first written constitution of the world, model for many to come. The United States was organized as a federation in which every state had its own government and laws. But all foreign affairs and the army where in hands of the federal government and its chief executive, the President of the United States.

The Constitution was completed by a Bill of Rights based on the Virginia Declaration of Rights. This Bill of Rights warrant basic freedoms and rights such as freedom of speech, freedom of press, religion, etc...



[Cg-realms](#) *Public Domain*

The war finally ended with the Treaties of Utrecht and Rastatt. Philip became King of Spain as Felipe V. England benefited significantly from the treaty. It gained Gibraltar and Menorca. Meanwhile, Austria gained the Duchy of Milan and the kingdom of Naples, Sardinia and Naples.

7.2 Bourbon Absolutism

Felipe V and Fernando VI were inspired by the French model of centralised absolutism. They took measures to establish administrative uniformity in their territories. The various courts throughout Spain were merged into one for the entire kingdom. Castilla's laws were also imposed in Aragon and Catalonia. With the Nueva Planta decrees the whole state was unified and the privileges of the Crown of Aragon were abolished.

7.3 Economic Reforms

The Spanish economy experienced enormous growth in the 18th century as a result of reforms introduced by Felipe V and Carlos III.

- The population grew from about seven million at the beginning of the century to almost eleven by the end. Agricultural production increased as new land was cultivated (Sierra Morena) or irrigated (Canal de Castilla).
- Trade with America expanded beyond Sevilla and Cadiz to other ports in Spain. Some internal duties were also eliminated, allowing free trade.
- Industrial production increased. Royal manufacturers were created (Reales Fábricas) as well as private ones (textile production in Catalonia).

7.4 The Spanish Enlightenment

The Enlightenment just affected some elite groups and the most important enlightened period took place during Charles III's reign. Just some intellectuals and politicians coming from the lower nobility and clergy followed the enlightened ideas. Most of the people did not understand these ideas and the upper nobility and clergy opposed them since they attacked their privileges.

- New societies known as Sociedades Económicas de Amigos do País were founded across Spain in order to promote innovations in their regions and they became the main Spanish intellectual and economic focuses.

- New schools were opened and the Universities were reformed in order to teach the useful sciences according to the enlightened authors (mathematics, physics and chemistry).
- The monarchs also created Royal Academies for some specific matters such as the Real Academia de la Lengua Española (1713), Real Academia de la Historia (1735), Real Academia Médica Matritense (1734), and Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando (1752)...
- Some new public spaces were opened for leisure and research, such as the Royal Botanic Garden in Madrid.
- The Spanish enlightened authors understood that the decline of Spain was caused by the old-fashioned social order and the economic backwardness.

The main representatives of the Spanish Enlightenment are:

- Writers like father Feijóo and Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos (who was also a politician).
- Politicians such as the Marquis of Ensenada, Count of Aranda, Count of Floridablanca, and Campomanes

8Art

8.1 Rococo Art

Rococo art was a popular style across Europe between the 1730s and 1760s, but its influences were mostly reduced to noble and royal palaces.

Architecture:

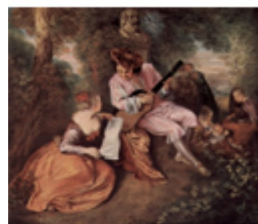
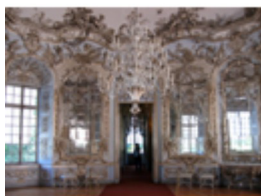
it is mostly shown in extremely overelaborate interiors of private salons and small cabinets: Curves, seashells and floral elements are the most typical decorative elements. All together they are so-called rocaille. Mirrors are also very common in their decoration. It can be widely found in many Austrian and German royal palaces, such as Amalienburg (Munich). In Spain the best example is the Gasparini Salon in the Royal Palace of Madrid and some rooms in La Granja Palace.

Painting:

pastel colours are mostly used to depict mythological themes, rural festivals and domestic scenes. Watercolours are also used in this style. The French Watteau and Jean-Honoré Fragonard (The swing) are the most well-known Rococo painters, whilst in Spain the best Rococo painter is Luis Paret

Sculpture:

Rococo sculptures were often small, and represented joyfull and mythological themes. An excellent example is Bouchardon's Cupid.



8.2 Neoclassical Art

Neoclassicism was very common across Europe between the 1750s and the 1830s.

- It followed all the classical principles for art and was quite well accepted by the enlightened thinkers and middle-class people.
- It is the style that reflects order and moral.
- Enlightened despots followed this style to rearrange and to modernise the cities.

Architecture:

Buildings were well-proportioned and featured classical elements, such as rounded arches, columns and domes. An excellent example of this style is the Pantheon in Paris (Soufflot). In Spain the best example is the Gabinete de Ciencias Naturais designed by Villanueva (The Prado Museum nowadays).

Painting:

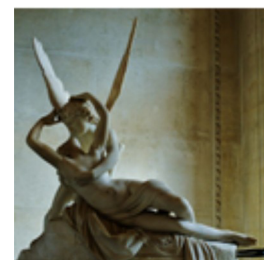
Neoclassical painters imitated classical sculptures, so their works featured people who look like statues. Drawing is really marked and dominates over colour.

The most common themes are mythology, portraits, and history.

The main neoclassical painters are Anton Raphael Mengs, and Jacques-Louis David (Oath of the Horatii, The Intervention of the Sabine women, The Death of Marat, or Consecration of the Emperor Napoleon I and Coronation of the Empress Josephine

Sculpture:

Neoclassical sculptures were usually made of marble and depicted mythological themes or famous people. The most important neoclassical sculptor is the Italian Antonio Canova (Cupid and Psyche, or Paolina Borghese as Venus Victrix)



Webgrafía

“Prof.Rosa Liarte – 4 ESO”, , fecha de consulta 24 octubre 2016, en

<http://leccionesdehistoria.com>

[/4ESO/author/prof-rosa-liarte/](http://leccionesdehistoria.com/4ESO/author/prof-rosa-liarte/).

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