



## The French Royal court, 1450-1789: art, architecture and life

**Start date** Friday 11 March 2022      **End date** Sunday 13 March 2022

**Venue** Madingley Hall  
Madingley  
Cambridge  
CB23 8AQ

**Tutor** Dr Sarah Pearson      **Course code** 2122NRX079

**Director of ISP and LL** Sarah Ormrod

**For further information** [intenq@ice.cam.ac.uk](mailto:intenq@ice.cam.ac.uk)

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### Tutor biography

**Dr Sarah Pearson** is an architectural historian, art historian and writer specialising in Italy and Italian influence on the art and architecture of western Europe, particularly France. Her MA focused on the architecture of Andrea Palladio and her PhD investigated the architect Francesco di Giorgio Martini, his output for the Duchy of Urbino and his wider influence. Other interests include European Renaissance art and English Brutalist architecture. She has taught at the Universities of Reading and East Anglia, and is a regular Tutor at the Institute of Continuing Education, University of Cambridge.

## Course programme

### Friday

Please plan to arrive between 16:30 and 18:30. You can meet other course members in the Terrace Bar which opens at 18:15. Tea and coffee making facilities are available in the study bedrooms.

19:00 Dinner

**20:30 – 22:00 Louis XI, Langais and the importance of marriages.**

*In the 100 years war the Chateau of Langais provided a key defensive structure. It was also here that a remarkable secret marriage was held between Charles VIII and Anne of Brittany, changing the shape of France. We examine the structure and the importance of this event.*

22:00 Terrace Bar open for informal discussion

### Saturday

07:30 Breakfast (for residents only)

**09:00 – 10:30 Francis I, Leonardo da Vinci and the influence of Italy.**

*Francis I changed the shape of French art and architecture by importing Italian artists and architects to France. We examine the commissions of the King and consider wider European influence including Francis's most famous meeting with Henry VIII of England at the Field of Cloth of Gold.*

10:30 Coffee

**11:00 – 12:30 The social life of the Chateau in Renaissance France.**

*A key requirement of the nobility was their ability to entertain and house the king. We examine the Chateaux of the Loire region and consider the competitive nature of their construction and decoration.*

13:00 Lunch

14:00 – 16:00 Free time

16:00 Tea

**16:30 – 18:00 Catherine de Medici, Architecture, Art, and Intrigue.**

*The marriage of Catherine de Medici to Henri II brought further Italian influence to the Court. Her commissions were extensive and influenced by competition with her husband's mistress Diane de Poitiers. We consider the difficulties faced by Catherine and her most important commissions.*

18:00 – 18:30 Free time

18:30 Dinner

**20:00 – 21:30 The Wars of Religion, the end of the House of Valois and the rise of the House of Bourbon.**

*The political machinations of the house of Valois were played out against the architecture of the Royal palace of Blois. We examine contemporary imagery of the St Bartholomew's day Massacre and the assassination of Henri III at the Chateau of Saint-Cloud.*

21:30 Terrace Bar open for informal discussion

## **Sunday**

07:30 Breakfast (for residents only)

### **09:00 – 10:30 The French Baroque, Louis XIII and XIV.**

*Under Louis XIII and XIV the great Chateau of Versailles began to take shape in the French Baroque style. At court, life moved ever further from the commoner's experience. We examine documents of the period to analyse the disparity between rich and poor and the impact of continued Royal commissions.*

10:30 Coffee

### **11:00 – 12:30 Louis XV, Versailles, and the seeds of discontent.**

*In the reign of Louis XV the growth of Versailles continued accompanied by commissions in art, architecture, furniture, tapestries and porcelain in such quantity that the Louis XV style was born. We examine the output of this period and consider it in the context of approaching revolution.*

12:45 Lunch

**The course will disperse after lunch**

## **Course syllabus**

### **Aims:**

The course will introduce you to:

- 1) The social history of the French Royal Court tracing its impact on French contemporary society.
- 2) The artistic and architectural production of the period with particular emphasis on the commissions of the French Court.

### **Content:**

The Royal Court of France was an extraordinary collective of nobility, clergy, ambassadors, artists, servants, and hangers on, all existing in a social bubble of castles, chateaux, and the complex manners of court life. Increasingly divorced from the grim reality of life for the commoners the lavish lifestyle of the monarchy accompanied by extravagant commissions in art and architecture sewed the seeds of discontent which ultimately manifested in the French Revolution. This course examines these commissions and those who commissioned them, considering their design and influence, and with the help of contemporary documents understanding them in the context of French social history.

Taking a chronological approach, the course begins in 1450 during the Hundred Years War and examines the politics, architecture and art of the Valois kings. Using primary source material to provide historical context artistic production is considered both for its intrinsic value and as a component of social history, illuminating the cultural practices of the time. Emphasis is also given to the importance of women as patrons within the French court as the commissions of French queens provide insight into the power and impact of female commissions.

The course concludes with the transition to the Bourbon Monarchs and the progressive increase in commissioning, exemplified by the Chateau of Versailles. The complexity and opulence of this structure and its artworks is examined in parallel with the increasing desperation of the common people. Through an examination of three hundred years of art and architecture, students are able to engage with French social and political history and understand the intricate dance of court life.

### **Presentation of the course:**

The course will involve illustrated lectures, group discussion and the study of documents and images from the period.

### **As a result of the course, within the constraints of the time available, students should be able to:**

- 1) Talk with confidence and knowledge about the chronology of the French monarchy identifying individual French monarchs and their spouses.
- 2) Discuss with insight the artistic and architectural production of the period identifying styles and key artists.
- 3) Locate the Royal Court within the broader social history of France demonstrating understanding of the historical context of the period

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## Reading and resources list

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Listed below are texts that might be of interest should you wish to supplement your learning on the course. Any essential reading is marked with an asterisk \*

De Wismes, A., Genealogy of the Kings of France, Artaud Freres, 1990

Girouard, M., Life in the French Country House, W&N, 2000

Knecht, R. J., The French Renaissance Court, Yale University Press, 2008

Wolff, M., Kings, Queens, and Courtiers: Art in Early Renaissance France, Art Institute of Chicago, 2011

### Website Addresses:

Chateau of Versailles: <https://en.chateauversailles.fr/>

Chateau of Fontainebleau: <https://www.chateaudefontainebleau.fr/en/>

History of France, Primary Source Documents: <https://eudocs.lib.byu.edu/index.php/France: 1454 - 1788>