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Dr Philip Mansel

The French Court 1770-1870: Grandeur and Catastrophe

Philip Mansel has long been arguing that Paris was the greatest court city of the nineteenth century. Indeed, under the Bonapartes, the restored Bourbons and Louis Philippe, it was a court city in a way it had not been during the century in which the court had been based at Versailles. Yet, even as late as 1782, when Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette visited the Hôtel de Ville following the birth of the Dauphin, Paris had welcomed them as loyally as ever. And later, even once the storm broke in 1789, the assumption initially remained that the court would simply relocate to the Tuileries. Under Napoleon I, this Parisian court became a reality. He revived the old court, reintroduced the old ceremonies and employed more servants than Louis XVI. Louis XVIII similarly revived the old forms and used them to reintegrate former revolutionaries and Bonapartists. When Charles X was deposed, the monarchy itself survived. True, Louis Philippe then reacted against previous practice and maintained no formal royal household. Yet Dr. Mansel suggested that the reduced Orléans court was still grander than that of Queen Victoria. And, of course, Napoleon III created a French court as splendid as there had ever been. 1870 therefore proved to be a more decisive break than 1789. The greatest symbol of the nineteenth-century French court, the Tuileries, literally went up in flames. **AB**