L’Art de Pâtisserie et Le Palais de Versailles: A Study of Power Through Pastry

Abstract
Louis XIV’s manipulation of the aristocracy at the Court of Versailles in his pursuit of absolute power is well documented. The utter opulence of the period was communicated in every realm of life at Court. The grand dining rituals of the Sun King in particular epitomize the relationship between expression of power and consumption of fine food. Contemporaneous with the relocation of the French monarchy to Versailles was the development of pastry-making into the modern art form recognized today. Changes in culinary techniques combined with sociological factors including increased access to cookbooks and the introduction of restaurants contributed to the elevation of the gastronomic field to its current standing in French culture. How was pastry, the novel art of the day, utilized in pursuit of the goals of Louis XIV? The expression gluttony and excess of Versailles-era France required pastry, and the art evolved to reflect the exorbitant wealth and regal frivolity of the time period. This inquiry examines primary and secondary texts to explore relationships between the culture of Versailles-era France and the pastry of the same time. Connections between the evolution of the art of pâtisserie and the spectacular, regal-centric culture of Versailles as orchestrated by the Sun King shape the role played by the former in the creation of the latter. Biographical sources about Louis XIV and about Versailles itself provide the cultural and political aspects of the time, while period cookbooks illustrate the culinary advancements made during the same era. This thesis attempts to unite these two strains of research to prove that the development and advancement of pastry played a role in Louis XIV’s distraction and manipulation of his aristocracy at Versailles.

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The work *De la distribution des maisons de plaisance et de la décoration des édifices en général* by the French architect Jacques-François Blondel (1705–1774) was the departure point for Frederick's plans for Sanssouci.  

The plans for the Communs, which were built opposite the New Palace, were drafted by the French architect Jean-Laurent Legeay (ca. 1708–ca. 1790). The New Palace itself was realised by the German Carl Philipp Christian von Gontard (1731–1791), who had studied in Paris in the mid-18th century.  

Versailles was also an important model in the areas of interior design and the visual arts. These ideas were disseminated by French craftsmen, artists and architects as well as by French publications, which were keenly read and translated.