

Baroque, Rococo, Neo-Classical: The Bourbon Court and Cultural Change in Eighteenth-Century Spain

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In this impressive *tour d'horizon* of Spanish culture from Philip V to Charles IV, Curt Noel argued that the court remained the central factor in the changing artistic, literary and social fashions of the first century of Bourbon rule. The tastes and, even more importantly, the personalities of each king – and their queens – made real differences. It was not the court itself that changed so much as the culture over which it presided. The formal structures of the royal household and the dictates of its ‘Burgundian’ etiquette were sufficiently flexible to adapt with relative ease to the change of dynasty and, later, to the changes of reign. Madrid was slower than most European capital cities in this period to develop public venues for polite sociability. The easiest place to meet to exchange ideas was a courtly location, namely the new Royal Library. But from the middle years of the century, following the example set by Ensenada under Ferdinand, it was the ministers more than their royal masters who did most to set the cultural agenda. Philip V had relied mostly on foreign artists imported from France or Italy and, in doing so, was generally seen as strengthening rather than weakening standards in his new kingdom. The Alcazar in Madrid and La Granja were among the more obvious fruits of that policy. In contrast, the tastes and characters of Ferdinand VI and his wife, Barbara of Braganza, were decidedly more Rococo. Everything then changed again under the more sober Charles III and, although it was now more often his ministers who took the initiative, it was the King’s own neo-classical preferences that became the norm and which left a lasting influence. **AB**