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### **Politics and Luxury: The Court of King Richard II**

Nigel Saul, who has written extensively on the subject, disputes the idea that there was no court before the Yorkists or Tudors. Contemporaries thought Richard II, like his predecessors, had a court. An extensive household, centralising policies and love of magnificence had also been apparent at the court of his grandfather Edward III. The fire at Windsor Castle in 1992 revealed the magnificence of the medieval royal apartments in 'the Versailles of its day'. Richard II was interested in jewellery, plate and dress. When he met Charles VI of France at Ardres in October 1396, his wardrobe far outshone that of his French cousin. His court was more formal and less military than its predecessors. Before 1390 he was addressed as 'My Lord'; thereafter as 'Your Majesty'. He practised a conscious cultivation of kingship and distance. He chose the sun as one of his emblems and even his uncle, John of Gaunt, was required to bow to him. Chaucer, who was Clerk of the Wardrobe and Esquire of the Household, was a court poet. The King regarded him as an ornament of his court. In the subsequent discussion Anna Keay asked if his magnificence led to his downfall. Nigel Saul said this should be seen in the context of the Peasants' Revolt and the need to instil obedience. Mary Hollingsworth, referring to the growing sophistication of European court culture, pointed out that Chaucer, Froissart and Petrarch had all visited the Visconti court in Milan. To Philip Mansel's question about the contrast between the dress of French and English kings, Nigel Saul replied that the same difference had been seen between the dress of Richard I and Philippe Auguste. He also stressed that, although Richard II's first language was French, English was the principal language at Court by the fourteenth century. In response to Patric Dicknson's question about heraldry, Nigel Saul stressed Richard II's pioneer use of the personal badge of the white hart. Further questions from Rupert Shepherd and Barney Dobson stressed the importance of magnificence as a political instrument.