

THE ANCIEN RÉGIME

The **Ancien Régime** is the period between the **16th and 18th centuries**. There were social, political and economic transformations which ultimately led to the start of the Modern Age.

- In the 17th century **absolute monarchy** became the Ancien Régime's typical form of governance. It was called 'absolute' because all power was concentrated in the hands of the monarch. Royal authority was unlimited and it was believed that this power came from God.
- However, the first **parliamentary monarchy** was established in England in the 17th century.
- **Mercantilism** was the dominant economic system in the 17th century.
- Under the Ancien Régime society continued to be based on the **estates system**.

THE 18TH CENTURY: THE ENLIGHTENMENT AND ENLIGHTENED DESPOTISM

The **Enlightenment** was an intellectual movement, a new way of thinking. It developed in Europe in the 18th century.

- In political terms Enlightenment thinkers wanted to limit the power of the monarchy.
- In economic terms they advocated **physiocracy**. In the mid-18th century, **economic liberalism** began to emerge. It was based on the ideas of **Adam Smith**.
- **Enlightened despotism** was a new style of governance that was imposed in some European countries in the second half of the 18th century. Its objective was to combine absolute monarchy (despotism) with Enlightenment measures designed to modernise the country and improve people's wellbeing.

ECONOMY AND SOCIETY IN THE 18TH CENTURY

The early 18th-century economy was similar to that of previous centuries (agriculture predominated). In subsequent decades, all areas of the economy experienced important changes caused by the **reforms** implemented by Enlightened monarchs. Remember the Mercantilism and Physiocracy

- The **population** of 18th-century Europe **steadily increased** due to improvements in nutrition and hygiene, fewer epidemics and scientific progress.
- Even though Enlightened thinkers wanted to introduce social reforms, society continued to be based on the estates system.

SCIENCE AND ART IN THE 18TH CENTURY

- The 18th century was an era of **great scientific and cultural progress**. This was due to the influence of the Enlightenment on education, as well as the scientific legacy of the 17th century.