

Architecture 351: Romanesque, Gothic and Renaissance Architecture

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Test #2 – Sample Essay Question

Citing one specific example, discuss the most crucial developments of French palace and garden design during the Baroque period. What architectural and design principles are reflected in this project and how does it relate to the broader social and political context of France during this period?

The most crucial developments of the French palace and garden design during the Baroque period can be seen in the context of the palace and gardens of Versailles. The move of the administrative center from Paris to Versailles created a need for Versailles to represent the Royal control of France. The most important development is the ordering of the landscape and the monumental palace set within to command the landscape. Such rigorous architecturalizing of the garden design according to axially and symmetry reflect the administrative changes of France at the time—which was being divided and subdivided and generally bureaucratized. The intense control imposed on the landscape also reflects the academic tradition in France at the time—which was focusing on a rule-based interpretation of classical ordering systems, as well as the incipient academia of architecture as a formal field of study and profession. The palace reveals the extravagance of the French Royalty under Louis XIV—as can be seen in the hall of mirrors—intended to give an infinite visual command of the surrounding landscape. The design principles of the garden refer to Italian gardens and villas such as that of Villa Madama. But here, though they maintain a sense of the episodic (like the movement through the Villa Giulia), the landscape elements are highly formalized and controlled. The overall sense of architectural order of the landscape and palace, as well as the lavish decorative program, combine to such excess here that this example embodies what the later French Revolution will react against.