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0521574544 - The Culture of Clothing: Dress and Fashion in the 'Ancien Regime'

Daniel Roche

Frontmatter

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This book, the English translation of *La Culture des apparences* by Daniel Roche, is a study of dress in France in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Roche discusses general approaches to the history of dress, locates the subject within current French historiography and uses a large sample of inventories to explore the differences between the various social classes in the amount they spent on clothes and the kind of clothes they wore. It is his belief that the choice of clothes, the trade in clothes and the perception of the function of clothing tells us more about the values of a society than the study of any other single commodity; clothes have different uses according to who is wearing them, and in the period under discussion several discrete markets in clothing had already emerged.

Roche's essential argument is that there was a 'clothing revolution' in the later eighteenth century as all sections of the population became caught up in the world of fashion and fast-moving consumption. This was an age of sumptuous fashion gravures and of a new press for ladies of leisure which provided their readers with a stimulating mixture of fashion and public affairs. He demonstrates that this was a period of revolutionary change in the ways in which Parisians thought of dress, for men as well as for women. There was a new concern for decency and respectability as well as a desire to impress.

Taken as a whole, this book is easily the most thorough and wide-ranging study of clothing and its social meaning that has been written to date.

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DANIEL ROCHE

translated by JEAN BIRRELL



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