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THE WHITE CHEMISE DURING THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

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FACULTY OF HISTORY OF ART AND DESIGN AND COMPLEMENTARY STUDIES

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BY

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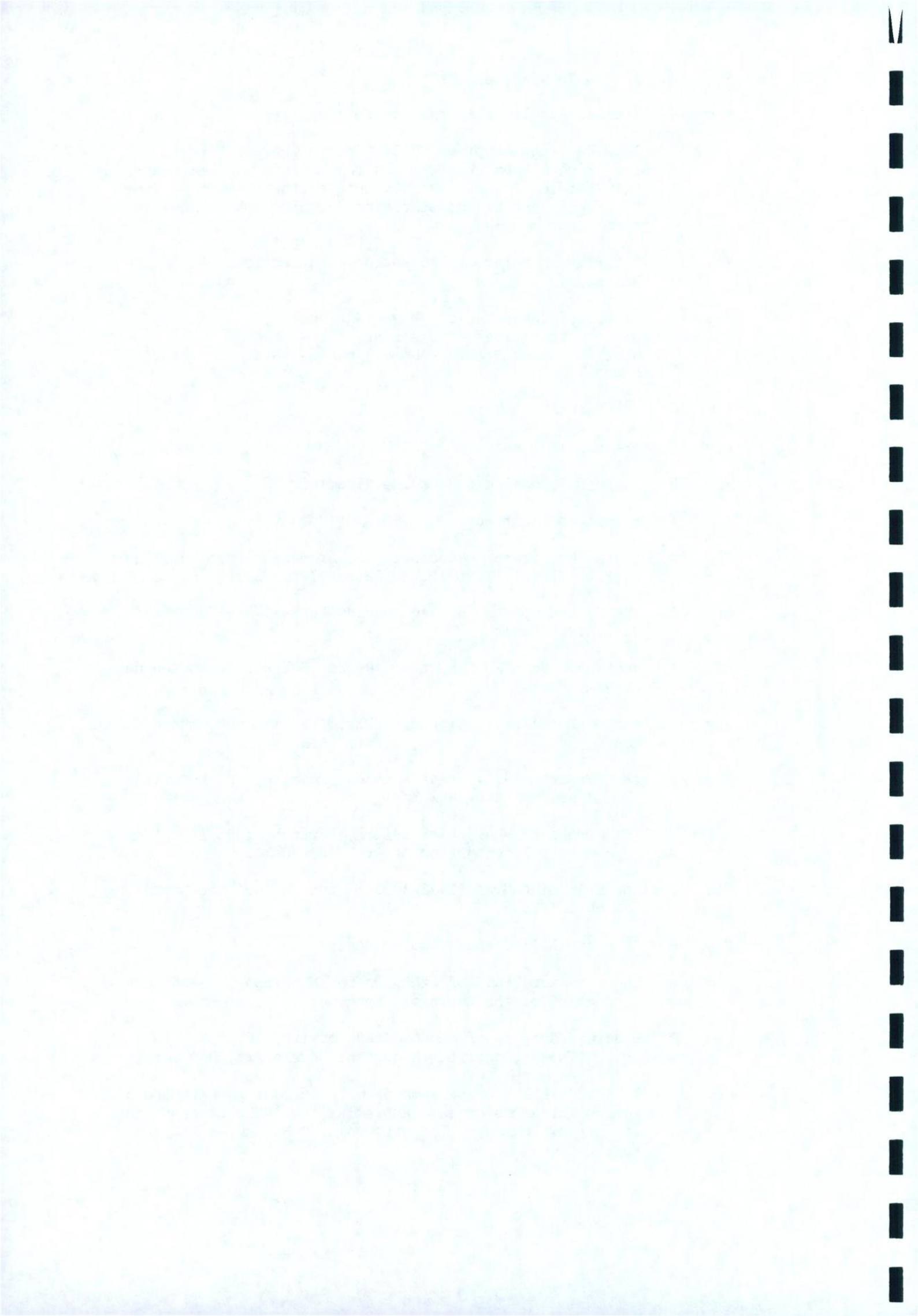
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INTRODUCTION

From the graceful silk frivolity of Watteau to the cool muslin tranquillity of David, from the eighteenth century to the beginning of the nineteenth century, clothing showed dramatic and rapid transition.

Akiko Fukaii, Co Curator
The Kyoto Costume Institute

My objective in this thesis is to discuss this transition, and to speculate on how far the artist, Jacques Louis David - Master of Neoclassicism - helped to make the humble white chemise the most significant mode of dress of the 18th century. I intend to do this through an examination of the history of the chemise first. An examination of the Revolution secondly, and finally in an analysis of Jacques Louis David's impact on the development of the white chemise in the form of his theatre associations, paintings and festivals.

CHAPTER I

WHAT IS A CHEMISE?

EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHEMISE

A chemise was a loose-fitting undergarment formerly worn by women, hanging straight from the shoulders. In Gaulish and Gallo - Roman costume, tunics were worn singly or two at a time, in which case the longer one served as an undergarment. Another garment worn by both sexes, probably for similar uses, was a type of long-sleeved vest with broad parallel bands. Derived from the tunic, the shirt or chemise, worn as body linen, appears in the 4th century A.D. The *camisia* as it was called (a word of Celtic or rather Germanic origin) supplants the loincloth originally worn under the tunic. (1).

The chemise developed over the centuries. It is important to trace its origin before discussing its development from a simple garment into a symbol of a republican ideal, during a period of great change in France. From Byzantium and the Dark Ages the basic garments were not surprisingly similar to those of the late Roman Empire. The undergarment was a simple tight fitting tunic with long sleeves which could vary in length from knee to ankle and over this was worn a tunic robe with loose sleeves similar to the *Damatia*. The undergarment was usually 'white' but the tunic robe offered more opportunity for decoration.

Women's costume followed that of their male contemporaries. Women wore a light, tight-sleeved chemise reaching the ankle and over



this they wore a tunic gown with a slightly shorter hem and sleeves so that a band of the undergarment was visible. The chemise appears to have been a simple undergarment which was worn next to the skin, and was the only garment worn while sleeping and frequently mentioned in Anglo Saxon manuscripts, but since it was covered by other clothing it is never shown in illustrations and its exact form is therefore unknown. (2).

Apart from a few items of actual clothing found in burial sites, we have little information about female dress until Cordingian times, since there were few images of women until the 8th century. Most comments at the time state women's costume was similar to that of men except that women usually did not use leg coverings. But from the fragments of cloth found in the tomb of the Merovingian Queen, Arnegonde, buried in 570 A.D. we can see that she was buried in a chemise of fine woollen fabric, a knee-length tunic, which was of ribbed indigo violet stain. Her legs were covered in woollen cloth hosed crossed thongs just like the men of the period, and over all of this she wore a long, loose tunic of red silk lined with linen that reached to the floor. It was open in front with wide, long sleeves and was fastened by a gold brooch and a girdle, that went twice around the waist and was knotted at the front. On her feet she wore black laced leather boots. (3) So the chemise at this time was a simple insignificant undergarment.

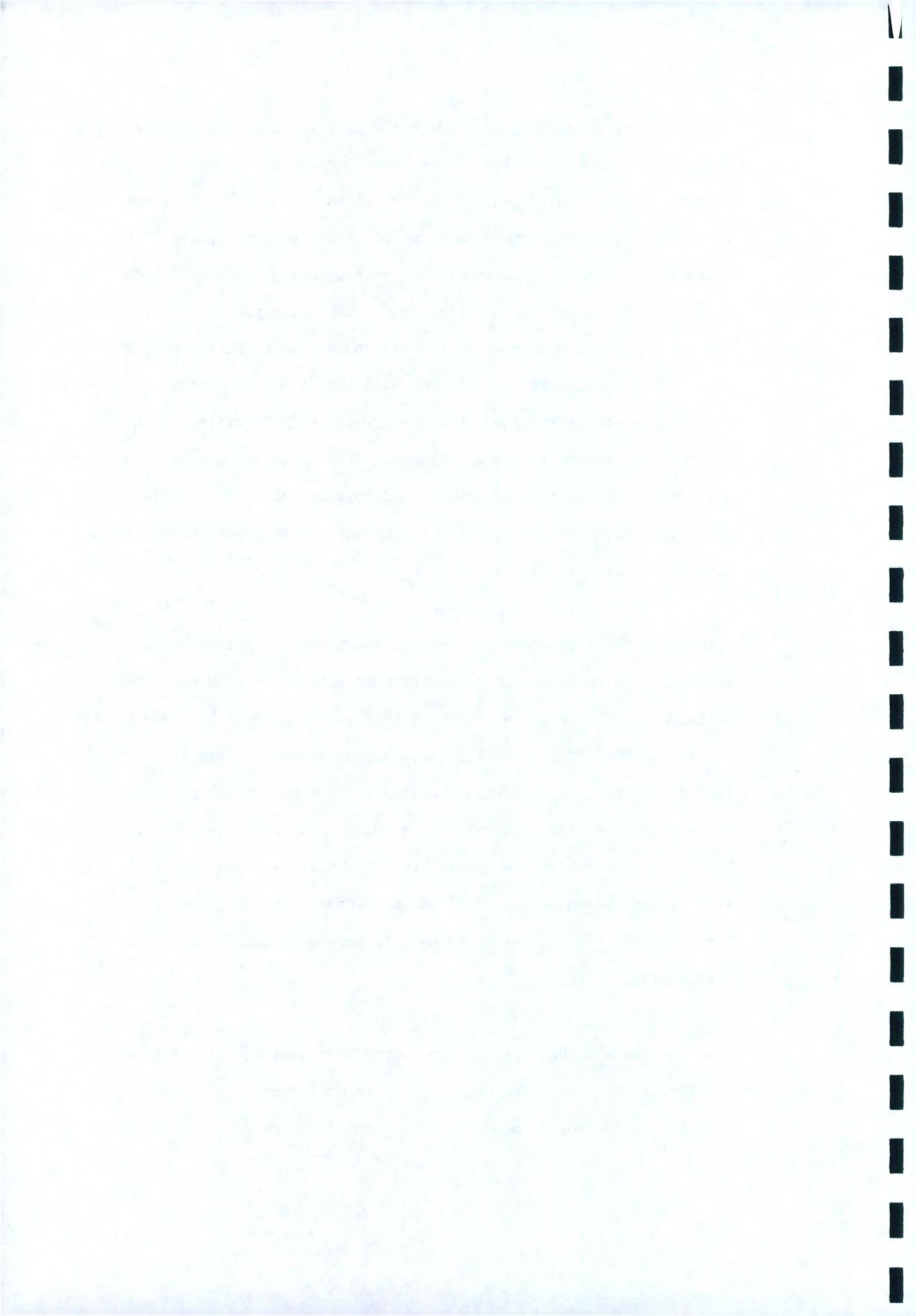
During the Romanesque period however, women wore a 'bliaut'. This garment was usually worn with a close 'chemise' that showed at the



wrists as it emerged from inside the wide sleeves of the 'bliaut. The period from the decline of the Roman Empire to the rise of the Gothic period manifested itself in clothing heavily muffled, tight-fitting garments through a period where drapings, were giving a semifitted semidraped effect, garments covering the sinful body were in accordance with early christian principles. In the Romanesque period, a sense of texture and design of fabric echoed the use of Roman draping. By the middle of the 15th century the Renaissance was established in Italy. Women's dress reflected the enormous bulk seen in men's costumes. The women's chemise was gathered into the neck to achieve a deeply textured look similar to slashing. The wide sleeves of the undergarment were drawn up to tight cuffs (4) (Fig. 1).

Throughout the 16th century women's costume changed little. They continued to wear the short-waisted gown with the deep V neck as described. The chemise underwent the same changes as the man's shirt; as the cuffs and collar were almost always visible it was fitted with ruffs at the wrists and neck. A very typical portrait of an Italian lady about 1515 is that of La Donna Velata by Raphael. The entire ensemble is representative of the high Renaissance emphasis, on full rounded forms in all of its arts. The chemise is still worn as an undergarment and is accorded little significance.

The chemise was then a voluminous white undergarment of extreme simplicity, a smock, a shift, a basic undergarment and nothing more for all European women for some thousand years.





CHAPTER II

NEOCLASSICISM

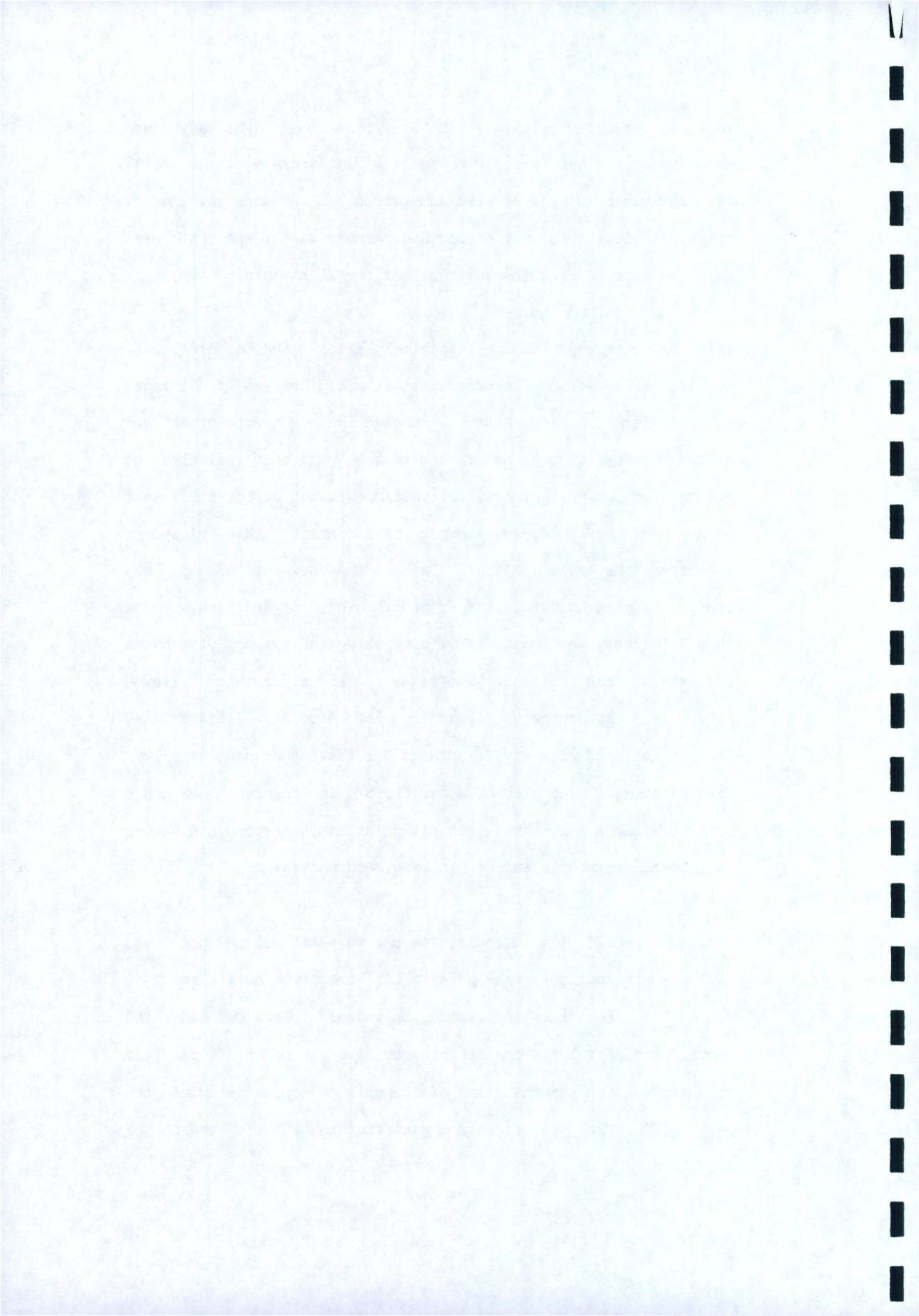
But did the role of the chemise change with the changing times of the 18th Century? To ask this we must look at the beginning of Neoclassicism. The rediscovery of Herculaneum and Pompeii, halfway through the 18th century, caused a widespread interest for art based on details from classical antiquity. In his first history of the fine arts, published in 1775 the German archaeologist, Winckelmann, spoke with great admiration of the classical style as having 'noble simplicity and tranquil grandeur'. The Greeks of the 5th century believed that the highest aspiration of the 'spirit' could be expressed in the perfection of the human form based upon harmony and proportion; that perfect humanity implies the perfection of a universal order. The classical spirit survived in art as long as something of this ideal, this fundamental belief in humanity, remained the source of inspiration. (1) (no. 5).

This was obviously the message for the 18th century. The Greek style had a noble simplicity and an emphasis on the idea of perfection. It was clear that this was the art of all "free peoples". Greek culture was organised around a series of small city states wherein both religion and government officialdom were mere extensions of individual human attitudes and ideas. Individual achievements were at the centre of Greek life. When a Greek artist or architect began something, he or she would see it to its conclusion as his or her individual, creative contribution

to the community culture. The Greek ideal of democracy even encompassed clothes as the rich and the poor dressed alike. (2). (6). The vision of any ordered and harmonious universe governed by classical ideals of perfection and harmony were ideas that grew more and more, during the last half of the 18th century.

In the literary and philosophical salons the middle class intelligentsia met and discussed what it would be like if 'things' were different, they bitterly opposed the decadent order and called for a return to nature and reason, and this reflected on all dress codes. They held that art should not be for art's sake alone, but have a moral and educative content, this viewpoint announced the role art would play in the Revolution. It was shared by some of the great French thinkers of the time, among them Voltaire, who spent his life opposing the tyranny of church and state, and Rousseau who was a social critic who believed nature was the source of all good. For Diderot, artists like Chardin pointed the way forward to new taste and new morality. His paintings were part of a new climate in France. Chardin's work acquired a new theme. In his paintings, heroism and virtue is invested in people and not in kings and nobles.

Chardin's world of middle class people were the men and women who would be attempting to take part in the Revolution half a century on. The enlightenment made universal tolerance and the brotherhood of all men the centerpiece of a new order, "a party of humanity", free communication of thoughts and opinions ruled the day. (7) The age of reason was returning to the source of



classical Greece. The monuments of classical antiquity were an inspiration to artists from the Renaissance onwards. The Apollo Belvedere had been even known to Michelangelo and his contemporaries.

This provided a philosophical and artistic basis towards simplification in clothing. The excavations of the ancient Roman ruins began in 1738 and provided the driving force for a neoclassicism honouring 'Antiquity' against the background of a return to nature as Jean Jacques Rousseau advocated. The enthusiasm for ancient Greek and Roman styles dominated Western Europe in the later half of the 18th century, affecting everything from art to life in general. Respect for eternal beauty and the idealized simplicity from Ancient Greece and Rome caused a rejection of ornate decoration. (8) This was a period of great transition, a dying Rococo elegance merged into neoclassicism; a great new stress was placed on 'reason as the key ideal of the enlightenment, and a growing interest in the emotional demands of Romanticism evolved.

Marie Antoinette supported all three. In her formal court functions she and her court combined the older Rococo tradition with the neoclassic ideal, in furniture and decoration, while the salons sponsored by intellectuals at her court discussed the latest views of the enlightenment - freedom of the individual, constitutional government and justice through law. (9) At the same time, in the gardens of the Petit Trianon the queen built a rustic village or Hamlet, which contained a Temple of Love, a dairy and an old mill,

romantic settings against which to play out a game of picturesque 'milkmaids'. While Marie Antoinette was playing games leaders such as Voltaire, Burke and Jefferson were creating a new view of the relationship between a government and its people.

So when a portrait is exhibited in 1783 at the Salon du Louvres in Paris and provokes a storm of protest we are not surprised. 'A lot of money has been spent on giving the Queen's Hameau the aspect of poverty,' wrote the Marquis de Bombelles, 'but by spending a little more, Her Majesty would have been able to improve the condition of the poor.' (10) According to Adrain Bailey if the portrait was considered an image of a decadent order mocking a nation on the verge of 'bankruptcy' it served to emphasise the Queen's unpopularity. The young Queen embraced the styles coming from England in which simple white chemises were in vogue but provoked public indignation. Obviously the dress was not the problem, since similar portraits passed without comment. The problem was Marie Antoinette and what she represented. Times were changing, there was a movement away from the ideas of excess to the 'pure'. Did Marie Antoinette have a presentiment of changing times when she is quoted as saying "no more flowers, or extravaganzas to Rose Bertin". (11) (Figure 2).

A definite dislike for the monarchy was establishing itself. This portrait caused such a storm it had to be removed from the Salon. According to Valerie Steele, Vigee de Brun, the artist responsible for the painting, was popular for her parties, where her guests dressed in Grecian costume, she spent very little on clothes and wore white dresses of muslin or linen and the simplest parisian styles. (12)

But Vigee de Brun is also quoted as saying "women of the court were already wearing muslin dresses around 1775." (13) this indicates to me that the chemise a la Reine was being used by Marie Antoinette because she obviously felt threatened by the attempts to establish a new order in society. Vigee le Brun, I believe, with this portrait helped popularise a more natural look, by introducing into her portraiture light weight gowns as opposed to the corsetted, bulky robe a la Francaise (Fig. 3). But was Vigee le Brun responsible for the launching, of the style that came to be known as the Empire line, a claim made by art historian Joseph Baillo? (14) Perhaps she was but I feel it is too simplistic a comment to make. In my opinion it is important to note Vigee le Brun's absence from France during the most tumultuous period in history.

Her relationship with Marie Antoinette made it too dangerous for her to stay in Paris so she escaped and began twelve years of exile when Marie Antoinette and Louis XIV were arrested in 1792. (15) A lot happened within those twelve years, politically and socially, 'costume' evolved along the path to freedom but in a different 'context'. Words like equality, liberty, fraternity, were inflaming the hearts of Parisiens. Words unthinkable under the old regime.

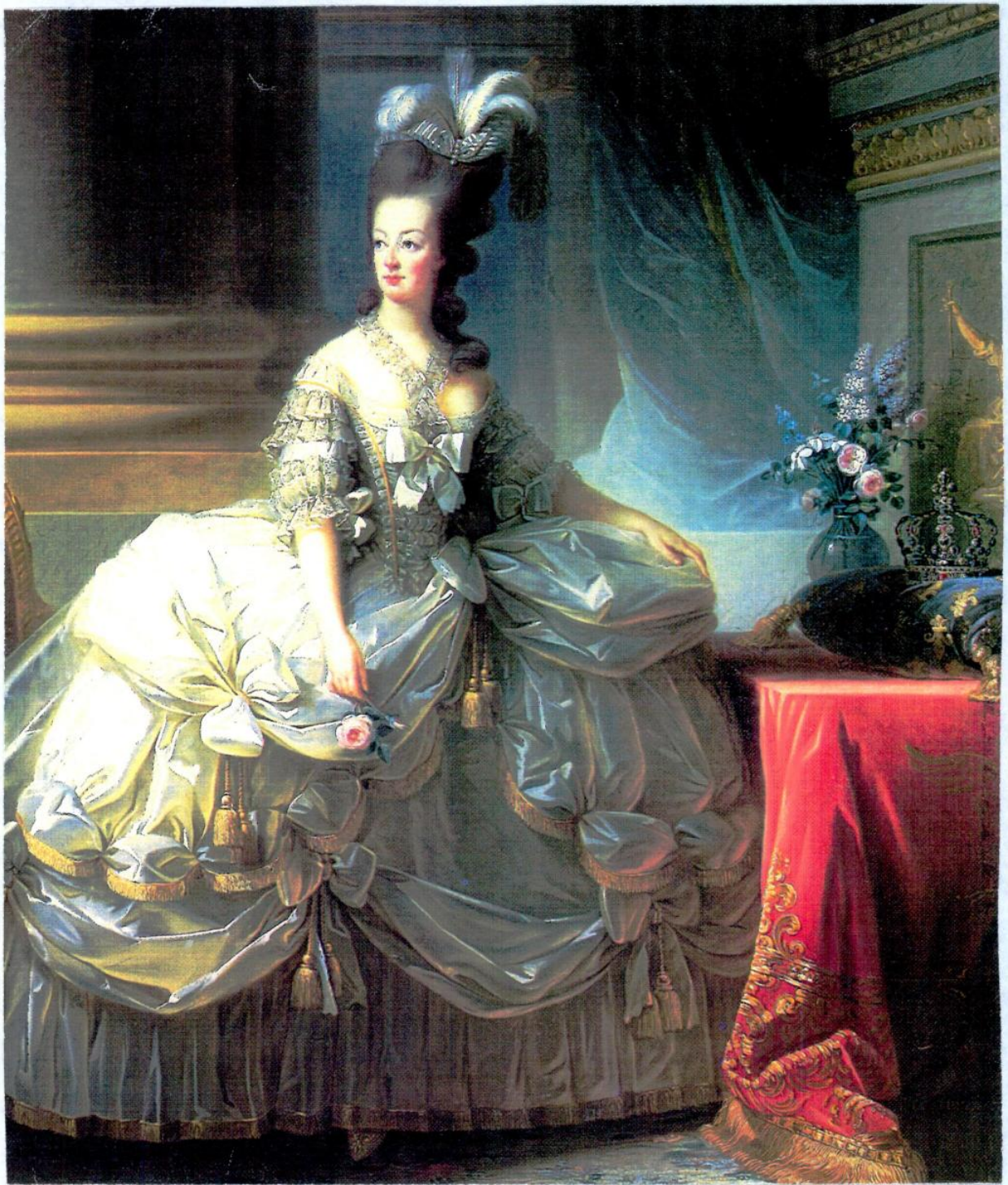
David Wakefield aptly describes Vigee le Brun's input as a "conscious anachronism typifying the final attempt by Ancien Regime society to shut its eyes to unwelcome realities and to take refuge in a world of make-believe and fancy dress". (16) In



Fig. 2 Marie Antoinette dressed in chemise a la Reine.



large measure, I believe this to be true as it would account for
Vigee le Brun's success with Marie Antoinette.



The Queen wears her elaborate grand habit, the cause of many a fainting spell at court.



CHAPTER III

THE CHEMISE AS A SYMBOL OF A REPUBLICAN IDEAL

The artist Jacques Louis David helped to bring down class barriers and helped popularize a mode of dress that symbolically represented the ideals of the republic in the form of the white chemise. His paintings and festivals encouraged women in their pursuit for the ideal 'Antique' and therefore brought to fruition the Directoire and Empire styles. At the outbreak of the Revolution, Jacques Louis David stands out above everyone. He reached maturity as the neoclassical school was languishing and also at a moment when the grandeur of liberty was dawning in French consciousness. (17) David was considered the Master of Neoclassicism and the greatest painter of his day. He was one of the most powerful as well as the most famous artists in all France. Neoclassic art was a powerful propaganda weapon of the Revolution and was wielded with great effect by David in his struggle to overthrow the old regime.

The artistic Revolution led by David triumphed before the political Revolution. David brought neoclassicism to the people with a vigorous content capable of moving the illiterate masses to revolutionary activity. David's combination of classicism and naturalism appealed to workers, peasants and bourgeoisie, all classes could comprehend its symbolism.

Changes in ways of seeing it could be argued, coincide with and even anticipate social change and so it was in this build up to

the French Revolution. I have selected the painter Jacques Louis David to illustrate the development of the white chemise as a symbol of a republican ideal because in the career of David art and politics were so closely interdependent. David dominated french painting for thirty five years through the reign of Louis XIV, the Revolution and the Napoleonic Empire, and finally the restoration of the Bourbon kings. He had a talent for both painting and survival.

David's great paintings show us how the classical tradition could be used not just for academic purposes but as a model for political action. The chemise is a direct reflection of this, it was an instrument used in the Revolution asserting political allegiance to the New Republic and became a part of political action in the tumultuous years ahead. Simplicity in dress became a political statement and the white chemise epitomised this statement of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. Liberty in costume and equality of dress were fundamental to the Revolution and women would soon realise how the white chemise could be worn to express symbolically this new republican ideal. As the Revolution approached The Oath of Horatii became one of the great images of its time (Fig. 4). The story was taken from Titus Livy and was situated in the period of the wars between Rome and Alba in 669 B.C. With this painting David became his own master and in my opinion placed a symbolic importance on the garments worn by the people in this drama.

These costumes worn by the people in David's canvases come to life



Fig. 4 The Oath of Horatii



when they are worn by men and women taking part in David's Festivals of Antiquity. The men in David's festivals adopted Roman costumes and the women, taking on the role of goddess of Reason, Liberty and Nature, dressed in 'Antique' clothing echoing the ideal of Liberty.

These costumes even became prominent in the designs for David's actor-friend, Talma, which were revolutionary in the theatre. Instead of wearing plumed hats and silk doublets, Greek and Roman heroes strode the boards in tunics and helmets designed by him. David used the same research in his great history paintings and showed the same interest in dressing the main protagonists in his republican festivals which I will now discuss.

David's festivals of Antiquity created the world in which the 'white' chemise could live and thus David's influence made the white chemise the most important mode of dress of the 1790's. In David's festivals we see the symbol of 'Liberty' and its evident importance; she expresses the freedom France is experiencing and epitomises the ideal of the republic. The continuation of revolutionary activity into these festivals projects a mood sweeping through France and quickly imitated elsewhere in other countries. The white chemise develops with these festivals worn by the women attending such pageants and by the women grouped around the statues of philosophers and symbolic goddesses. The tunic robes worn by the women begin to develop continually as women dress in pursuit of the Antique.

So, although the women play a small, insignificant role, they epitomise a fashion that evolved from the manipulation of these simple garments into *chemise à l'antique* and *chemise à la grecque* worn by such women as Madame de Verniac, Madame Recamier, Theresa Tallien and others. The women in *The Oath of Horatii* announce the importance the chemise will play when it becomes a garment worn by thousands in the years ahead. David's painting of *The Oath of Horatii* is more in keeping with the emerging times and expresses the new ideology of the bourgeois revolutionaries painted seven years before the Revolution. Its exhibition in 1785 marked the triumph of neoclassicism over the Rococo Regime. These early paintings provided the inspiration for future fashion as women began to seek inspiration from the styles of ancient Greece and Rome.

An event took place months into the Revolution: Voltaire's old play on the Life of Brutus was revived at the National Theatre. This event is interesting as it illustrates how passionately people felt about change, a change to be reflected in costume, when women would no longer wear extravagant panniers, corsets, wigs, plumage and rich fabrics of the earlier part of the century but adopt simplicity in dress as with all things, echoing antiquity. At the end of the play David's painting of Brutus was enacted as a *tableau vivant*. Brutus's sons have been condemned for conspiring for the return of the 'Monarch'. When Brutus cried 'Gods give us death rather than slavery' the roars and applause of the audience was so great it took minutes before order was re-established. Liberty was now inscribed on people's hearts with

David's help. 'Never' said an eyewitness, 'was the illusion more complete the spectators became so many Romans, they believed they took part in the action.' (18)

The women in the Brutus painting are a focal point. They are not placed in the corner as in the Oath of Horatii but in the centre. The white flowing chemise is worn by two of the young women and the flowing 'white' drapes of fabric outline the fluid lines of their bodies as in the Oath of Horatii and they are highlighted by the strongest light.

Brutus was painted the year the Revolution began and was exhibited at the salon of the summer 1789. (Fig. 5) Both paintings portrayed scenes from the early history of Rome. Both scenes were invented by David and painted in defiance of official convention. How different David's women appear - free from any extravagance or constraint. By creating a mania for Antiquity with these early paintings, David created a fashion for the 'Antique' which became a craze in the 1790's. Brutus was read as a political manifesto announcing a new age. David replaced the principles of the Monarchy with the democratic principles of the Greek and Roman Republics. Art and costume together made visual propaganda. Brutus had an effect on customs, etiquette and costume. The constraints of earlier costume and ancien regime luxury were being abandoned in pursuit of Antiquity.

One of the most daring measures was the prohibition of the boned corset in 1789. This simple act revolutionised costume and was



Fig. 5 Brutus



the first step in helping the development of the chemise. (19)

In the summer of 1789 fashion magazines quickly exploited fast moving political events and costume demonstrating political allegiance. The Lady's magazine in 1789 was able to comment "All the sex from fifteen to fifty downwards appear in their white muslin chemises", with broad sashes, and their hair curled over their foreheads and hanging down behind to the bottom of their backs echoing the loose hairstyles to be found in Brutus and the Oath of Horatii, and obviously illustrating the effect these paintings were having in the shaping of fashion and in the development of a new society without aristocratic domination.

"Today [in 1789] " a contemporary wrote, "underneath a long dress of caraco, all the movements of the body can be perceived". Never before had people concerned themselves with the well-being of the body scorning any costume that hindered its movement. Stays and high-heeled shoes were abandoned, and dress fell in a straight fluid line. (19)

On 7 September the wives and daughters of a number of leading artists, Madame David among them, dressed in 'white' with tricoloured cockades in their hair and publicly donated any jewellery to the war effort, adopting cheap metal trinkets symbolic of a commitment to the Revolution. Popular motifs included faces of Roman symbols of unity the bonnet rouge and the heads of eminent ancient and contemporary heroes as Brutus and Marat. The idea of such a gift was inspired by a Roman story in Plutarch's Parallel Lives. 'White' connotated purity and

sacrifice and was gaining significance for the events to come as well as echoing the classical ideal (Fig. 6). (20)

A revolutionary change in values regarding dress had taken place. David's early paintings had been influential in accelerating the pace of change, giving the white chemise style a certain high profile which would continue into David's great revolutionary fetes ordered by the government. David would also design a range of civil costumes, and official costumes for the new republican world. In a sense the white chemise was the unofficial costume worn by women that David helped to design. David knew dress was one of the most powerful means of communication and he exploited this during these heightened revolutionary times.



Fig. 6 Boizot and Chaponnier Generosity of Roman Women, Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, Cabinet des Estampes.

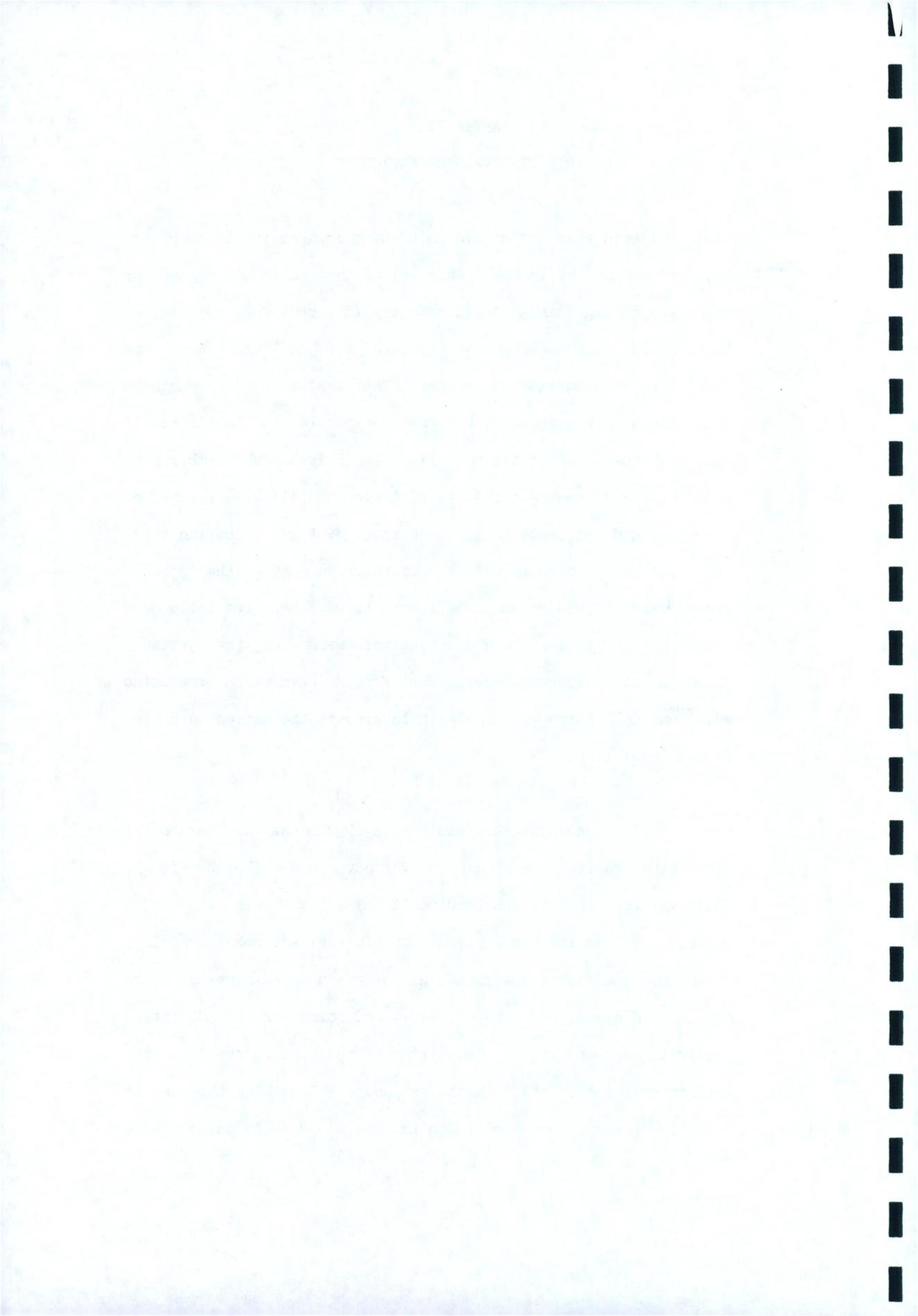


CHAPTER IV

DAVID'S FESTIVALS OF ANTIQUITY

David believed that art should be used to advance the cause of the Revolution and he followed this belief through into a number of magnificent pageants. David's festivals were a form of street theatre in which everyone could take part and experience the Revolution as a continuing process. They reached a wider audience than the more conventional theatre and appealed to the illiterate masses, those who could not afford expensive club membership, newspapers and theatre tickets. (21) Every detail was designed to stimulate and influence the men and women of Paris. During these festivals David encouraged women in their pursuit of the Antique. Women were influenced by David's work as we might be influenced today by the media. David's festivals were among the greatest triumphs of propaganda during the French Revolution replacing devotion to church and king with loyalty to the nation and the French Revolution.

The first full-scale pageant designed by David was the ceremonial procession taking the remains of Voltaire to the Church of St. Geniveve renamed the Pantheon on 11 July 1791 (Fig. 7). The cortege had as its centerpiece, the funeral triumphal chariot, drawn by twelve attendants in 'Roman' costume and twelve white horses. Singers, dancers, actors and actresses of different theatres grouped around the statue of the philosopher in the various costumes of the *dramatis personae*. The white chemise was worn by twenty young women, Voltaire's adopted daughter among



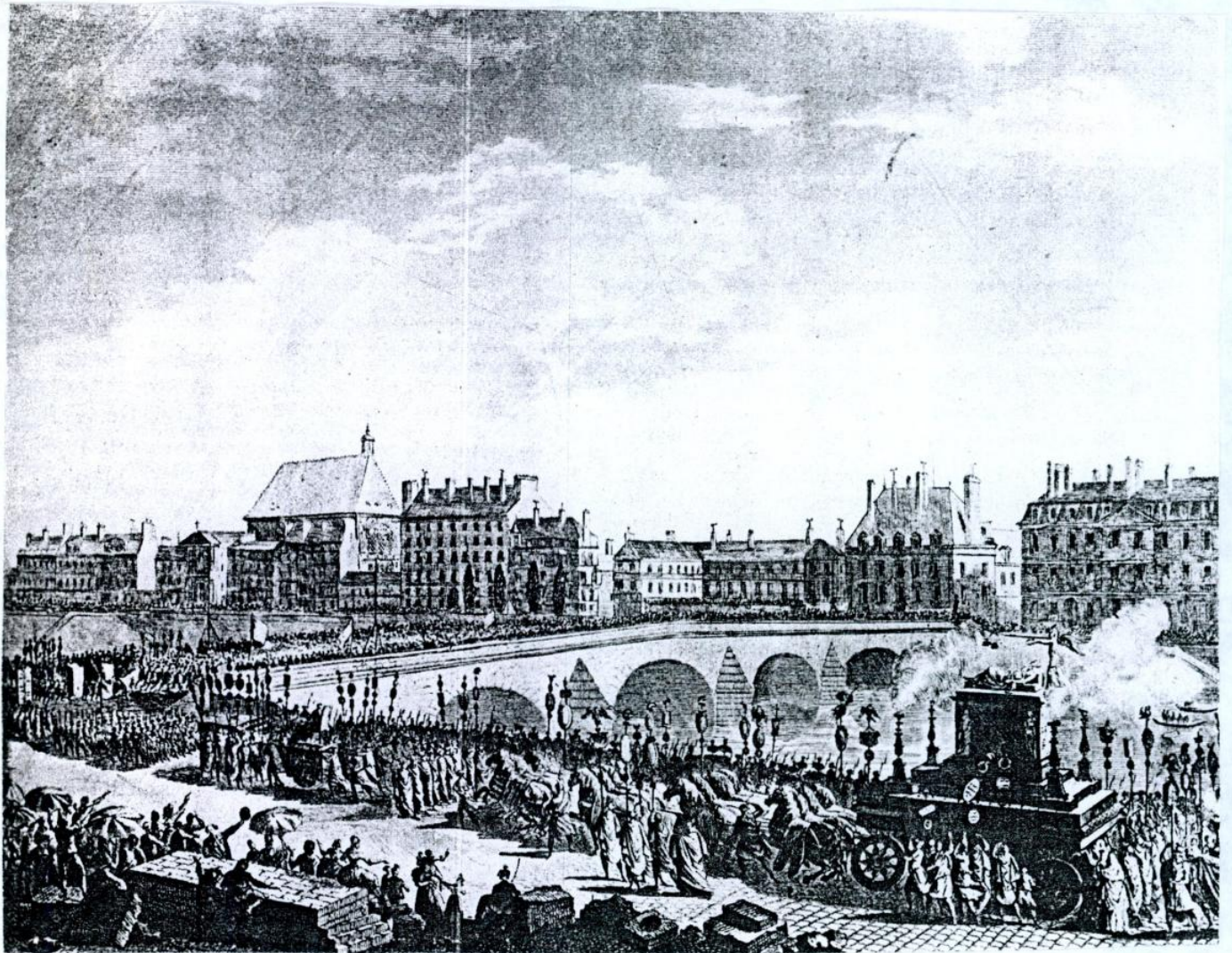


Fig. 7 (A) Triomphe de Voltaire, 1791.



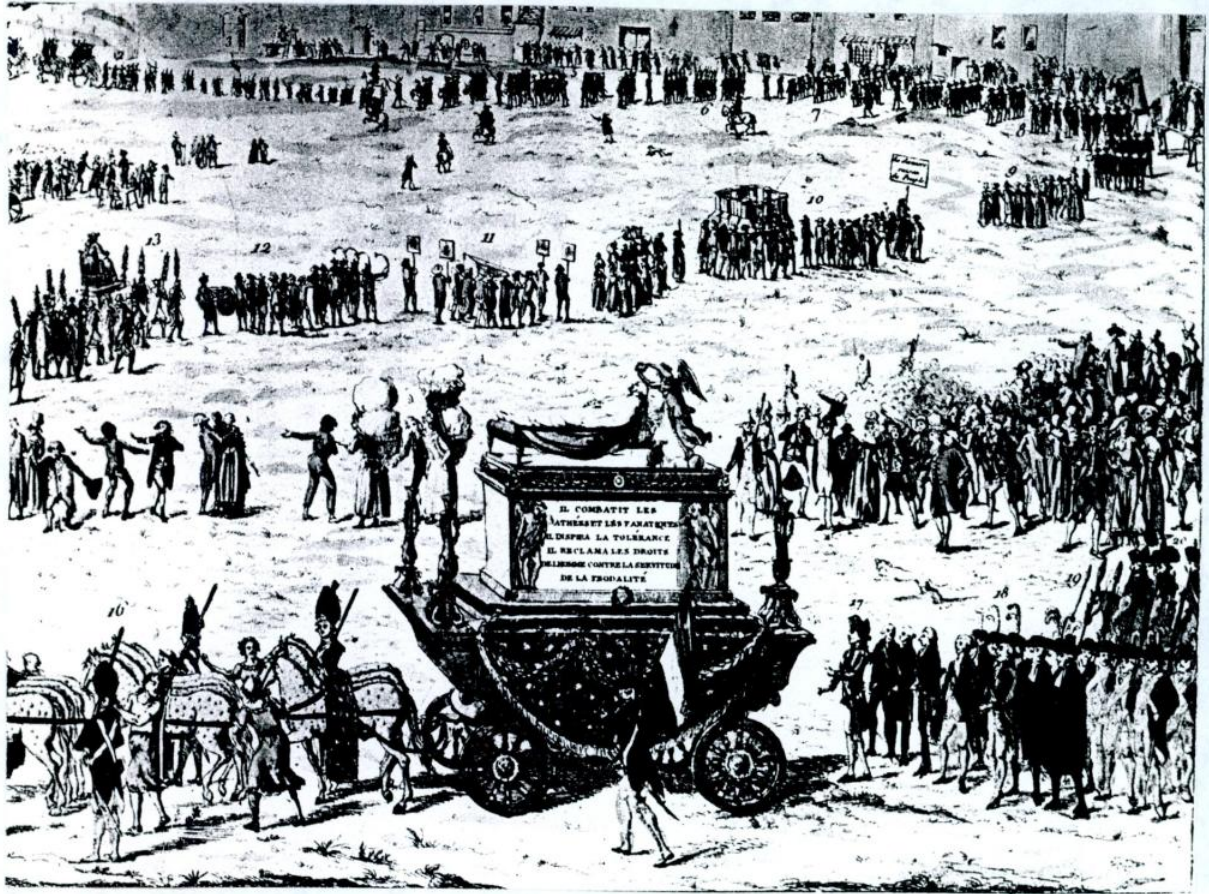


Fig. 7 (B) Triomphe de Voltaire, 1791



them, crowned with laurels and holding a golden lyre. In my opinion the 'white' chemise was deliberately chosen by David because it was a perfect symbol of freedom from aristocratic domination and because it echoed the Roman and Greek chitones, worn by the women who strolled the streets of their ancient cities dressed in wonderful simplicity, and united by a common belief in the republic. The wealth of information found among the ruins of Herculaneum and Pompeii (Fig. 8) were placed at the service of the Revolution in the form of David's 'Festivals of Antiquity'. The symbolic development of the white chemise was closely linked to the revolutionary ideology which urged a return to Spartan simplicity, and consistent with this, dress became extremely simple.

Early in 1792 according to D. L. Dowd, David used his talents for a purely propagandist opus *Causis Grauhus* of his friend Marie Joseph Chenier. The political drama assaulted the aristocracy, and after attending the private reading, David was persuaded to produce it. It is interesting to observe the reaction of the public to this drama. There were criticisms of the play but the costumes and decorations designed by David were appreciated by the audience and praised by the press. One journal remarked the 'heroic morals of the Roman republic do not appear at all strange to the spectators. The hatred of all tyrannies is in every heart and the fire 'Liberty' needs only to be fed. (22) This fire David fuelled successfully initially in his paintings, and subsequently in his festivals and theatre performances. David's passion for Antiquity influenced this burning 'desire' for Liberty. This was





Herculaneum and Pompeii



as much a visual revolution as it was a political revolution. The middle class Jacobins of which David was a member, sought a secular society based on equality. The everyday lives of the men and women of Paris were transformed from 1792 onwards. A new calendar and new currency were developed, streets and churches were renamed and reconsecrated to a new republican way of life. David was commissioned to design festivals inspired by the heroic virtues of the Roman Republics.

Patriotic virtue was expressed in trees of Liberty first planted in 1790 (Fig. 9). The participants taking part adopted a variety of revolutionary emblems: tricolour plumes, and cockades, while women and children dressed in white chemises with tricolour sashes and garlands in their hair. In all, some 10,000 trees of liberty were planted. (23)

On 17 July 1792 David designed a festival commemorating the Champ de Mars. On a huge triumphal car was placed a statue of Liberty. It left the Faubourg St. Antoine for the Bastille where the statue was dedicated and then proceeded to the Champ de Mars where a ritual purification took place. (1) Once again the emphasis was put on the Statue of Liberty and her Antique clothing. She is being honoured symbolically and represents in her attire the fluid lines of freedom and the virtues of a republic. She is being used as an example, and it is obvious her symbolic representation influenced the fashion that would inspire women to dress in a similar way. David's festivals emphasise these points and enforce ideas about nature, reason and wisdom, ideas that inspired even

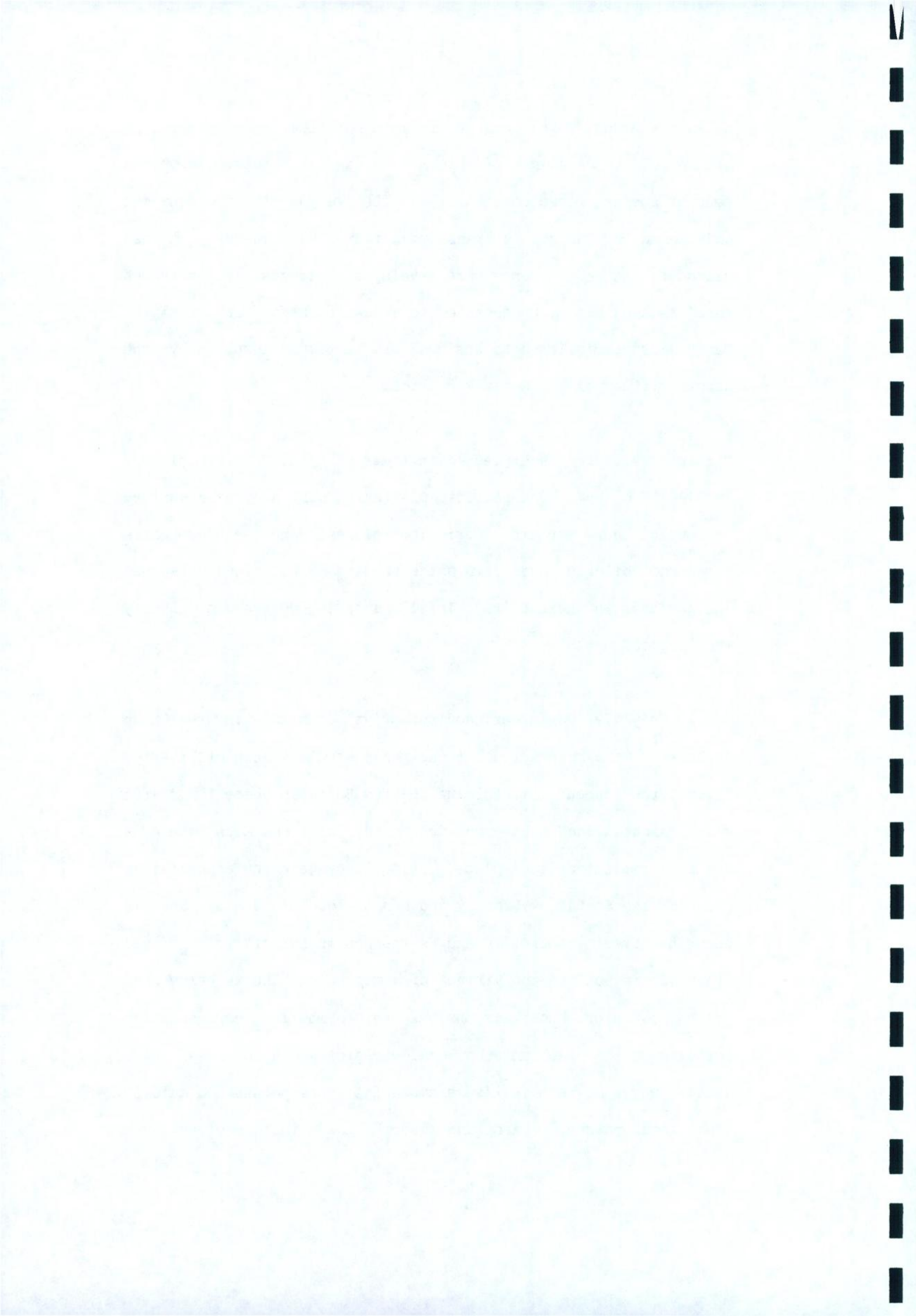




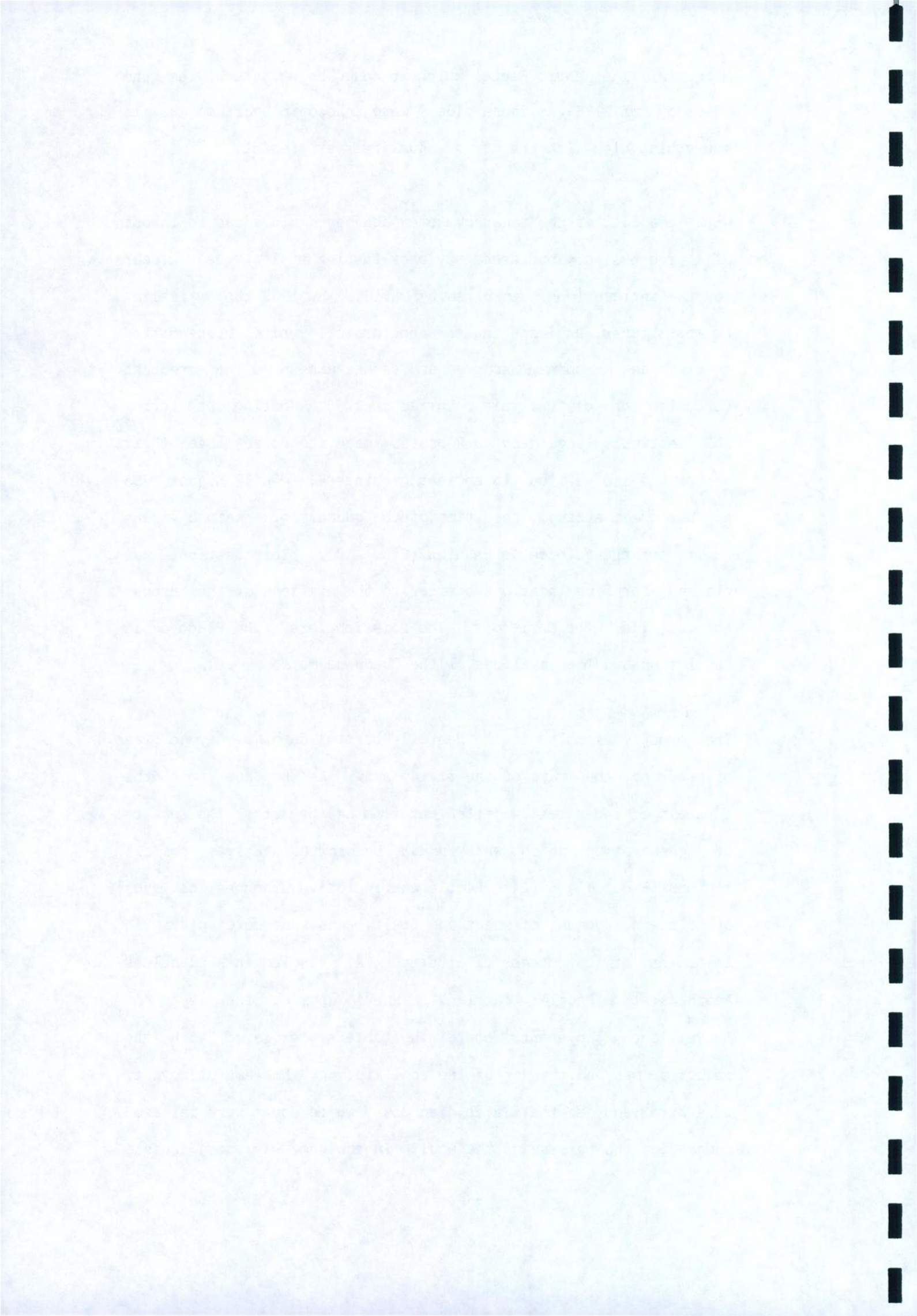
Fig. 9 E. Le Sueur, Planting the Tree of Liberty, 1792 (Musee Carnavalet, Paris).



Mozart's 'The Magic Flute' which it could be said embodies the ideology of 1789. These ideas were echoed in costume as in everything else with the cry of equality ever present.

With the fall of the monarchy women abandoned old ideas in favour of a progressively undressed style as fashion styles moved closer to the antique look, inspired by David. By 1793 the waistline creeps higher anticipating the neoclassical white high-waisted chemise and ribbons, scarves and sashes ascend. The greatest concentration of festivals occurred in 1793. During the terror the festivals according to Rousseau "made the Poles love their motherland and revived its ancient greatness". On 10 August 1793 another great statue, this time of the goddess of 'nature', was built for the Fete de la Reunion (Fig. 10). This festival was planned for five locations similar to the stations of the cross, the Bastille, The Carrefour, The Poissonniere, The Place de la Revolution and The Invalides of the Champ de Mars.

The group assembled on the Bastille before dawn, everyone was blessed by the rays of the rising sun. As the sun rose the fountain of regeneration jetted out from her breasts, the waters of regeneration which were drunk by representatives of all regions (Fig. 11). (24) People carried olive branches, garlands of flowers, poses of wheat and fruit, and some bore pikes in imitation of the goddess of liberty. All mingled in a classless Apotheosis. People carried banners showing the eye of Surveillance, covenants containing tablets, engraved with the rights of man and the act of the constitution. Emblems of royalty were burnt and, as the flames died down, white doves were released suggesting the release of the soul. In the same way women dressed



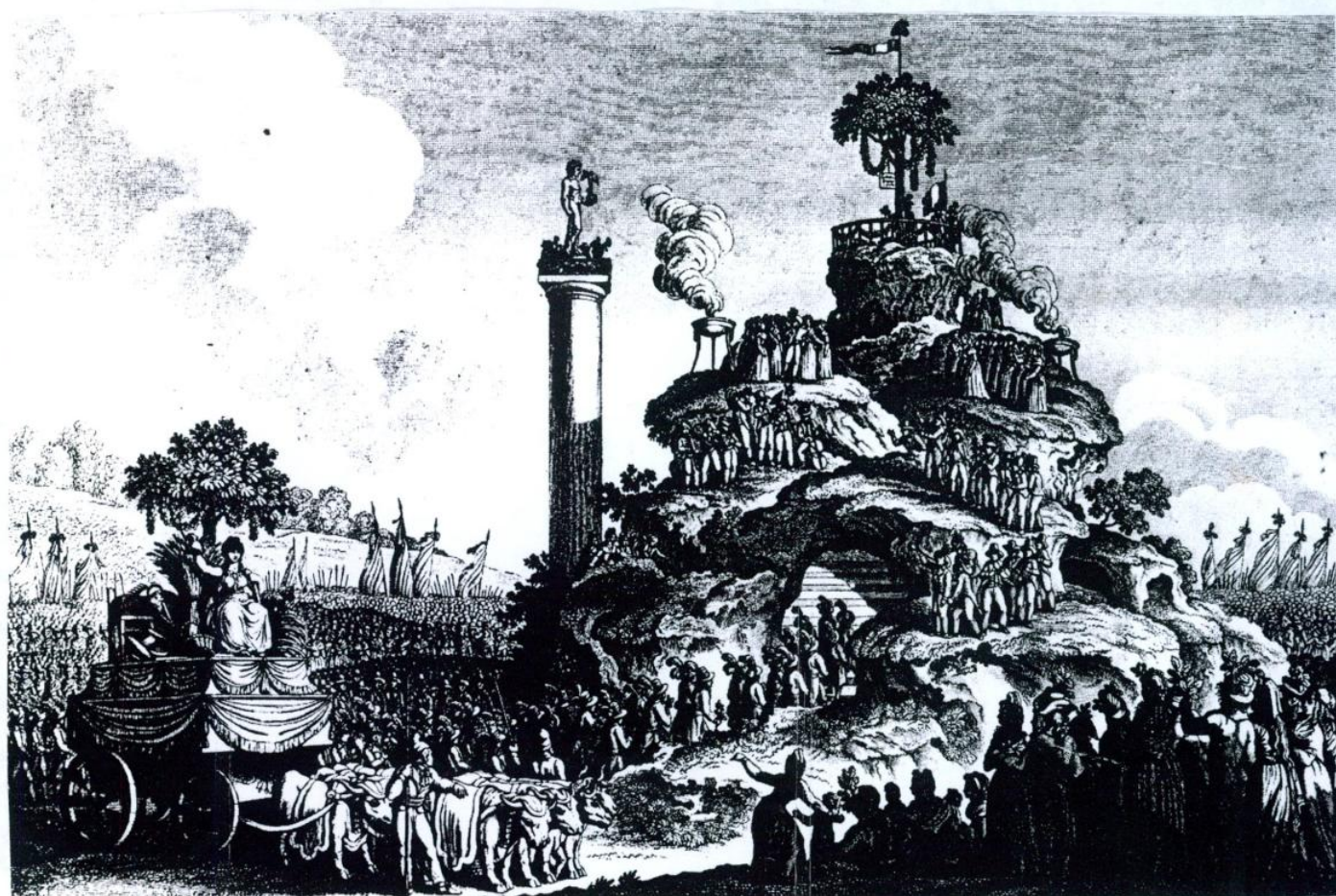


Fig. 10 Vue de la Montagne Elevee au Champ de la Reunion.





Fig. 11 Fontaine de la Regeneration sur les debris de la Bastille.



in white chemises symbolising freedom from constraint and symbolising an escape from an aristocratic state to the ultimate ideal of a republic. The crowds then passed under a masonic emblem of equality, to a symbolic altar where everyone swore to defend the constitution with the gesture inaugurated in David's "Oath of Haroatii" and now transmitted into an act of greater faith. The ceremony ended with a frugal meal after sixteen hours.

Other festivals also occurred at this time, La Fete de l'Unite 10 Aout 1793, where a plaster statue of Liberty was raised on the pedestal of tyranny (Fig. 12). (25) Her antique clothing echoed the statue's magnitude. It epitomised all the virtues of a republican ideology. Other festivals were dedicated to nature, old age and concepts like youth, industry and agriculture (Fig. 13). Robespierre tried to supplant religious ideas and morals with republican principles, and Rosseau ordered the establishment of the 'supreme being' and churches were converted into temples of reason. Christianity had been too closely identified with the old order and now 'reason' was to take the place of revelation.

An 'actress' often took on the role of the goddess of 'reason' dedicated in these temples to the 'supreme being' (Fig. 14). Michael Batterberry tells us in the early phase of the Revolution that the Cathedral of Notre Dame was renamed the "Temple of Liberty", and commandeered for a particularly 'memorable' occasion when a pageant was arranged around a nineteen year old chorus girl from the opera, Theresa Angelique Aubrey. (26) She was dressed as the goddess of reason and placed on an elevated throne of Liberty,



Fig. 12 La Fete de l'Unite, 10 Aout 1793.



Fete a la Vieillesse, 1794 Pierre Alexandre Wille. This festival was dedicated to old age. The element of revolutionary propaganda is evident, note the Statue of Liberty, the central group of municipal officials in their tricolour sashes of office, and the young girls in flowered coronets and white gowns who vow to marry 'jeune republicains defenseurs de la patrie' - entertainment and merry-making are the order of the day.





Fig. 14 Engraving by Bauvisin, 1790.



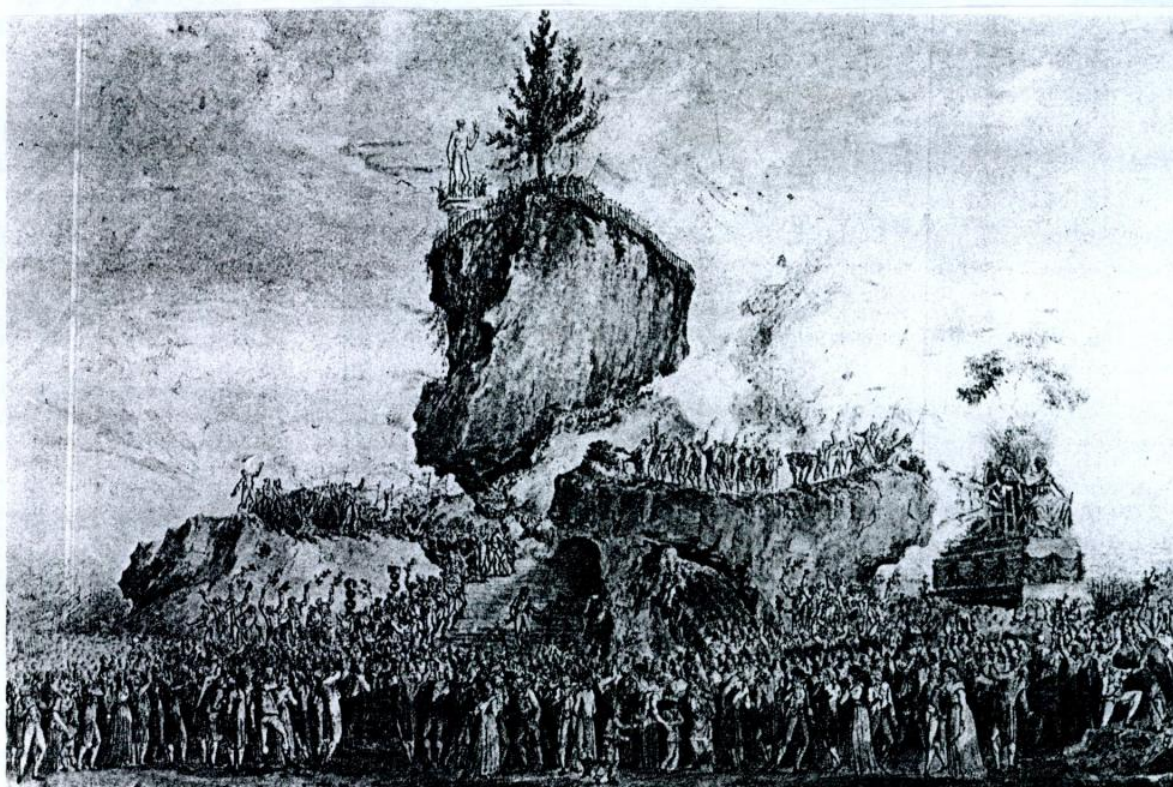


Fig. 15 Fete de l'etre Supreme, 1794. On the right the chariot of Ceres, goddess of harvests, but the focal point was a mountain crowned with a tree of Liberty and a vast statue of Hercules who symbolized the french people



a red bonnet on her head and holding a pike. She represented the spirit of an era.

In 1794 David designed the Fete de l'etre Supreme (Fig. 15), his final festival before the Directoire. The dawn was heralded by warlike music, houses were decorated with garlands of leaves and every parisian mother dressed her daughters' hair with flowers. An enormous ampitheatre was erected, statues of egotism, discord, and atheism were placed in front of the Tuleries. After a sermon Robespierre fired a statue that revealed the statue of the goddess of Wisdom. Groups representing childhood, adolesence, viritly and old age marched to the Champ de Mars. Children were consecrated to the Supreme Being and each section elected citizens to sit on the mountain made of papier mache. Matrons and young girls dressed in white and wore tricolour sashes, and children wore white tunics crowned with violets. Men dressed in Roman costume. Many thought they were living through heroic passions such as courage, virtue and danger associated with the great days of the classical past. In 1792 Helen Maria Williams declared the Revolution 'abounds with circumstances that would improve the page of a Roman or Greek annals'. Succeeding generations will consider the Forum and the Capitol associating them with the Tenniscourt of Versailles and the Champ de Mars. (27) Madame Roland recalled how she wept at not having been born a spartan or a Roman. Such was the effect of David's Festivals of Antiquity on society. Their importance should not be dismissed lightly and neither should the experimentation in clothing that occured at such festivals, be taken as having no significance.

The white chemise was the one element that survived into the Directoire. It was, during this period and in the years to come, the single most important symbol of the Revolution that remained when the festivals had ended. Its meaning and significance was deeper than just freedom from physical constraint. It was part of an ideal vision of a society based on Roman virtues.

CHAPTER V

DIRECTOIRE AND EMPIRE

David brought the chemise to New Heights. In 1793 the 'Merveilleuse' were women so 'nicknamed' because they wore transparent chemise dresses. They appeared during the terror, according to Akiko Fukai, advocating 'purity'. Their flowing drapes of fabric aimed to show the body of a woman in its natural form. I feel as a result of David's festivals and early paintings this fashion emerged. These early experiments with Antique clothing were influential in bringing about the Directoire and empire styles. The white chemise in a variety of modes could be worn by rich and poor and this is evident in David's festivals. According to Ian I Kanai even the threat of the guillotine would not deter women in their urge to be fashionable. Women have always been indifferent to the laws made by men and so even at the height of the Revolution and after, they continued to dress as they liked.

Women aspired to become walking goddesses of Liberty, Equality, Reason and Wisdom, which David promoted in his festivals, and the Merveilleuses set the pace for revolutionary feminine fashion during the Directoire. Women trailed their skirts over their arms and bared their legs. They dressed their hair in a porcupine style either done or undone or a la grecque, a la titus, or a la Brutus. (28) Occasionally their gowns were slit from waist to ankle and revealed the new underclothing, a type of flesh coloured body stocking called a Maillot worn by ballerinas in the Opera.

(29) The vision was complete with ankle bracelets, toe rings, open sandals and gilded nails to achieve the effect, a la Vestale or a la Diane. David's paintings had come to life. Everything a l'antique was the craze. (16)

The concept of freedom in all things was expressed. Even plays were revised for republican ears and any mention of royalty or aristocracy removed. Cockades were placed on 'Minervas' helmet and Andromachus robe and many actresses appeared in white gowns decorated with a tricolour sash. In 1793 Le Tableau de Paris declared "never before had women dressed with such simplicity", and women continued to do so into the Directoire. The white chemise was part of an ideal.

In 1794 according to Mercier "Semi nude and dressed in white tout le femme sont et blanc et le blanc sied a toutes les femmes". Such women danced with abandon and almost a religious ecstasy. The often transparent chemise revealed the shape of the body which Mercier implies was barely covered in knitted stays and underwear. Some women wore flesh coloured tights although this was thought indecent. White in colour revealed in design, neoclassical dress in its most beguiling form. A mixture of fake innocence and eroticism enhanced the charms of these demi mondaine leaders of society like Theresa Tallien, women became Merveilleuses.

The simplicity of their dress was set off by a shawl which was draped in the most becoming styles. Women were walking goddesses of Liberty, Fraternity and Equality.



Fig. 16 L. Boilly: Point of Convention, Collection, Alain de Rothschild.



The Antique swept the style-setters of the Directoire. Transparent white chemises were all the 'rage', underpinning and corsetting disappeared and some women, for a brief moment, even discarded their underwear and wore transparent chemises over 'naked' flesh. The waistline was now under the bustline as can be seen in David's women depicting Antique clothing in his paintings and his festivals. Some women went barefoot, while for others the standard footwear was the simple sandal. Hair was dressed in a series of curls in a Greek manner. White muslin chemises were worn with no decoration other than a colourful stole and a ribbon under the breast. The break was made from centuries of padding, and layering in a moment of madness after centuries of aristocratic conventions.

Everything associated with democratic Greece and Republican Rome was exploited to create the Directoire which inherited the ancient classical republican tradition. This freedom, simplicity and revealing naturalness was breathtaking. Not since ancient Egypt had society women been seen in such a state of undress. The Directoire restored Paris to its place as the centre of the fashion world. The first Roman and Greek style tunics made their street appearance from the hands of specialist dressmakers. Nancy designed Greek style chemises and Madame Raimbault was inspirational and unsurpassed in her Roman style creations. These costumes evoked such figures as Flora, Diana, Ceres, Minerva, and the Vestal Virgins (Fig. 17). Even Catherine the Great ordered a Greek chemise and Princess Wilhelmina of Prussia, Princess of Orange and wife of William V, was struck by the freedom of the new



Fig. 17 Flora Diana Minerva





Fig. 18 Ceres Juno.



fashion. She desired the style she heard so much about "the chemise under which we are not laced up".

David's painting of Madame Seriziat illustrates the popularity of the chemise. Her simple garment was the height of fashion. Although it shows primitive stitchwork on the plain white fabric (everything was hand-stitched until the introduction of the sewing machine in 1860). The ultimate ideal during the classical period was to forego all sewing and to stress the grace and controlled beauty of the natural body movement which was supported and enhanced by the soft flow of finely woven fabrics. Then the ideal was complete when the wet drapery effect found on figures from the Parthenon was adopted during the Directoire. This soft flow of nearly transparent fabric enhanced the natural beauty of the body as completely as possible without inhibition or construction.

During the Directoire Therese Tallien was nicknamed Notre Dame de Thermidor (Fig. 19). She was the first woman to adopt the ridicule, a handbag made of papier mache, painted receptable shaped like an urn or etruscan vase. Her most successful outfit was the white chemise, open at the lower edge of her skirt revealing her legs. She wore bracelets on her ankles and rings on her toes and fingers with her hair in a Grecian style. The other two most celebrated beauties during the Directoire and Empire were Josephine de Bauharnais who married Napoleon and Juliet Recamier, wife of a prominent banker (Fig. 20). The sheer white Grecian dresses they preferred left little to the imagination. Worn with cashmere shawls they typify the mania for classical Antiquity,



Fig. 19 Theresa Tallien



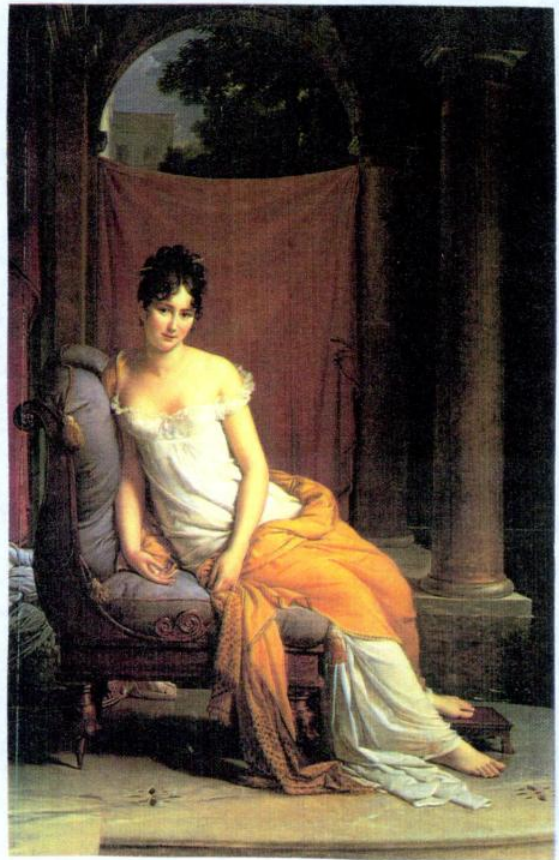
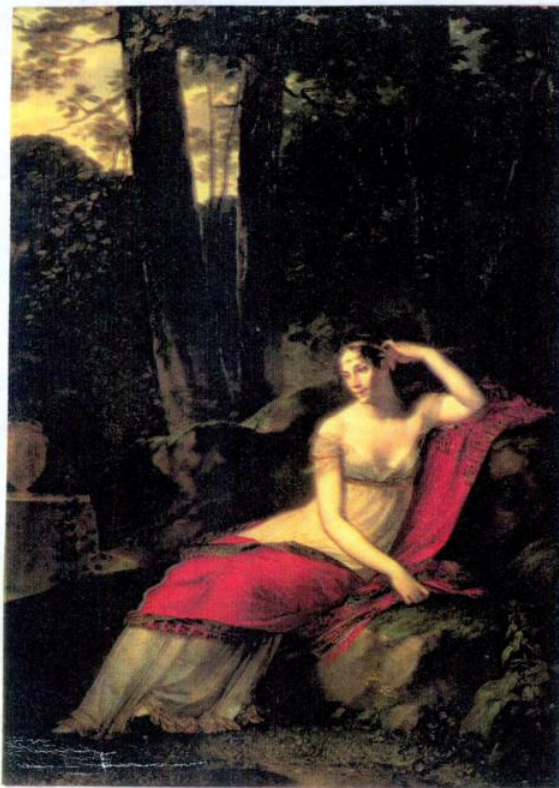
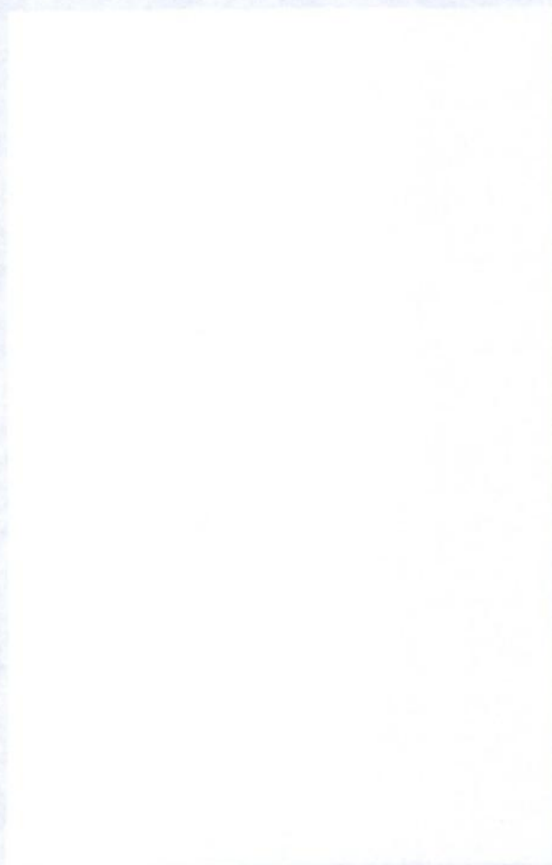


Fig. 20 Empress Josephine (left), Madame Recamier (right).



created by David in his paintings and festivals. The stress on the beauty of the draped silhouette enhanced and underlined 'grace' and freedom of movement. Even the draped shawls adopted by women were in imitation of the himatia derived from the east, even in ancient times it was draped for easy relaxed movement.

Every movement was emphasised by classical Greek dress, the body gestured through constantly shifting folds of soft fabric which in its simplicity echoed the lucidity and beauty of the human form. These three beauties were known as the three graces when seen together dressed à l'antique. These great ladies inspired fashion magazines such as *Journal des Dames et des Modes*. Mercier said "the white chemise was a favourite for all women, there is not one woman who does not decorate herself on Sunday with an Athenian muslin gown." The pages of fashion magazines were dominated by gowns in the classical mode. Although other styles and colours were available the classical style remained the most popular (Fig. 21). Another more poetic description of the mode à la grecque can be found in the ladies Monthly Magazine: The close, all white, shroud-looking, ghostly chemise undress of the ladies seems to glide like spectres with their shrouds wrapped tight around their forms" (Fig. 22).

In 1796-1799 David paints *The Intervention of The Sabine Women* (Fig. 23). This painting re-emphasised the importance and significance of the white chemise in society. The Romans in the painting have abducted the daughters of their neighbours. Hersilia is between her husband and adjures the warriors on both



Fig. 15, 1798, as seen in the Boulevard des Capucines, the punk hair of porcupine style, semi-transparent spotted shawl edged with black velvet.



Fig. 16, 1798, an elegante of the Directory displays elaborate croisures a la 'victime'. Red ribbons as a reminder of the guillotine - on her muslin robe, and hair tied up in a kerchief a la paipanne, in these last years of the century the waist gradually rose until it was under the bust.

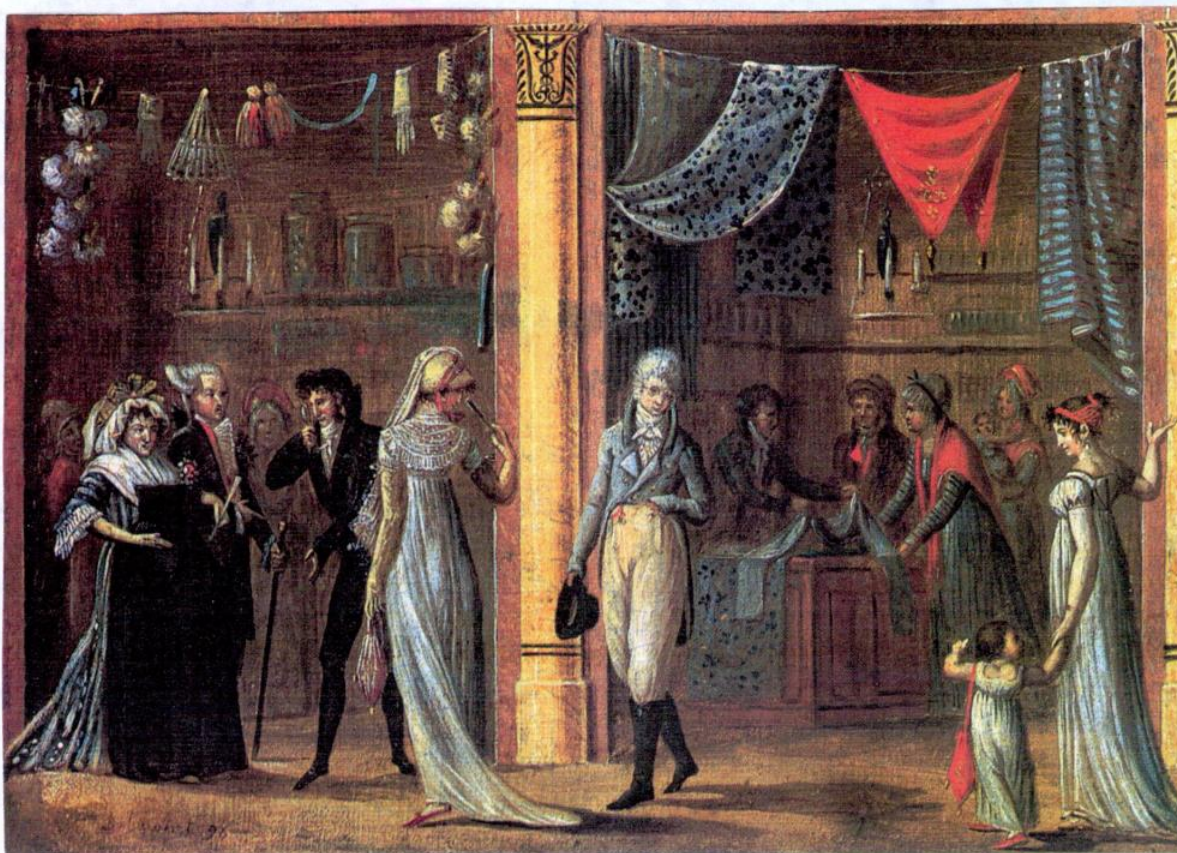


Fig. 22 Louis Philibert Debucourt, La Promenade publique du Palais - Royal, 1798 (Musee Carnavalet, Paris).





Fig. 23 The Sabine Woman.



sides not to take their wives away from their children. The painting depicts reconciliation and could well be the dramatisation in ancient dress of the storming of the Bastille. The female figure according to Luc de Nanteuil stands for the noble and merciful France restraining the excesses of the Revolutionary terror. When the painting was exhibited it was considered shocking but the cries of the critics were drowned out by public excitement at the magnificence of the work. It was exhibited for five years and 50,000 people went to see it. David's paintings offer a distinctive insight into the development of the white chemise. This painting in particular epitomises the age. Women in France echoed in dress the liberation of France, by adopting the more undressed style.

The symbolism in the painting made a huge and happy impact on the spectators as did the costumes of the subject. In 1798 two young women dared to stroll along the Champ Elysees wearing nothing but gauze shifts. (31) According to Michael Batterberry "Wicker in all his wildest dreams of feminine Sparta could not have imagined the extremes to which Directoire women would go in their efforts to dress a la grecque.

David paints Madame De Verniac in 1799 (Fig. 24) who was nicknamed The Beautiful and Calm Juno but Madame De Verniac could well be the goddess of Liberty, Wisdom, or Reason, represented in David's festivals. Madame de Verniac is dressed a l'antique against a decor reduced to a minimum. The folds of her gown are ample and soft and a champagne silk scarf crosses over her bosom

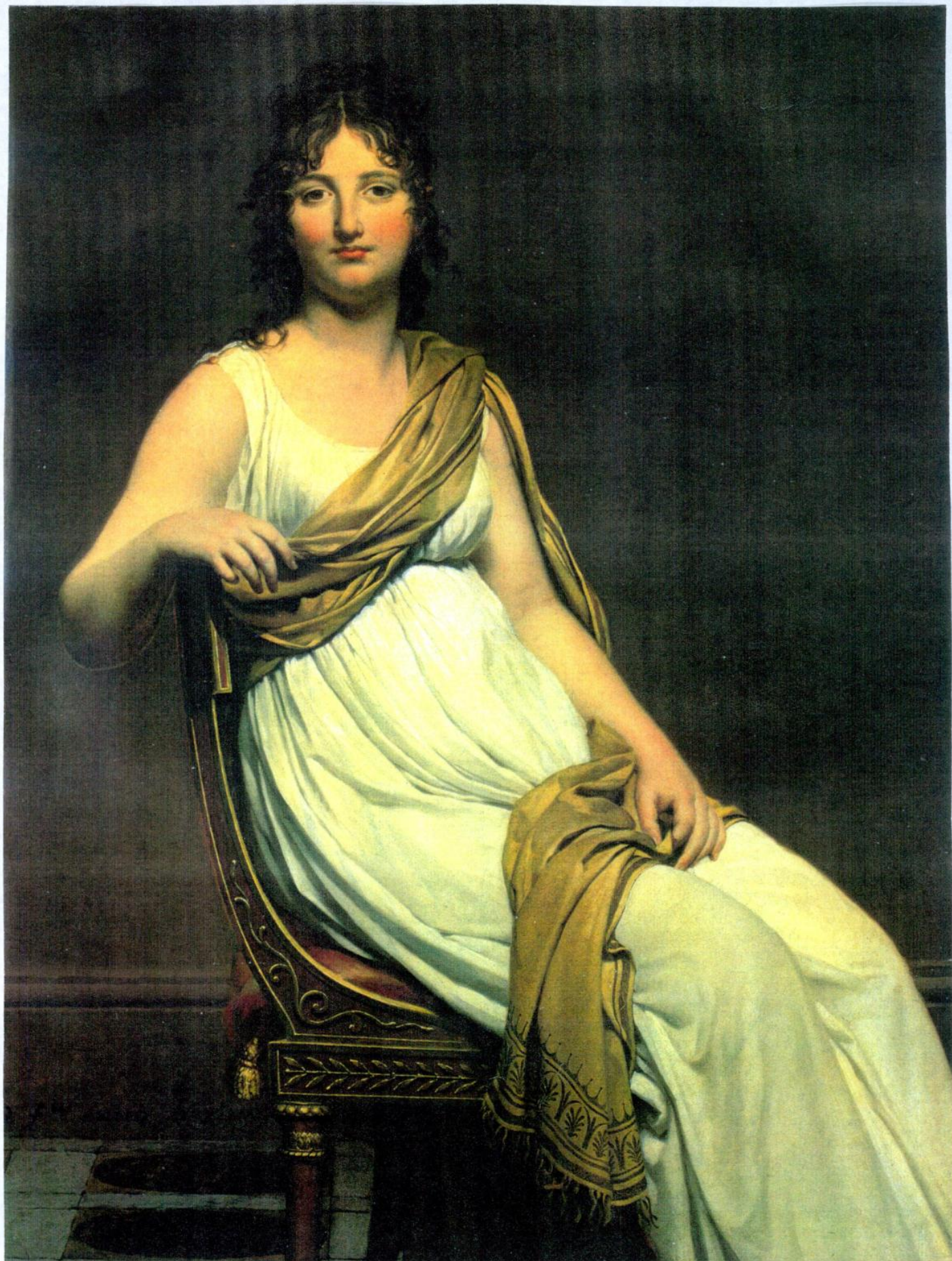


Fig. 24 Madame De Verniac



and falls languidly into her lap. Her face is monumental as if the goddess of Voluptuousness sits before us. In 1800 David paints Madame Recamier, nicknamed Venus, the goddess of Love. Between 1800 and 1803 the upper part of the chemise became a small separate bodice with a square neckline, an overtunic like a Greek poplos was worn over the underskirt and the hair was done in a more formal Greek coiffure. The fashionable ideal is epitomised in her short bouncy curls and headband dressed in a white Empire chemise dress reclining on an Empire sofa (Fig. 25). Together with German de Stael she was a fashion "trendsetter for over fifty years". In London she was followed by a throng of admiring onlookers through Kensington Gardens. From 1800 white muslin gowns graced the feminine scene for twenty years (Fig. 26). Romantic and Grecian in appearance "sheer undressing was the general rage". Women dressed en chemise as if they were just out of their beds. And in 1802 a dress may be made so exceedingly fine and thin, that it may be carried in a pocket book or conveyed by two penny post to any part of town. (32)

The Directoire merged into the Empire. Napoleon realised the Tax Revenues in France depended on luxurious textiles, he made a tremendous effort to revive the factories which the revolution had left in ruins. He dictated that no women should appear at court wearing the same gown twice. Another device he put into action was the boarding up of all fireplaces. The cold required heavier more luxurious costly textiles. Women's costume began to change once again. (33) Josephine was a fashion trendsetter. Paris was the leader of fashion and Josephine lead the way. She inspired



Fig. 25 Madame Recamier.



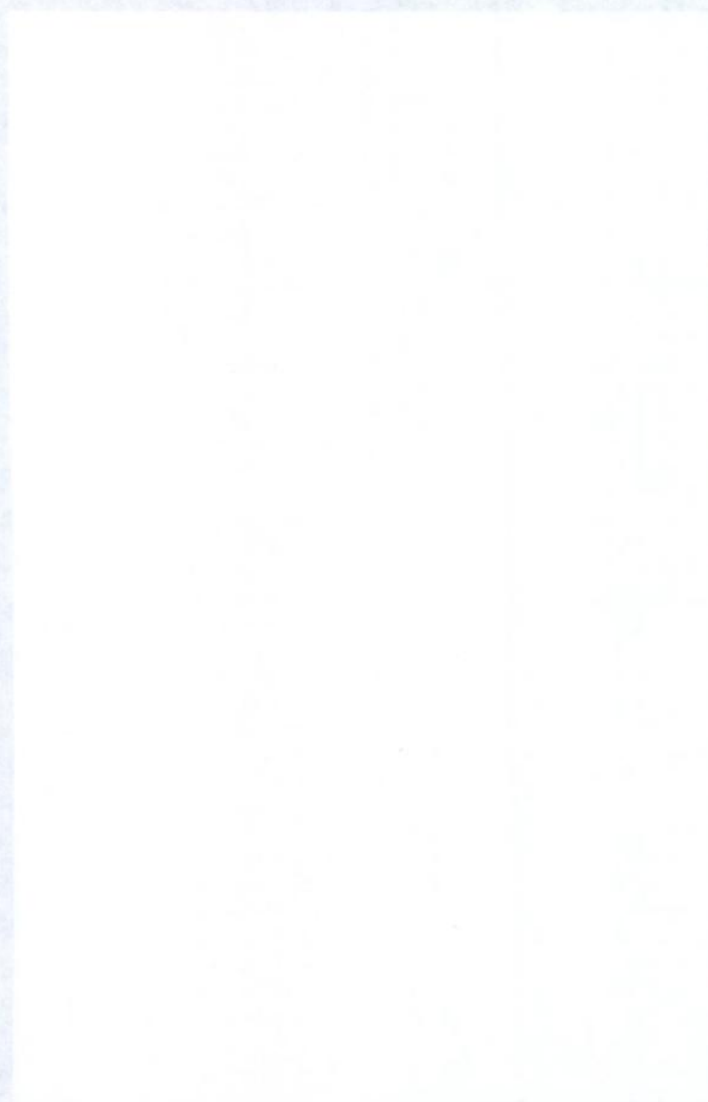


Dress of sheer white muslin with short puff sleeves of patterned gauze weave and embroideries, French, 1800.

Fig. 10. Dress of sheet white muslin, French, 1803-1806.



Fig. 27 Portrait of Empress Josephine, 1809



the dress of her guests and friends at her soirees and is quoted as saying "the time of the fable is over, the reign of history is beginning". (34) Following Greek models, the clothing of the Directoire usually trimmed their chemises only on the edges and borders of drapery with classical designs (Fig. 27). But after the advent of the Empire motifs were sprinkled all over a garment. In addition, many elaborate accessories were added to costumes from Renaissance sources, ribbons, slashing, ruffs and ruffles, fans muffs, elbow length gloves, walking sticks, parasols and handbags all returned.

Napolean had reinstated festivities such as Bal de l'Opera, a major event in the Parisienne calendar. The sumptuous soirees of the Directoire were revived (Fig. 28). The reign of Napolean did not last long but the fashion imprint of this historic period is still left today. David's monumental painting of the coronation of Napolean and Josephine illustrates the chemise in its final stage (Fig. 29). The occasion was designed by David and is very similar to a festival of Antiquity he might have designed in 1793. The painting is a brilliant example of propaganda for the imperial regime. The inside of Notre Dame was remoulded to look like a Roman temple; costumes were designed that mixed Renaissance court costumes, 17th century Baroque sources and contemporary dress. The entire painting looked like a scene from an opera and reflected the new styles gracing the streets of Paris. Heavier fabrics return for parties, balls and ceremonial court occasions. Josephine's rich courrobe fastened around the waist adds richness to earlier classical simplicity. Dark velvet courrobes were a

fashion embroidered in gold and silver ermine (Fig. 30). Small cuffed sleeves appear along with gloves and a variety of stiff ruffled lace collars in the Medici style. The waist was so high there was space for two fingers between the belt and the top of the dress. The short spencer jacket was introduced (Fig. 31) and a longer redingote were worn outdoors and shawls and stoles were still popular for posing in the classical manner. According to an inventory of Josphine's estate compiled by her son after her death 529 muslin and other cotton dresses were evident out of 751 dresses.

By 1805 any number of Romantic touches borrowed from the 16th century were frequently added to women's gowns. Thus Greek simplicity of female costume had begun to deteriorate and medieval and Renaissance touches are now added to carry female costume into the charming excess of the following Romantic period.

Napoleon produced a New Paris, a city of great monuments, vistas, boulevards and parks and moved this great city into the modern world of the 19th century.

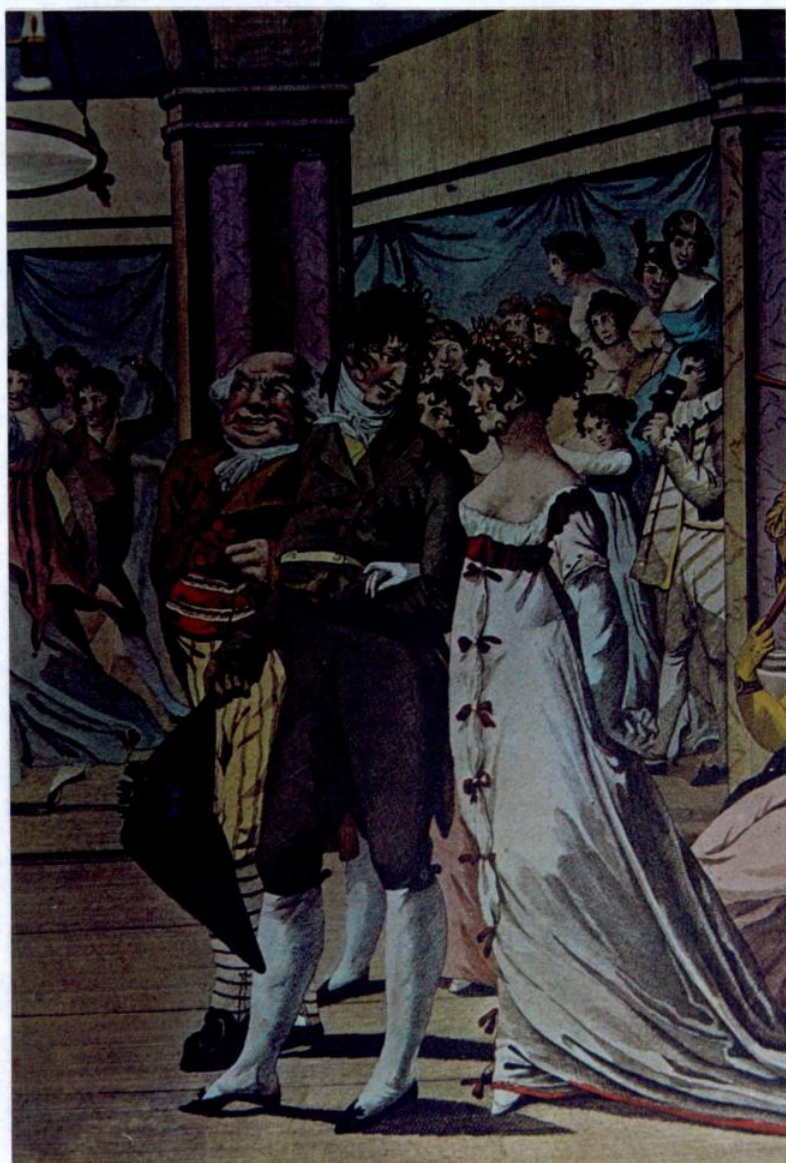
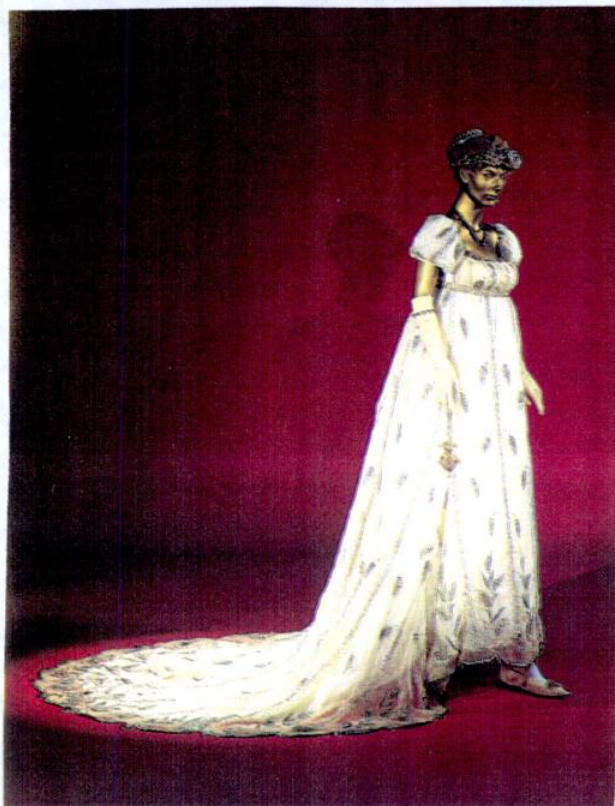


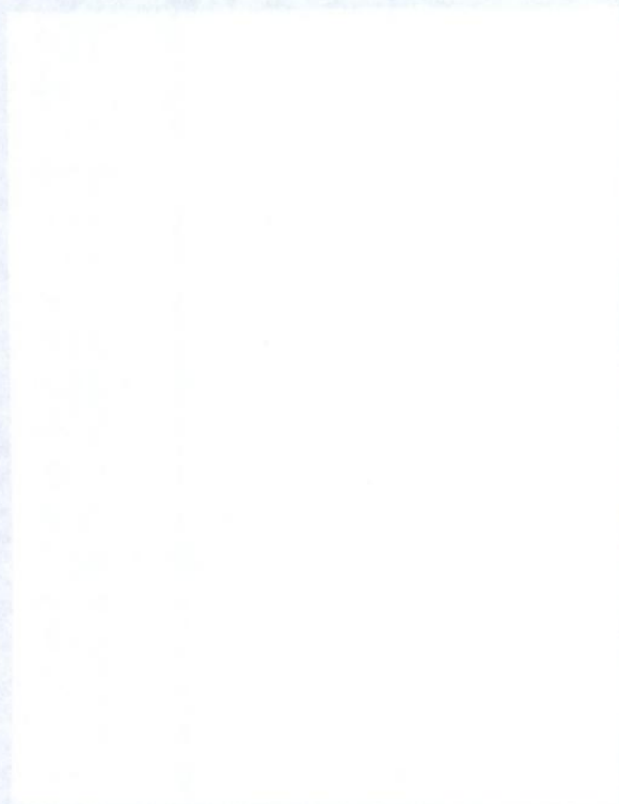
Fig. 28 Society Ball.



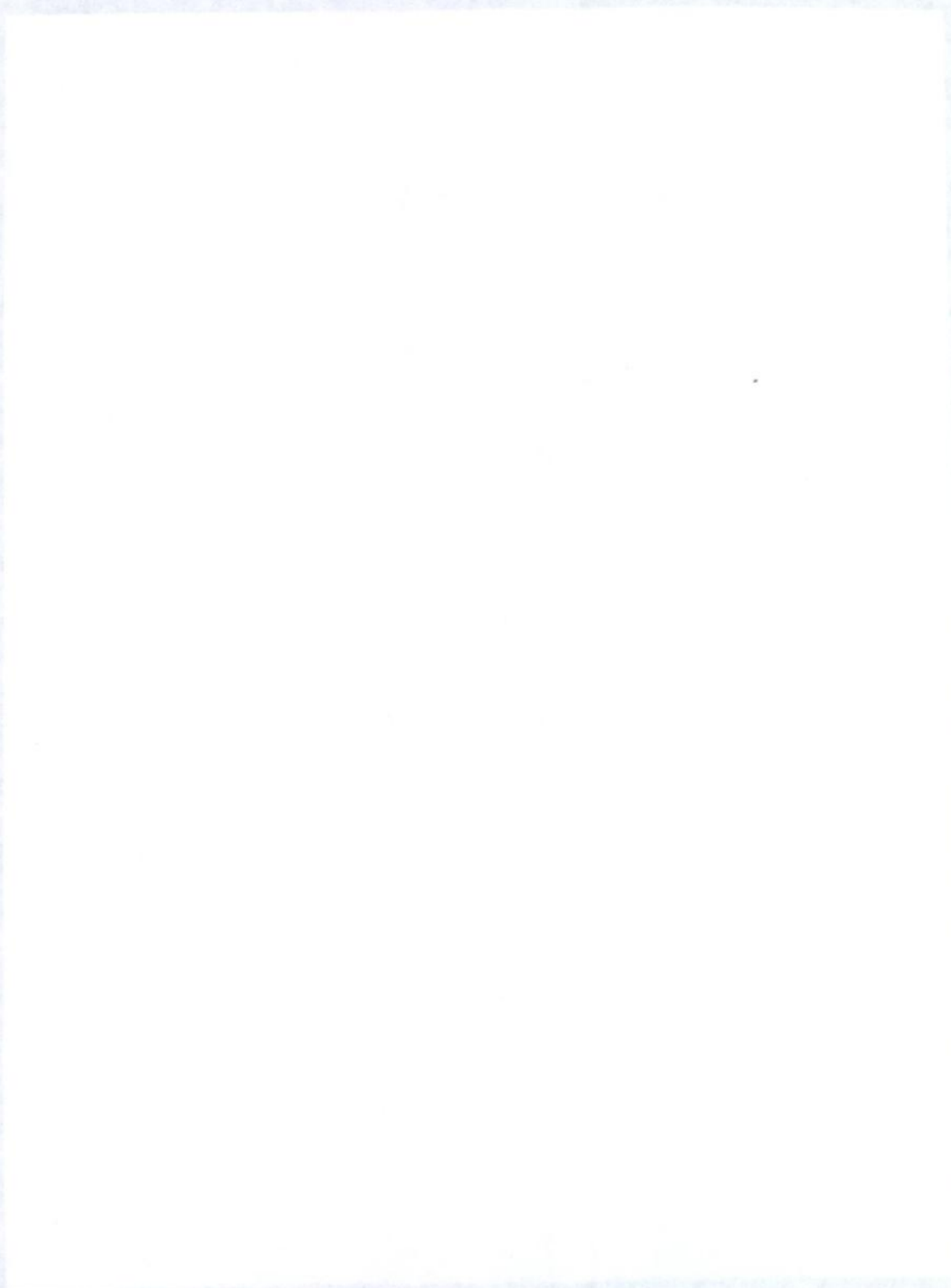


Fig. 29 The Coronation of the Emperor Napoleon I and the Coronation of the Empress Josephine.









CONCLUSION

The significance of the white chemise developed from a garment worn for its simplicity in the early part of the 18th century into a garment placed within the context of Antiquity by Jacques Louis David encompassing the ideals of the Revolution, equality, liberty and fraternity. David, in my opinion, was responsible for giving the white chemise a more important purpose. He placed a symbolic importance on the garments of Antiquity which in turn created a vogue for Antiquity itself. Women were quick to realise how the white chemise could be worn to symbolize the new republic and they dressed in pursuit of this ideal. There was a definite move away from the symbols of aristocracy to the symbols of the lower and middle classes and the chemise became an ideal symbol to unite all classes.

Following the Revolution society did not tolerate obvious signs of aristocratic caste which were considered offensive. The white chemise became a symbol of equality as rich and poor dressed alike. Extravagances were unfashionable in an egalitarian world. Normal waistlines à la anglaise were abandoned for example in Dubucourt's *La Public Promenade du Palais Royal* where dress styles were transformed as women aspired to the high waisted neoclassical chemise à l'antique with flat slippers and hairstyles à la grecque. As a result of the events prior to 1795, David's paintings and festivals encouraged women in their pursuit of the Antique. Women thus expressed in dress the ideal republic. Echoing the Roman and Greek chitones worn by the women who

strolled the ancient cities, dressed without ostentation, united in a republic because of David's influential paintings and festivals.

It is impossible to look at the development of costume without looking at David's revolutionary festivals. The books on revolutionary costume do not examine these festivals in relation to costume; to omit them causes a major distortion as they played such a significant role at the time. The clothing of Ancient Greece reflected their belief in a larger harmony where costume, philosophy, architecture, artefacts, jewellery and sculpture combined to reflect each other. The festivals David designed used symbols where the symbol was reinforced by the attire of the figure. He used dress like the Greeks to create the notion of an ideal society. Jacques Louis David tried to bring Greek and Roman ideology to life during his revolutionary festivals and in doing this he gave people the opportunity to experiment with costume in the context of an ideology.

The terror brought an end to a system of society that had lasted for centuries. When a society undergoes change so too does costume. Frowning on extravagances and ostentation, simplicity and elegance came to be admired. The result of the French Revolution can be seen in our everyday lives today. It could be argued that we dress unencumbered by class codes in comparison with the days of Marie Antoinette and Louis XIV. Had the women during the French Revolution not dressed in such extreme clothing designed to express a political and social viewpoint would we be

dressed as we are today?

The Statue of Liberty sculpted by Baroldis is an extremely important symbol of the ideals of the French Revolution, given to America in 1886 by the French, it is admired throughout the world, why? She is a symbol of democracy and expresses in her attire the freedom associated with Antique Ideology; a freedom women pursued during the French Revolution with which women today can identify.

Emma Lazarus' sonnet describes the Statue of Liberty,

Keep, ancient lands your storied pomp! cries she,
With silent lips, give me your tired, your poor,
huddled masses yearning to breathe free...

There is no doubt that David's paintings and festivals influenced the fashion of the day as we might be influenced today by fashion magazines or television.

FOOTNOTES

- 1] Boucher, A History of Fashion in the West, p. 137.
- 2] Black, A-History of Fashion, p. 81.
- 3] Boucher, A History of Fashion in the West, p. 159.
- 4] Black, A History of Fashion, p. 41.
- 5] Strong, The Classical World, p. 12
- 6] Ibid. p. 47.
- 7] Kennedy, A Cultural History of the French Revolution, p. 20.
- 8] Ibid. p. 49.
- 9] Russel, Costume History and Style, p. 114.
- 10] Bailey, A Passion for Fashion, O. 81.
- 11] Kyoto, Revolution in Fashion - 1715-1815, p. 114.
- 12] Steele, Paris Fashion - A Cultural History, p. 65.
- 13] Kyoto, Revolution in Fashion, p. 115.
- 14] Bailey, A Passion for Fashion, p. 83.
- 15] Heller, Women Artists - An Illustrated History, p. 59.
- 16] Wakefield, French Eighteenth Century Painting, p. 77.
- 17] Kennedy, A Cultural History of the French Revolution, p. 85.
- 18] Vides, The Age of Reason, Ch. 4 programme.
- 19] Katel, The Age of Napoleon from Revolution to Empire, p. 47.
- 20] Ibid., p. 41.
- 21] D. L. Dowd, Pageant Master of the Republic, p. 63.
- 22] Ibid., p. 54.
- 23] Katel, the Age of Napoleon from Revolution to Empire, p. 47.
- 24] Brookner, Jacques Louis David, p. 104.
- 25] Ribeiro, Fashion during the French Revolution, p. 54.
- 26] Batterberry, Fashion - The Mirror of History, p. 197.

- 27] Ribeiro Fashion during the French Revolution, p. 94.
- 28] Katel, The Age of Napoleon, p. 65.
- 29] Kyoto, Costume Institute, Revolution in Fashion, p. 102.
- 30] Katel, The age of Napoleon, p. 43.
- 31] Ibid., p. 65.
- 32] Bradford, Costume in Detail, p. 102.
- 33] Bailey, A Passion for Fashion, p. 94.
- 34] Katel, The Age of Napoleon, p. 71.
- 35] Kyoto, Costume Institute, p. 215.

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