

HEATING IN THE CASTLE

(10th-18th centuries)

Techniques, practices, and uses for thermal comfort in elite residences

October 16-18, 2026, Château de Pierre-de-Bresse (Saône-et-Loire)



Everything has been said and everything is known about heating in the château of the Ancien Régime: fireplaces, sometimes stoves, everyone has seen them and thinks they know how they worked. Yet, what a difference there is between our society, accustomed to living with temperatures of 19 to 21°C in interior rooms, and the one where we entered the château bedroom at a temperature equivalent to that outside! Wood heating, which is most often only a superfluous accessory to our thermal comfort, then had a completely different role: social, practical, and technical, which the dry architectural or archaeological typology does not capture. will be devoted to the question of thermal comfort in elite residences, starting with the château. Given that the topic is particularly rich in the various aspects it can cover across research disciplines, it will be organized along a fairly open theme, focusing on four broad, broad themes including non-exhaustive sub-themes, which will allow authors to avoid feeling constrained by an overly rigid or formalistic approach. The objective of this conference is to understand the relationships that the inhabitants of châteaux, palaces, and other noble residences had with the sensation of cold, the search for warmth, thermal solutions, and the social uses of what we today perceive as inherent in the notion of comfort.

These themes and sub-themes are as follows:

A – The perception of cold and heat in the château. How do the sources provide insight into how the château's inhabitants experienced the difference between the outside and inside temperatures? How did medieval and Ancien Régime societies perceive heat and cold in the home? What was the difference between the populations living in the castle, those who were frequently active outdoors, and those who led more sedentary lives? What was their appreciation of the difference between daytime and nighttime temperatures?

B – Protection against the cold. What insulation techniques and what developments have they developed? Caulking, insulation, ways of dressing indoors and outdoors. The issue of humidity.

C – Keeping warm. What active heat-producing techniques were used in the castle? Fireplaces, stoves, braziers, hypocaust heating and hot air: advantages and disadvantages, geographical distribution of the various techniques and cohabitation. Distribution of heating accessories in the various rooms of the castle: efficiency, position of the heating source in the room, trends and hierarchies.

D – Creating beauty from heating. Is the decoration of the heating tool a central element of the room due to its ostentatious role? What symbolism does it use, what emphasis does it place on a trend toward staging through decoration (sculpted, painted, etc.)?

Authors are free to propose topics that fall within this nomenclature; they may also deviate from it if they believe they can make new and innovative contributions to the subject.

Proposals should be returned to the organizers before May 1, 2025, with a 10- to 20-line summary:

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