

# The Age of Enlightenment

“Beams of the sun are banishing the night, destroying the hypocrites' obtaining might.” With this verse the wise sun priest Sarastro comments on his victory over the bad Queen of the Night in Emanuel Schikaneder's libretto for Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's famous opera, The Magic Flute. This quotation reflects well the common metaphor for a new rationalism in man's thinking and dealings which has given the name to an epoch of European cultural history marking the end of the Baroque period: The bright and clear light of the sun breaking through a dark cloudy sky. From the darkness of religious and mythic determinism to the light of reason and logic lead the new way that mankind should take to discover the truth and gain understanding of the world. The small oil study for a ceiling fresco painted by Josef Winterhalter the Younger showing an apotheosis of reason from the end of the 18th century, may reflect this special kind of critical thinking which brought absolutist European society another step toward modernity. The basis for that cultural phenomenon, which in common sense terms is called the Age of Enlightenment, presented progressions in the natural sciences and the establishment of a critical historiography during the second half of the 17th century onwards. This was combined with a secular individualistic philosophy of reason. Beside the general idealistic aim of the era – the discovery of truth through the abandonment of prejudice and failure – we can summarise certain practical aims such as the reasonable exploration of nature, the force of education and erudition, technological progression, wealth for all levels of society, justice and equality of rights, efficiency of administration, responsibility of government, liberty and tolerance in thought and religion, freedom of the press, and other similar aims.



## **Glorification of Reason**

After 1794

Moravian Gallery, Brno  
Governor's Palace, Brno, Moravia,  
Czech Republic



## **Biblioteca Joanina da Universidade de Coimbra**

1728

Parish of Sé Nova, Coimbra,  
Coimbra, Portugal



## **Episcopal Cathedral and Bishop's Palace of Kalocsa**

Episcopal cathedral 11th century,  
1728, 1735–1800; Bishop's Palace:  
Middle Ages, 1773, 1775–1780;  
end of the 18th–early 19th century  
Kalocsa, Délkelet-Magyarország /  
Southwest Hungary, Hungary



## **The Laboratories of the Istituto delle Scienze of Bologna**

November/December 1739

Archivio di Stato  
Bologna, Emilia-Romagna, Italy



**Portrait of Count Sámuel Teleki  
with Baron Sámuel Brukenthal's  
half-length portrait**

1787

Hungarian National Gallery  
Budapest, Közép-Magyarország /  
Central Hungary, Hungary