



Persian Letters

Charles Louis de Secondat Baron de Montesquieu

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Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de La Brède et de Montesquieu generally referred to as simply Montesquieu, was a French lawyer, man of letters, and political philosopher who lived during the Age of Enlightenment. He is famous for his articulation of the theory of separation of powers, which is implemented in many constitutions throughout the world. He did more than any other author to secure the place of the word despotism in the political lexicon. Montesquieu is credited as being among the progenitors, which include Herodotus and Tacitus, of anthropology, as being among the first to extend comparative methods of classification to the political forms in human societies. Indeed, the French political anthropologist Georges Balandier considered Montesquieu to be "the initiator of a scientific enterprise that for a time performed the role of cultural and social anthropology". According to social anthropologist D. F. Pocock, Montesquieu's *The Spirit of the Laws* was "the first consistent attempt to survey the varieties of human society, to classify and compare them and, within society, to study the inter-functioning of institutions." Montesquieu's political anthropology gave rise to his theories on government. When Catherine the Great wrote her *Nakaz* (Instruction) for the Legislative Assembly she had created to clarify the existing Russian law code, she avowed borrowing heavily from Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws*, although she discarded or altered portions that did not support Russia's absolutist bureaucratic monarchy.

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