

## PARIS AT THE TIME OF THE FOUNDER (1/5)

### OVERALL VIEW

Gamboust's plan of Paris drawn 1649-52, includes a panoramic view of the city as might be viewed from the hill of Montmartre, then well outside the capital. Paris looks so small that Robert Mousnier calls it «an urban blob in a sea of corn.» (Paris au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle: Cours de Sorbonne). It still had largely the aspect of a medieval town crowded within its walls, with the spires and steeples of its many churches and monasteries marking its skyline.

#### The city walls

Philip Augustus from 1190 to 1210 had built a defensive wall around the little commercial town on the north bank and around the smaller university area on the south bank. Charles V had later built a new perimeter wall or dyke further out to protect new suburbs to the north, and Louis XIII had added defensive walls west and east of this, ending at the river; so that Paris north of the river had in La Salle's day the shape of a semi-circle extending from the present Place de la Concorde to the royal arsenal south of the Bastille: about two miles and a half. South of the river, i. e. on the left bank, the walls of Philip Augustus still enclosed only the Latin Quarter in an arc running only from south of the Louvre to the present Panthéon and then back to the river at the eastern end of the present Boulevard Saint-Germain.

#### The main arteries

Two north-south arteries, Rue Saint-Denis and Rue Saint-Martin, ended at the river, the one at the Châtelet (then a policing centre and a prison) the other by the Town Hall (today much enlarged) and the Place de Grève (now the Place de l'Hôtel de Ville). Each was continued by streets across the Île de la Cité to link up, the one with the Rue de la Harpe, now straightened and widened as the Boulevard Saint-Michel, the other with the Rue Saint-Jacques, the main thoroughfare of the Latin Quarter.

The main east-to-west artery was made up of the Rue Saint-Antoine, running from the Bastille to join up through the streets of central Paris with the Rue Saint-Honoré.

#### Suburbs and districts

On the south bank, west of the University area, a market-town had long since grown up around the great abbey of St Germain-des-Prés; it was by now a suburb of the capital. To south and southeast were the growing suburbs of Saint-Jacques, Saint-Marcel and Saint-Victor, while east of the Bastille lay the faubourg or suburb of St Antoine.

For city and suburbs there were thirty-four parishes – forty-two by the end of the reign. Twelve were tiny medieval ones on the central island, while some of the newer ones covered twenty times their territory. Saint Sulpice, for instance, was the only parish in the suburb of Saint-Germain.

The capital was also divided into sixteen administrative and policing districts or quarters, augmented to twenty in 1702. Traditionally Paris proper was divided into the "Ville" or Town, meaning the commercial area north of the river; the "Cité" on the main island in the river where royal administration and ecclesiastical power were concentrated; and south of it, the "University".

#### Dwellings

All three sections of the city had their characteristics, but all had many churches, some magnificent; religious houses with their vast domains acquired long before the town developed, charitable institutions and taverns. Squeezed among these properties and the great private residences of the nobility, were the constricted houses of merchants, craftsmen and wage-earning dependent artisans. These would live in the same building, the poorest at the top (as in the house known as Gladstone's Land in Edinburgh) Pierre Petit, in his introductory note to Gamboust's plan, writes: «There are plenty of houses of five or six stories all of them full to the roof with various families and professions, who are nothing more than barbarians, and who do not even know one another's names, just as they don't know, from one place to another and from suburb to town, anything unusual that happens; and you are just as unknown and hidden when changing quarter as if you changed province.» (Most houses, it seems, however, did not go beyond three or four stories.)

Amidst its squalor and teeming streets, Paris had seen new royal buildings and many palaces of the nobility arise earlier in the century; they were still gleaming white when La Salle first went there in 1670. John Evelyn, who visited Paris in 1642 and 1650, moving among the aristocracy, was full of admiration for the noble buildings he was shown: Paris was «one of the most gallant Cityes in the world.» From 1661 to 1715 Paris was further embellished, mainly to glorify the king while new palaces were built by the rich in more spacious properties in the suburbs; but its inner core changed little.

### A DESCRIPTION OF THE THREE DIVISIONS OF PARIS.

#### 1. The "Town"

The central area of the "Ville", beginning from the Châtelet, was one of narrow, stinking streets of fishmongers, fruiterers, craftsmen and traders, of abbatoirs and shops of butchers who were rich and lived in good, clean well-fur-

nished houses. In this area, opposite Notre Dame was the Place de Grève, so called because it gave on to a little strand along the river. It was the square where executions took place, and also where men without jobs congregated, hoping to be hired, even for the day or by the hour. They were said to "faire la Grève"; in time, "faire la grève", has come to mean to be idle through strike action. On the north side of the square is Place de l'Hôtel de Ville. The main food market of the capital was north of the intersection of the Rue Saint-Denis and the Rue Saint-Honoré. Here Philip Augustus had put up two great plain buildings – immediately called "halles" by the Parisians – as a great covered market that increased with the years, and has now been replaced by the great underground shopping complex known as the Forum des Halles.

Here was the famous "Cour des Miracles" or thieves' underworld described by Victor Hugo in "Notre-Dame de Paris" (1831). D'Argenson is said to have cleaned it up, but it was described in the eighteenth century as a great open square with a very long cul-de-sac, stinking, muddy and winding. But there were other places in Paris where the police patrols would hesitate to go.

Further northward along the Rue Saint-Denis was the better area, where cloths and silks were sold and exported, and confectionery and food obtained. Westward along the Rue Saint-Honoré were the rich haberdashers and sellers of works of art and of the finest furniture. For just beyond them, north of and around the Louvre, ministers, beginning with Richelieu, had built their palaces, followed by the many of the lords in the royal service.

The Louvre (the meaning of the term is unknown) began as a royal keep and developed into a royal residence. In La Salle's day it comprised the palace of the Louvre with a wing beginning to extend westwards towards the Palace of the Tuileries, then forming a huge facade facing the present gardens. This had been built for Catherine de Medici between 1564 and 1608 on the site of a twelfth century tile-factory, whence its name. That palace no longer exists, having been burnt down in 1871. Louis XIV moved to the palace of St Germain-en-Laye, 23 km northeast of Paris, in 1660, after the death of his mother, Anne of Austria, and finally left Paris for good to go to Versailles in 1682.

Northwest of the Louvre, on the Rue Saint-Honoré, Richelieu began in 1629 his splendid cardinal's palace; at his death in 1642 he bequeathed it to his sovereign; Louis XIV and Anne of Austria took it over in 1643, so that it has since been known as the Palais Royal, although its present sweep of galleries and gardens came later.

At the opposite end of the "Ville", the arsenal along the river and the Bastille north of it (then a defence point comprising eight towers surrounded by a moat), marked the military area. Not far from this Henry IV provided Paris with its first public square, the Place Royale, now called Place des Vosges. It became in the first half of the century the centre of an extraordinary development of great town houses of courtiers and statesmen, their limestone fronts gleaming among the houses of the lesser bourgeoisie and the artisans.

This was the origin of the very upper-class triangle known still as the Marais, «which had its greatest hours in the XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries, with the driving of coaches, the clash of swords, the hum of "salons" frequented by all the personalities owning famous literary or political names.» (Guide Bleu: Paris, p. 363) Here Madame de Sevigné wrote charmingly about the dukes and nobility of the area. The Duchess of Guise had a palace here, now part of the Archives Nationales. So did court nobles, but they began to move away with Louis XIV. In La Salle's day, the area was inhabited by the noblesse de robe and the great financiers. Nevertheless, a cross-section of the population lived in the Marais. On the eastern side of this area, in the Rue des Minimes, two streets north of the Place des Vosges, was the well-known Minims' Friary with its great church, now gone. Here Nicholas Barré spent most of his life. A gendarmerie now occupies the site. When he was called back from Rouen in 1675, he opened a school for poor girls in the crowded quartier east of the Place de Grève, and in 1678 set up a training centre for his Brothers in the Rue de la Mortellerie, now Rue de l'Hôtel de Ville, not far from the interesting old church of Saint Gervais.

### The "City"

At the eastern end of the island known as the Cité, stood the cathedral of Notre-Dame, dating in its present form from the twelfth century onwards, and south of it Archbishop's house. South of the little cathedral square, along the waterfront, was the Hôtel-Dieu or hospital, extending over the bridge (Pont au Double) in a set of wards two-storey high, and then along the other bank of this little southern arm of the Seine. (The present Hôtel-Dieu, on the other side of the cathedral square, dates from 1877.) The middle of the island was a criss-cross of medieval streets; then westwards came the old royal palace, for long the Palace of Justice, an area enclosing a great number of buildings housing the various royal departments of justice and finance, including the Parlement of Paris with its six courts or chambers. In their halls and galleries moved crowds of magistrates, lawyers and other members of the legal fraternity and their clients. The western end of the island was occupied by the triangular Place Dauphine, created in 1607 in honour of the Dauphin, later Louis XIII. Across the tip of the island the Pont Neuf linked both banks of the Seine, and was the only one of the seven bridges of the Cité not to have houses several storeys high built on it. Both it and the Place Dauphine were built on two little islets made in 1601 into one fine triangular area. (On these two islands «used to be found the turbulent Irish students, both martyrs and rogues.» Guide bleu, Paris, p. 203.)

**Brother Alfred Calcutt**