

## Paris in 1615: Kings, Cathedrals, and Musketeers

When you step into the pages of *The Last Musketeer* by Stuart Gibbs, you are transported back to Paris in the year 1615. At that time, France was ruled by King Louis XIII, who had just become king as a teenager. Life in Paris was filled with excitement, beauty, and danger, especially for those living near the royal court.

### Paris in the 1600s

Paris in the early 1600s was a bustling, walled city of narrow, twisting streets, lively marketplaces, and crowded houses. People traveled mostly on foot or by horse-drawn carriage. The city was noisy and busy, with street vendors selling bread, cheese, and other goods, while musicians and performers entertained crowds. Wealthy nobles dressed in fine silks and lace; commoners wore simpler wool clothing. Life was not easy for most people—disease spread quickly, and clean water was hard to come by—but Paris was also a place of art, culture, and growing power.

Two of Paris's most famous landmarks stood tall even in 1615:

- **The Louvre:** Today the Louvre is one of the world's largest art museums, but in 1615 it was a royal palace where King Louis XIII and his court lived. The palace was filled with richly decorated rooms, gardens, and guards who protected the king. Important decisions about France's future were made inside its walls.
- **Notre Dame Cathedral:** Built in the Middle Ages, Notre Dame was already hundreds of years old by the time of Louis XIII. The grand cathedral was the center of Parisian religious life, with its soaring towers, stained-glass windows, and massive bells. People gathered there for worship, festivals, and important events in the life of the city.

### King Louis XIII

When Louis XIII became king of France in 1610, he was only nine years old. His father, Henry IV, had just been assassinated by a fanatic who stabbed him while his carriage was stuck in traffic. This shocking murder left young Louis on the throne but far too young to rule by himself. His mother, Marie de' Medici, became regent and made most of the decisions for the kingdom.

The French court in the early 1600s was a dangerous place, filled with whispers, secrets, and conspiracies. Powerful nobles were always looking for ways to gain more influence. Some plotted against Louis himself, while others schemed against his advisers.

### Musketeers of the Guard

Another important part of life in 1615 was the king's personal guard—the **musketeers**. Musketeers were elite soldiers who carried muskets and swords. Their duty was to protect the king and his family, who were constantly in danger from conspiracies against them.

To become a musketeer, a man had to be a nobleman of the upper class. He also had to be trained in sword fighting and have strong horsemanship. Musketeers were masters of sword fighting and participated in many duels to defend the king and queen. They lived by a strict code of chivalry.

A musketeer of the guard wore a cavalier hat with a plume and a tabard decorated with a silver cross and fleur-de-lis—a symbol of the musketeers. A tabard is a loose outer garment without sleeves that is worn over a shirt or armor.

### **The Famous “Three Musketeers”**

*The Three Musketeers*, written by Alexandre Dumas, was originally published in 1844 and became an instant success. Set in France during the 1700s, the story tells the adventures of a fictional young man, D’Artagnan, who is about eighteen years old in Dumas’s book. He becomes friends with three of the Musketeers—Athos, Aramis, and Porthos. The four swordsmen join to defeat an evil adviser who has a secret plot to overthrow the king. In the end, D’Artagnan proves his loyalty and chivalry and is granted his wish to become one of the famous musketeers famously sharing the motto, “All for one, and one for all.”

When you read *The Last Musketeer*, you’ll see how Stuart Gibbs brings this world of kings, cathedrals, and daring musketeers to life. It gives you a chance to imagine the excitement of Paris in 1615, where adventure was waiting around every corner.

- Look at the map of Paris drawn in 1630. Locate and circle the Louvre, which is found in the bottom right quadrant. Locate and circle Notre Dame Cathedral, which is found in the upper right quadrant.
- Take a virtual field trip to the Louvre (optional). Visit <https://youtube.com/watch?v=JkPcA8dngB4>.
- Take a virtual field trip to Notre Dame Cathedral (optional). Visit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v7WmOrtO5FE>.