Old French Stones

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Foreword

This book is a product of my love of France. I have, throughout my travels in France, taken pictures of sites that are dear to me. After some time, I found that I would like to assemble some of the pictures I like best in one document, and combine them with texts relating to different aspects of France. France is a very diverse country, both geographically and culturally speaking. The texts and the pictures you will find in this book, reflect this diversity. If you choose to run through this book, I hope you will find out why I think France is such a beautiful and interesting country.

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«--- learning to find our pleasure elsewhere than in the satisfactions of well-being and vanity."

(Marcel Proust: Swann, I)

The search for pleasure is a search for sensual stimulation that never reaches its saturation. When one type of sensual stimulation has been attempted a certain number of times, its effects are weakened and the senses require stronger doses of the same stimuli to obtain the same effects as before. When this type of stimulation has lost its attractiveness, the search for other stimuli starts – and the same pattern is repeated.

Vanity is derived from the desire to be liked and, preferably, admired by others. By allowing vanity to play itself out freely, we remove ourselves progressively from our deeper personality and allow ourselves to be governed by what we think others will like and by what trendsetters think we ought to do or look like. Socrates and Plato thought that true pleasure was to be found by seeking knowledge, do what is good and live in ethical harmony with yourself. "Know yourself!"

Gaston Bachelard is a French philosopher who is well known for his books on **the psychoanalysis of the elements** (air, water, fire, and earth). He has also written interesting reflections on time (past - present - future), in his book "L'Intuition de L'Instant" (The Intuition of the Instant).

The notion of time is divided in past, future and present. The past and the future are not real. They are ideas and images lodged in our consciousness and in our unconscious. Only the present is real, tangible.

The past is made up of all the ghosts that inhabit our imagination. Some ghosts are good-natured, representing selected memories of moments in our life which have left positive imprints in our unconscious and in our consciousness. Some ghosts are ill-natured, representing various sorts of negative imprints left by earlier events of our life, also stored in our unconscious and in our consciousness.

The ghosts of the past can appear as regrets, satisfactions, sources of pride, sources of shame, nightmares, lessons to remember, and so on. These ghosts live their own life in our unconscious, and may indeed have effects on our behavior in the present, but they are ghosts of the past. They may be transformed over time, embellished, rendered more ugly, blown up in size or diminished, depending on our internal psychological mechanisms of selection, repression or images of the self. Sometimes, these ghosts may grow so big - either in our consciousness or in our unconscious - that they take completely control of our behavior or well-being in the present. Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung have, of course, had much to say about this.

The future is made up of all the illusions, in the form of fears, desires and hopes, produced by our imagination**.** These illusions are greatly influenced by your personality and by the ghosts of the past. Your attitudes towards risk, your evaluation of what is possible and what is not possible, your sense of initiative and capacity to take action to influence your own situation, your will-power, fighting spirit or lack of such are among the important factors that will color your illusions in dark or bright colors. They will nevertheless be illusions, until confronted by the facts and forces (including your own actions) that produce the present.

The present is the moment when the ghosts of the past and the illusions of the future are confronted with actual events and interaction with other beings. It is an instant that, depending on the nature of your actions, senses and perceptions, produces a multitude of events and feelings that in turn will be processed by your selective memories. The present is the only part of our life which is real in a tangible sense, and it lasts only for a moment.

An interesting view on the present is illustrated by the discussion of the notion of mindfulness. In essence, according to Jon Kabat-Zim of the University of Massachusetts Medical School, this is about attention, awareness, relations and caring in the present time. Mindfulness, in this serious version of the notion, deals with our experience of: a) the present moment; b) our own bodies; c) our own thoughts and emotions; d) our tacit and constraining assumptions; e) our highly conditioned habits of mind and behavior.

The great literary critic, Harold Bloom, has in his book "**The Western Canon**" reproduced a passage in Shakespeare's play "Measure for Measure" (the Duke's speech in act 3, scene 1), and a comment on this by Dr. Samuel Johnson:

Thou hast nor youth, nor age
But as it were an after-dinner's sleep
Dreaming on both

Dr. Johnson's comment, as reproduced by Bloom, goes as follows:

"This is exquisitely imagined. When we are young we busy ourselves in forming schemes for succeeding time, and miss the gratifications that are before us; when we are old we amuse the languor of age with the recollection of youthful pleasures or performances; so that our life, of which no part is filled with the business of present time, resembles our dreams after dinner, when the events

of the morning are mingled with the designs of the evening."

The capacity to concentrate on what is happening in the present, while at the same time mastering the ghosts of the past and harnessing the illusions of the future, together make up the quality of our life.

Michel de Montaigne, a French wise man who lived from 1533 to 1592, has in his major work «The Essays», given us reflections on his life experiences. This is an extensive piece of work, and if you wish to know more about it you need to read it. However, it is possible to reproduce some shorthand points to give you an idea of the nature of the reflections:

It seems to be the habit of the mind to be quick and sudden, and the habit of judgment to be slow and solid

It is not useful to know the future. It is unfortunate to torment yourself to no use. (Cicero, quoted by Montaigne.)

The game of consistency and stability is played by carrying patiently the inconveniences that cannot be remedied.

I have often seen people being impolite by too much politeness, and embarrassing by their courtesy.

If what we call hurting and torment are neither hurting nor torment in themselves, but only in our imagination, it is in our power to change them.

While some await death with trembling and fear, others meet it with more ease than life.

Happy is he who is adjusting his needs in a way that his riches can handle without him having to think or worry about it.

Courage has its limits, like the other virtues, which, when surpassed lead us into the train of vices, as you can slide into temerity, obstination or folly.

In truth, it is reasonable to make a big difference between errors that come from our weaknesses, and those that come from our malice.

In order to always learn something from communication with others, always lead them into subjects that they know best.

Nothing carries our judgment away more than fear.

"I imagined, like everbody else, that other people's brains were passive and docile recipients, devoid of powers of reaction to what they were subjected to,---"

(Marcel Proust: Du côté de chez Swann, I)

Communicating your own thoughts to other people, without regard to how your listeners perceive and react to what you say, will be a source of great surprises and perhaps also disappointments! Knowing the situation and

background of the person you are speaking with is useful if you wish to understand how your words are interpreted. The words you use will have a different interpretation and content for persons with different backgrounds from yours. What is a normal way of life and way of thinking for a wealthy person, may be repulsive to talk about for a person living on a low income. Empathy is important, but it is also a challenge to find the right balance between understanding and consideration. It may not be a good idea to identify oneself so deeply with the other person's situation and feelings as to lose one's own identity and sense of direction. It is easily done to be brought out of balance by other people's feelings, or for that matter, be engulfed by the other's feelings. Trying to please a psychopath, for instance, will lead to the elimination of one's own feelings and one's own will.
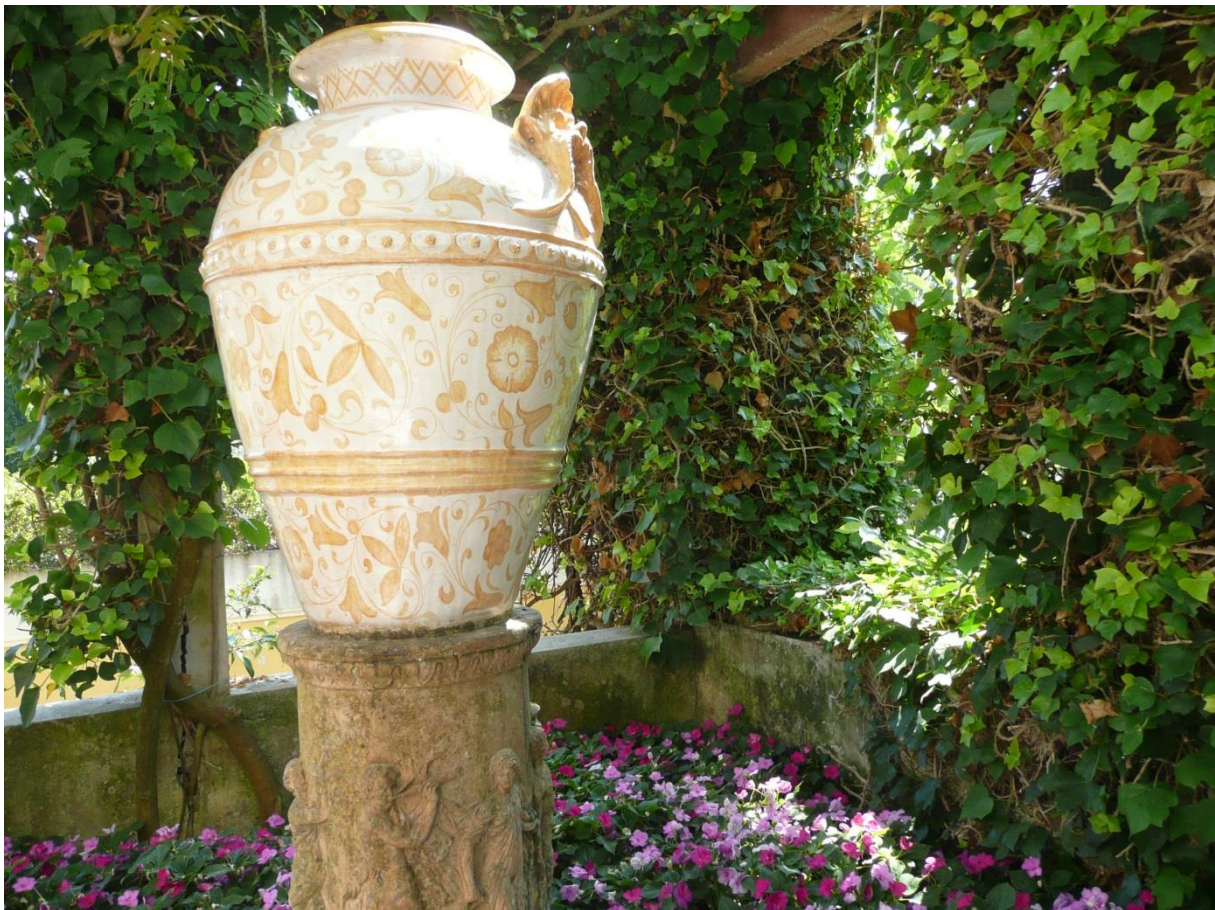
"...because these afternoons were more filled with dramatic events than a whole life often is. They were the events that came up in the book I was reading; it is true that the persons subjected to them were not "real", as Francoise said. However, all the feelings that we experience through the joy or the misfortune of a real person come to us only through our imagination of this

joy or misfortune; the ingeniosity of the first novelist consisted in understanding that in producing our emotions, the image being the only essential element, the simplification which would consist in purely and simply eliminating the real persons would be a decisive perfection."

(Marcel Proust: Du côté de chez Swann, I)

What is real? Is there a reality outside of that produced by our own senses and imagination? And what would that reality be? These are eternal questions that philosophers have dealt with for thousands of years. If we think our lives are lived through what our senses and imagination tell us, then it is the type and magnitude of our imagination and of our sensual experiences that make up the quality of our lives. Does it make any difference whether these sensual experiences come through a novel or through other impulses to our senses? In continuing his line of thought brought out in the quote above, Proust says that you, through the short time it takes to read the novel, will become much better acquainted with the persons in the novel than you would be with a "real" person through an entire life. You may acquire much richer ideas of other people's lives and your own life than those you would obtain if you defined the persons in the novel as "unreal" and only stuck to people you have met yourself in the "real" life.

When we read history, we get acquainted with the ambitions, achievements, and feelings of fascinating people that we no longer have any chance of meeting in real life. The purpose of this book is to navigate in French history and culture, inspired by the old French stones. The notion of France appeared after the Francs, a Germanic tribe originating thousands of years ago in the area around the Black Sea, invaded the territory situated in what is today the north of France. This happened along with the great migrations of the fifth century AD. In 448 AD, Merovée, a Franc tribal leader was recognized as the leader of all the frankish tribes present in what was then Gaul.

Gaul was the name of the territory occupied by the Roman Empire ever since Julius Cesar broke down the last resistance of the Celtic tribes led by Vercingétorix at Alésia in 52 BC. The Celts had occupied the entire territory we today know as France for many centuries. They divided the territory between several Celtic tribes which were in constant conflict with each other for the numerous reasons that tribes have always been conducting warfare.

When Merovée managed to assemble the frankish tribes under his leadership in 448 AD in the north of this territory, he created the embryo of what was to become France. His rule started what has since been called the Merovingian dynasty. The grandson of Merovée, Clovis, strengthened the grip of this dynasty on the territory with his victory over rival tribes at Soissons in 486 AD, and from then on the kingdom of France established itself with the throne passing from father to sons for centuries to come. However, the territory was split up and assembled several times, depending on the number of sons the rulers had and how they managed to deal with their inheritance.

A substantial consolidation of the situation came when Charles Martel, guardian of the King's palace under the last Merovingians, beat back the attempted attack by the muslim rulers of the Iberic peninsula at Poitiers in 732. From then on, he consolidated his grip on the kingdom and sidelined the Merovingian kings, who had weakened considerably in their role as rulers.

Pepin the short, Charles' son, subsequently deposed king Childeric III with the consent of the pope, and started the dynasty of the Carolingians.

Charles the Great (Charlemagne), Pepin's son, came to the throne in 768. He was a formidable ruler, and during his long reign – which lasted until 814 – he united territories comprising large parts of today's France, Germany and Northern Italy under his rule. He became the first Holy Roman Emperor in 800. When Charlemagne died in 814, the Carolingian Empire – as it was then called – was divided between his three grandsons after a short reign of his son. One grandson got the French part, another got the German part, and the third got squeezed in between with a territory called Lotharingia, which subsequently became the object of many rivalries as time went by.

After Charlemagne, the French kingdom moved erratically along with weakening rulers, until another palace master – Hugh Capet – took control of the country and introduced what was called the Capetian dynasty in 987. All the subsequent kings of France up until the French Rvolution descended from him, along different branches of the family tree.

The purpose here is not to run through all the descendants of Hugh Capet. It is, however, interesting to dwell on phases in the succession that have had a lasting effect on the history of France – for better or worse.

The first of the descendants of Hugh Capet that I wish to mention, is Louis VII, who reigned from 1137 to 1180. He was not important in his own right, but because of his weaknesses history took a dramatic course. He was married to a strong woman, Eleanor of Acquitaine. She had a strong will, a fiery temperament and she was Duchess of Acquitaine in her own right – not through her husband's rights. Louis was a pious man, more attracted to monastic life than to the demanding task of ruling a country. Eleanor was the opposite, fully capable of and willing to rule a country – and she had a strong appetite for life and love. She got no satisfaction from her union with Louis. In the end they divorced, and Eleanor in 1152 went on to marry a man more to her taste. This man was Henry Plantagenet, Duke of Normandy, who later became Henry II, king of England in 1154. In passing, it is interesting to note that Henry and Eleanor's oldest son was Richard, who later became known as the Lionhearted.

The union between Eleanor and Henry had dramatic consequences for France. Between them, Eleanor and Henry ruled over almost all of western France. Even though much of this territory was formally under the rule of the king of France, the reality was that Eleanor and Henry had the power in their hands. This development sowed the first seeds of the Hundred Years War between England and France, which started almost two hundred years later, in 1337, when the French king Philip VI took hold of territories earlier held by Eleanor.

However, before we get to that, we need to mention some important kings who have also left an important imprint in French history. The first of these is Philip II August, who reigned from 1180 to 1223.

Philip II August was a strong ruler who consolidated the power of the French monarchy. He fought successfully for the territories in Normandy that Richard the Lionhearted had inherited from his parents and he also expanded the territory of the kingdom of France in other parts of the land. Another important achievement of his, was the establishment of strong local, regional governments under the control of the state. Normally, local warlords would have strong control of their own territories, but with Philip II August this local autonomy was held firmly in check.

Philip's grandson, Louis IX – who lived from 1226 to 1270 – was most notable for his extensive participation in the Crusades and his religious devotion. When away on Crusades, his mother – Blanche of Castile – acted as regent. Louis was also seen as a man with a great sense of justice. He brought home to France an important relic from the Holy Land, the crown of thorns that was believed to have been worn by Jesus Christ when he was crucified. He paid a gigantic price for it and went on to build The Holy Chapel (Sainte Chapelle) in Paris as a home

to this crown. Seen in historic perspective, this very expensive purchase has paid off handsomely, because it has ever since been a huge attraction, with visitors coming from all over the world to see it. Louis is known in history as Saint Louis.

Saint Louis' grandson, Philip IV (the Fair) – who reigned from 1285 to 1314 – contributed in a decisive way to the centralization of the French monarchy's power, and in addition established the principle of political autonomy of France towards the Papal power. This latter point was a major achievement in those days when the monarchs and the Church were in constant and strong rivalries for political power. The Church had ambitions of ruling over men's minds and spiritual life. The limits between spiritual and material power were at that time particularly blurred, and the Church's appetite for power was not limited to spiritual matters.

Charles VI – who reigned from 1380 to 1422 – was a weak king, with spells of mental illnesses. As mentioned earlier, the French king Philip VI in 1337 invaded territories held in the southwest of France by the King of England. This started The Hundred Years War between France and England, which was not one continuous war, but a series of territorial battles which went on and off for about hundred years – and ended when the English crown had lost all its territories on French soil in 1453. Before it came to that, however, Charles VI's weaknesses led to a lack of military determination in his rule, and this gave the King of England opportunities to reinforce his powers in his inherited territories in France. The French monarchy weakened gradually under his rule, and it was only when he died in 1422 that a turn in events could come about. The son of Charles VI, Charles VII, inherited a weakened kingdom and his authority was heavily contested by the King of England (who then occupied large parts of the north and the southwest of France), and by the Duke of Burgundy (who controlled important territories in the east of France). Charles VII's power base was therefore under great threat.

A crucial moment for the French monarchy came when the important city of Orleans in central France was under siege in 1428 by the English king at that time, Henry VI. If this was lost, things would be very critical. What happened then has since been a great mystery, a magic moment for the French. A very young woman, Joan of Arc, daughter of a peasant, heard voices from Heaven telling her to take up arms and defend the French king. She contacted the local lord, and – with an unbending will and strong powers of persuasion – convinced him of giving her command over a group of warriors. With her group, she marched on to Orleans. She came to the battle scene, and fought with such strength that her intervention tipped the scales over in favor of the French. With her intervention, the English siege of Orleans was broken.

At that time, King Charles VII resided in the castle of Chinon. After her victory, Joan – who by now had been joined by a large army of followers – went to Chinon to convince Charles VII of going to the coronation city of Reims to be coronated, to ensure that he would be formally instated as the legal ruler of

France. This was a risky enterprise, since the territories around Reims were still under the command of King Henry VI. The history of Joan, which already at that time had taken on a legendary character, tells us that upon arriving at the castle of Chinon Charles VII wanted to test whether Joan's powers were as magical as people would have it. He therefore hid behind several of his councillors in the crowd of Charles' followers, when Joan entered the great hall of the castle. Joan, having never seen Charles VII, did not know what he looked like. Nevertheless, when entering the great hall, she looked around, and went straight over to where the king was standing and faced him directly.

After having meetings with him, she convinced him of going to Reims. They went together, and beat back all resistance by the enemies of the king, and Charles VII was coronated. Some time after this, with the reputation of Joan having taken on enormous proportions, Joan was captured by Burgundian troops who handed her over to the English – with whom they were allied. At

the city of Rouen, the English took advantage of Joan's legendary status and a pro-English bishop accused her of sorcellery – after which she was burned at the stake on May 30, 1431. She was then 19 years old. This turn of events suited Charles VII fine, as he was worried that her status would make it more complicated for him to rule the country. Charles VII went on to become a strong king who consolidated the power of the kingdom.

The son of Charles VII, Louis XI (ruled 1461 to 1483), was also a strong king and he took on the Burgundians and succeeded in bringing their territories under French rule. Louis XI was an introvert and secretive king who was constantly on the watch against people plotting against him, imagined or real. He held firmly on to power and consolidated the power of the throne to a considerable extent.

An important event in French royal history took place when the son of Louis XI, Charles VIII (who ruled from 1483 to 1498) married the duchess Anne of Brittany in 1491. The duchy of Brittany had all along been a very independent territory, with the dukes there being fiercely independent and not inclined to take instructions from the French king.

The marriage between Charles VIII and Anne changed this situation, in spite of the fact that Anne in her marriage contract insisted upon her political independence and upon her position as the legitimate ruler of Brittany also after the marriage. Charles and Anne loved each other dearly, but Charles died prematurely after he hit his head on a beam in the castle of Amboise. They had not got any children, and the succession of the French throne went to his cousin, Louis XII. Louis XII did not want to lose the alliance of the French throne with the duchy of Brittany, which Charles had achieved. He therefore divorced his wife, Jean of Valois, and went on to marry the widow Anne. When Anne then died before Louis XII, Brittany was formally included under the rule of the French throne.

Louis XII and Anne had no children either. When Louis XII died one year later, in 1515, the throne then passed to a descendant of another branch of the royal family, Francis I, who ruled from 1515 to 1547. The story goes that, at the time both Louis XII and Anne were still alive, Francis was very attracted to Anne. Louis and Anne were childless, and Francis would inherit the throne if no child came. With Louis being an older man, and Francis young and full of energy, Francis' friends smelled danger when seeing how he courted Anne. They told him that if he had an affair with Anne, and this affair produced a child, the child would inherit the throne and not he. Francis took to his senses, and abstained from further courtship of Anne.

Francis I went on to become an illustrious king in French history. After ascending to the throne, he had an early military victory against the Milanese at Marignan which made him immensely popular in France. However, later on he was beaten several times militarily by the Habsburg emperor Charles V and was once caught and made prisoner. For Francis to be released, France had to

pay an enormous ransom, so it is fair to say that it was not his military achievements that made him famous. He was tall and handsome with a flamboyant nature and was highly interested in arts. He is known as the renaissance king and he constructed the most extravagant and elegant castle ever seen. This castle is intact today and is named Chambord. He invited several Italian artists to France, to decorate royal buildings. Most famous among these in this context, is the castle of Fontainebleau. The Florentine artist Leonardo da Vinci spent the last years of his life as a guest of king Francis in the Clos Lucé, next to the castle of Amboise where Francis was residing.

The son of Francis was Henry II, who reigned from 1547 to 1559. At his time the Reformation of the church (which was set in motion by Martin Luther in 1517 in Wittenberg) was playing out in full, with Protestants and Catholics opposing each other fiercely. The stronghold of the Protestants was in northern Germany, among feudal lords who supported Luther's reformation, but

protestant movements were found many places – also in France. Henry II was married to Catherine, a member of the powerful Medici family of Florence. She was fiercely catholic, but Henry did not allow the religious quarrel between Protestants and Catholics in France to degenerate into open conflict.

However, Henry died prematurely in a festive joust where Henry wanted to show off his (vanishing) youth and strength in a horseback duel with lances, like it was done in celebrations in older times. He was killed by a lance that accidentally pierced his eye and entered his head. Henry had three sons: Francis, Charles, and Henry. The first two were weak persons with bad health. During their successive reigns, the Queen mother, Catherine, held considerable power. As a fierce catholic, Catherine had close relations with the Duke of Guise, a warlord who was leader of the Catholic opposition to the Reformation. The Duke was also a very ambitious person, who had set his eyes on the throne of the kingdom.

During the reign of her two first sons, Catherine had allowed the Duke of Guise to build up considerable power and influence. When the second son (Charles IX) died, her third son became king (Henry III). Catherine still retained her strong grip on power, but Henry feared the influence and ambitions of the Duke of Guise. Henry got the Duke killed in an ambush at the castle of Blois. However, this did not eliminate the religious conflict which was underlying the Duke's power and ambitions. Henry himself was killed not long afterwards, by a dominican munk, Jacques Clément. The religious conflict now became an open conflict with the potential to set a civil war in motion.

Henry III had no children, and his throne therefore passed on to another branch of the royal family. Henry of Navarra was the heir of the throne and he was a protestant. He ascended the throne as Henry IV in 1589, and he soon decided upon an edict that aimed at appeasing the religious conflict. This edict, the Edict of Nantes, established the freedom of devoting yourself to the religion of your choice. With the French people being overwhelmingly catholic, Henry himself chose to convert to Catholicism in order not to fuel further conflict. He became a popular king. Nevertheless, Henry was also killed by a catholic extremist, Francois Ravaillac, in 1610 on the streets of Paris as Henry travelled in a carriage.

Louis XIII was the son of Henry IV, and he reigned from 1610 to 1643. He was a child (9 years old) when he ascended to the throne, and his mother Mary (also of the Medici-family) reigned for seven years until he was capable of taking power himself. Louis XIII had power-struggles on two fronts. Internally, he fought the political power of protestants as well as catholic nobility in France who were not in favor of absolute monarchy. Externally, he fought the Austrian Habsburg-family whom he also felt was a threat to his power. His prime minister, Richelieu, was a formidable ally for him.

Together, Louis XIII and Richelieu kept the nobility and protestants in check, by undermining their local power. As part of this policy, they destroyed all castles and forts that were in such a state that they could be used militarily against Louis XIII. Among these was the destruction of the fort of La Rochelle, a protestant stronghold that attempted to form an alliance with England. Externally, his policy led him to enter the Thirty Years War (1618 – 1648) in which the German protestants were opposed to the Austrian Habsburgs.

Because of his desire to contain the power of the Habsburgs, Louis XIII joined the war on the protestant side, along with Denmark and Sweden. The war thus became a European war.

In 1642 Richelieu died, and another cardinal – Mazarin – became prime minister. Louis XIII died the year after, at the age of forty two. He had a son fairly late in life, and his son – who now became Louis XIV – was five years old when he became king. As was the case for Louis XIII, the king's mother (in this case Anne, daughter of the Spanish king Philip III) reigned until Louis XIV was old enough to take power himself. Anne and cardinal Mazarin were the two people who held power during Louis' infancy.

The time during which the queen mother Anne and cardinal Mazarin were in power, was a period of unrest. This had a lasting effect on how Louis XIV chose to rule when he took over the power. In 1648 the Treaty of Westphalia ended

the Thirty Years War, and France gained control over Alsace. However, war continued with Habsburg Spain, and French noblemen resisted the power of the absolute monarchy by starting an insurrection against the child king Louis XIV. This insurrection (called "La Fronde" in French history) was supported by Spain, and Louis was only ten years old when it started and it caused him great anguish to watch this conflict from the sideline as Anne and Mazarin dealt with it and finally beat it back in 1653.

The French general Turenne beat the Spaniards in 1658, and a peace treaty between France and Spain was signed in 1659. As part of this, Louis XIV would marry the daughter of the Spanish king. Louis married her, Marie-Therese of Austria (the Spanish Crown being part of the Habsburg-family's domain), in 1660. Louis was then 22 years old. In the year after, 1661, cardinal Mazarin died and Louis then decided that he would reign alone, without a strong prime minister by his side.

At this time, Louis had a Finance Minister, Fouquet. Fouquet was very rich, in part because of successful commercial enterprises. He had the bad judgment of constructing a flamboyant castle (Vaux Le Vicomte, which still exists today). He extended the bad judgment as far as to organize a formidable celebration for the inauguration of this castle, where the king and all the French nobility was invited, and nothing was spared in terms of luxury. He even served the food in gold plates, as compared with the silver plates used by the king. He was thus outshining the king, not only with the construction of this castle which surpassed anything constructed so far, but also with the display of luxury during the reception. The obvious question was where he had got the money to do all this. Not long afterwards, in 1662, Fouquet was fired and put in prison.

As a direct reaction to this event, Louis set about constructing the castle of Versailles. He would not have anybody outshining him. The splendor surrounding his reign was a conscious display of power with the clear aim of intimidating anybody who would contemplate challenging his power. This way of displaying power can be traced directly back to the threats made against his reign when he was a child. Another aspect of the legacy of "La Fronde" was the fact that he ordered all the powerful noblemen of France to come and live at Versailles, where he could have full control of their movements and actions. In this way, the court at Versailles became the epicenter of power in France. For

the noblemen, this had the advantage of showing their importance and giving them access to the king, although competition was hard for his ear – since so many people were assembled there. The obvious disadvantage was that their freedom was limited by the fact that they had to stay there most of the time, and thus were under surveillance.

Louis XIV's reign was the longest reign of a monarch in the history of France. He reigned from 1643 until his death in 1715. This period of French history is often designated at "the century of Louis XIV". During this time authors and artists excelled. Corneille, Molière, Racine, La Bruyère, La Fontaine, Madame de Sévigné, Pascal, Bossuet and Saint-Simon were famous authors. Mansart and Vauban were famous architects (Vauban on the military side). Le Notre was the major landscape architect laying out the formidable gardens of the castles of a major part of the nobility. Le Brun, Mignard, Vouet and others were famous painters decorating the castles.

In addition to wielding absolute power in France, Louis XIV was ambitious in many respects. He was ambitious in art, architecture, public celebrations, building of infrastructure (both military and civilian), as well as in wanting to extend French territories. He conducted wars against territories to the north of France, wanting to annex them. All the ambitions of Louis XIV had the characteristic of costing a lot of money, and the government budgets suffered. When he died in 1715, he left a powerful state with strained finances to his heir, Louis XV. Louis XV was the son of his grandson. During his reign, wars of succession took place both in Poland and in Austria, and France was involved in them. Louis XV also led a seven year war with England, where the object was colonial power. His wars, as well as his lavish life style, did nothing to improve the public finances of France. When he died in 1774, he left the throne to his grandson, Louis XVI.

Louis XVI did not manage to improve the strained finances of the state. This situation gradually increased the hardship felt by the population on account of the heavy taxation they had been enduring ever since the reign of Louis XIV, a situation which had not improved under Louis XV. The French people now wanted a say in the management of public finances, and meetings with representatives of the people ("États Généraux") were organized. However, Louis XVI did not manage to create a credible dialogue. He held on to absolute power in a way which infuriated the representatives of the people, and revolution erupted when militias of the people stormed and took hold of the much hated political prison La Bastille in Paris, on 14th of July 1789.

From then on, events moved fast, and the king had lost control of the situation. Violent repression by the leaders of the revolution developed, under an atmosphere of power struggles and suspicion between factions of revolutionary leaders. Louis XVI tried to flee to Austria, but was discovered and captured on the way, and this destroyed all remaining good will he might have had at that time. He was subsequently executed in 1793. All the big monarchies of Europe were in shock and turned militarily against France. However, revolutionary generals were leading strongly motivated troops, and they succeeded in pushing back the foreign troops.

The political organization of the revolution was in constant turmoil, and the most powerful general at that time, Napoléon Bonaparte, gradually strengthened his grip on power. In 1799, after beating back several internal and external enemies of the revolution, Napoleon effectively took power, and in 1804 had himself named emperor of France. Napoleon had, as we all know, extravagant ambitions. He invaded most of Europe, and managed to take power over vast territories across Europe. In the end, he was beaten and forced to exile, first (in 1814) at the island of Elba in the Mediterranean Sea, from where he managed to escape and come back to power. Subsequently he was again beaten, at Waterloo near Burssels, under the British leadership of Lord Wellington in 1815. Napoleon was then sent to the far more remote island of St.Helena in the Atlantic, where he later died.

After the defeat of Napoleon, monarchy in France was restored when the oldest surviving brother of Louis XVI was placed at the throne with the name of Louis XVIII (Louis XVI had had a son who did not survive imprisonment after the revolution, but who among royalists was seen as the king Louis XVII after Louis XVI was executed). Louis XVIII did nothing remarkable, and when he died in 1824 was succeeded by his younger brother, Charles X. Charles X was a pompous fool, who had learned nothing from the years of the revolution, and he was thrown out of power as a result of a public uprising in July of 1830 (27, 28, and 29 of July: "Les Trois Glorieuses").

A descendant to the throne from another branch of the family, Louis Philippe, replaced Charles X, and some changes in the functioning of the monarchy were introduced ("Monarchie de Juillet"). Louis Philippe reigned from 1830 to 1848. He was respected as a king, bur this period was a period of general social unrest, not only in France. It was at this time that Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels wrote their communist manifesto, and their descriptions of social

exploitation and the need to fight for social justice had strongly taken hold on the public imagination. Numerous public figures picked up these ideas in various forms, as well as several writers in addition to Marx and Engels. A revolutionary atmosphere took hold among the vastly increased numbers of industrial workers of the time. An economic crisis which began in 1847 came on top of this, and by 1848 an uprising took place in Paris and swept Louis Philippe out of power that year.

The monarchy was then abolished again, and the republic was proclaimed on the 23rd of February 1848 (The Second Republic). Napoleon's nephew, Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte, was elected president of the republic. This new republic barely had time to get under way, before Louis-Napoléon staged a coup in 1851, and managed to get himself elected emperor in 1852. He took the title of Napoleon III, due to the fact that the first Napoleon had a son who died in exile in Austria while his father was at St.Helena. This rule quickly developed into a dictatorship, which lasted until 1870, when the emperor was beaten by the Prussians in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870. Napoleon III went to exile in England, where he later died.

After the defeat of Napoléon III in 1870, The Third Republic was established, and this lasted until the Second World War in 1940. This was the longest period of institutional stability since the revolution in 1789. The war interrupted this, and a new republic was established after the war, through the Constitution of 1946 (The Fourth Republic). This lasted until 1958, when a period of unrest, largely linked to the French war in Algiers, brought about institutional changes in the form of a new Constitution, and the election of General Charles de Gaulle as president (The Fifth Republic). This republic is still in force today.

As can be seen by this quick overview over the succession of kings, revolutions and republics, France has a rich history. If we go deeper into the old French stones, we will see that this rich history is further enriched by looking at the regional variety to be found in this territory. The French regions were formed both culturally and politically long before France was a unified country. Traces from pre-historic life in the territory of today's France can be found in many places, and most remarkably in the caves like those in Lascaux where mural

paintings dating back about 20 000 years give a vivid picture of animal life and hunting in those times.

Important cultural roots from more recent times come from the Celtic tribes which were settled there several centuries before the Romans invaded Gaul. Furthermore, the Celts who invaded the British Isles had strong ties with the Celts who occupied Brittany. Normandy derives much of its cultural identity from the time around the ninth century AD when the Vikings raided, invaded and subsequently were given the right to settle there by the French king. Acquitaine's historic links with the English throne remains a living heritage through English citizen's attraction to this region even today. More to the east in the south, we find Provence which has its own rich history and culture, illustrated by the period of the Cathars (or Albigensians as they are also called) which appeared in the 11th century as a reaction to the extravagant habits of the clergy and were persecuted by the Catholic church and eliminated in the 14th century. In the northeast, we find Alsace and Lorraine, which has lived through dramatic times ever since the reign of Charlemagne around 800 AD, as a buffer zone between the French and the German **interests.** The Alpine region has a culture of its own as well.

If we look a bit more thoroughly at this, the regions of France today are divided administratively in 13 regions in metropolitan France (including Corsica), and 5 overseas regions. The metropolitan regions are Hauts de France (Nord-Pas de Calais and Picardy), Grand Est (Champagne-Ardenne, Lorraine, and Alsace), Normandy (Upper and Lower Normandy), Île de France, Bourgogne-Franche-Comté (Burgundy, Franche-Comté), Brittany, Pays de Loire, Centre-Val de Loire, Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes (Auvergne, Rhône-Alpes), Nouvelle-Aquitaine (Poitou-Charentes, Limousin, and Aquitaine), Occitanie (Midi-Pyrénées and Languedoc-Roussillon), Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, and Corsica. The regions as they were before the reform in 2016 are given in brackets. Those regions which are not followed by brackets did not change name or content.

The overseas regions are Guadeloupe, Martinique, French Guiana, Mayotte and Réunion.

The capitals of the respective regions are:

Hauts de France: Lille, Grand Est: Strasbourg, Normandy: Caen and Rouen, Île de France: Paris, Bourgogne-Franche-Comté: Besancon and Dijon, Brittany: Rennes, Pays de Loire: Angers, Centre-Val de Loire: Orléans, Nouvelle Aquitaine: Bordeaux, Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes: Lyon, Occitanie: Toulouse, Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur: Marseille, Corsica: Ajaccio.

Let us now look closer at the history and culture of each region, as it appears now after the reform of 2016.

Hauts-de-France has, like all the other French regions, a rich and often dramatic history. In the north, the Celtic tribes of the Belgae (who were glorified by Julius Cesar's comments in "De Bello Gallico" about their strength as warriors) were the first peoples we distinctly know about in the area. In the 4th and the 5th centuries AD the Roman rulers of Gallia Belgica established a route of communication between the major port of Bononia (today's Boulogne) to

Colonia (today's Cologne). This established a linguistic border between the Germanic languages which were found to the north of this route and the Romance languages to the south. When the Saxons came between the 5th and the 8th centuries, the linguistic border was pushed a bit further south, so that most people north of Lille spoke a dialect of Old Dutch. This can be seen through the names of places in this part of the region. During the 14th century much of the area came under the control of the Duchy of Burgundy and later became part of the Habsburg Netherlands followed by the Spanish Netherlands, as the Dukes of Burgundy were integrated into the Habsburg dynasty through inheritance. Louis XIV invaded parts of this area in the 17th century and the southern parts of Flanders and Hainaut (south of what is today the Belgian border) became part of France.

This region has throughout thousand years of history been the scene of wars, and the two world wars that took place in the 20th century left strong marks here. From the 9th century onwards, this territory was disputed and its political scenery was unclear. Gradually, the counts of Flanders and Hainaut imposed their power. However, it was the cities that developed most strongly and gained a great degree of independence and economic and cultural affluence – culminating at the time of the Dukes of Burgundy in the 15th century.

During the industrial revolution in the 19th century this region experienced an unprecedented economic and demographic development, largely based on mining and textile industries. This industrial base, although largely dominating economically, lead to other industrial activities as well. The large number of industrial workers also created a strong labor movement, which in turn gave rise to dialogue and conflict with employers.

The devastation of wars in this region is well illustrated by the effects of The First World War in 1914 to 1918. During this time 801 municipalities were destroyed or heavily damaged. 600 churches were destroyed, 14 235 industrial plants destroyed, 350 000 apartment buildings annihilated, 598 000 hectares of ground had to be rehabilitated, 16 000 kilometers of roads were damaged, 773 kilometers of railroad had to be reconstructed, and numerous other infrastructure installations had to be repaired (Wikipedia: Nord-Pas de Calais).

After having been rebuilt during the 1930s, The Second World War (1940 – 1945) came and repeated the destruction, with the German invasion in 1940 and the arrival of the Allied forces, led by the United States of America, in 1944. The period of reconstruction in the 1950s and economic growth in the 1960s was then followed by economic crisis in the 1970s, when the textile and mining industries were hit particularly hard – largely due to technological development and hard competition from Asian textile producers. Agricultural activity was, and remains, very strong.

Aside from the north, with its dramatic history of wars and industrial expansion and decline, the region of Hauts-de-France also contains the old region of Picardie. This region has of old had its own romans language, different from French, of which its most vivid dialect is the "ch'ti". The name of Picardie derives from the notion of agricultural laborer ("piocheur"), which was applied to all those who lived to the north of the forests of Senlis and Valois and who

did not speak Flemish. The name first appeared in the 13th century. Arras, Boulogne, Calais and Tournai were cities of Picardie (Wikipedia).

During pre-Roman times Picardie was also dominated by the Celtic tribes of the Belgae, subsequently taken over by the Romans under Julius Cesar. At the time of the disintegration of the Roman Empire, Picardie was administratively part of the north. In 843, through the Treaty of Verdun, after the partition of the Empire of Charlemagne, Picardie was made part of Western France.

As a territory and political entity, Picardie acquires renown after the massacre of Saint-Barthélémy in 1572, when it decides to support King Henry III in his fight against the Duke of Guise, who (as already mentioned above) was plotting to take over the French throne. This loyalty to the royal family was celebrated in military parades long after this period. Like its territorial neighbors further north in the region, Picardie was heavily damaged during both World Wars in the 20th century. The idea of loyalty to the royal family was put in doubt during the early reign of king Louis XIV, when a group of noblemen tried to take over power and depose the king – who was at that time a child under tutelage by cardinal Mazarin. A major leader of this revolt, in French called "La Fronde", was the prince of Condé, who had a base in Chantilly in Picardie. The revolt was in due course crushed by Mazarin, and Louis XIV went on to become the most powerful and famous of all French kings.

Calais, one of the well-known cities in the region of Hauts de France, has stories to tell already from the time of the Hundred Years War. At one time during this war, in 1346, England's king Edward III laid siege to Calais. King Philip VI of France ordered the city to hold out at all costs. As the French king failed to lift the siege, starvation in time forced the city to negotiate surrender with England's king. Edward III offered to spare the city if six of its leaders surrendered to him. They were demanded to walk out with nooses around their necks, and bring with them the keys to the city and its castle. One of the wealthiest of the town leaders, Eustache de Saint Pierrre, volunteered first and five others joined him. This moment of defeat, self-sacrifice and willingness to face imminent death was immortalized about five hundred years later by the famous French sculptor Auguste Rodin, when he cast a vast Bronze sculpture of "The Burghers of Calais", which was completed in 1889.

The rich history of the region of Hauts-de-France is reflected in the large number of museums to be found, as well as numerous historic sites such as the great cathedrals of Beauvais and Amiens, beautiful castles such as Beaucamps-le-Jeune and Montépilloy, as well as idyllic villages such as Cassel which recently was voted "preferred village of the French".

The region of Grand Est is composed of four sub-regions which are all well known, each one for its own reasons. These regions are, as mentioned, Champagne, Ardenne, Alsace and Lorraine. Champagne is world famous for its special brand of sparkling wine, which is served by the world's rich and famous on all special occasions, but also by many of us all – all over the globe. Ardenne left an indelible mark in world history during the heavy, decisive battles fought between Hitler's armed forces and the Allied forces opposing Hitler, led by the Americans towards the end of the Second World War. Alsace and Lorraine are famous in history for their complicated destiny as buffer regions between

France and Germany, with their changing dependence on each of these countries – following the fortunes of France and Germany, respectively, in those two countries' power struggles ever since the death of Charlemagne in the 9th century AD. The citizens of Alsace and Lorraine were forced to change their allegiance and sense of identity along with changing power structures as history moved on. These regions were also heavily damaged during the wars of religion in the period between 1618 and 1648, when the Swedish army travelled through the territory destroying all castles and strongholds as they went. These changing fortunes have left the population in this region with a complicated sense of identity, as can also be seen in the architecture of these two regions.

Champagne has, as the industry of luxury gradually has gained global momentum throughout the latter half of the 20th century and into the 21th century, acquired a high status. This status can be seen through the numerous

vineyards specializing in production of champagne and their obvious opulence and attraction as tourist destinations. These vineyards combine links between production methods with ancient cultural roots and modern technology and marketing savvy. They illustrate the fascination brought about by all of the luxury industry, where old traditions in crafts form the basis of a production which manages to combine the quality in old masters' perfectionism with adaptation to modern consumers' taste for unique quality and design. The best producers are characterized by their acute consciousness of the importance of keeping the quality of old crafts present in their minds. Without the constant presence of this link, modern production would lose its touch, become ordinary and fade away in the luxury markets.

The region of Champagne contains a remarkable contrast between their production of luxury goods, as illustrated by their production of sparkling wine, and their agricultural production aside from wine. Vast agricultural areas are cultivated for cereals, vegetables and sugar beets. These cultures are developed on an industrial scale, and as such forms an entirely different type of activity offering an entirely different type of landscape.

Ardenne is a region with hills and forests, with an important past and a less visible present. Two well-known rivers flow through the Ardenne region, the Moselle and Meuse rivers. Topographically and administratively, the region of Ardenne has a more important presence in Belgium and Luxembourg. The trees and rivers of this region provided the basis for charcoal industry which fueled other industrial activities as well. The 18th and 19th centuries were the historical high points in the economic development of Ardenne, if we look at it as a whole (including Wallonia). At this time the region was the second greatest industrial region of the world, after England. Coal-based metallurgic industry maintained its importance into the early parts of the 20th century as well, but then gradually faded away as competition from other parts of the world increased and the coal-based technology lost ground. In economic terms, the region was too static and tradition-bound and did not manage to transform itself along with the changing needs of the world markets.

The Second World War brought – as already mentioned above - major destruction to the area, first as the German Army passed through this region when invading Belgium and France. Secondly, and even more destructively, when Hitler after the invasion of the allied forces in Normandy tried a desperate counter-attack with all his remaining military capacity. Major battles between Hitler's forces and the allied forces then took place within the region over a long time and left terrible devastation which took a long time to rebuild. The region has not so far recovered its former economic force after that.

Alsace and Lorraine are the third and fourth sub-regions of the region of Grand Est. They also have had major roles in European history, as briefly mentioned above. They come forward prominently on the European political scene already with the Treaty of Verdun, which was signed in 843 AD. This treaty partitioned the Carolingian empire among the three surviving sons of emperor Louis I the Pious, who had inherited the empire from its creator, his father Charlemagne. After the death of Louis in 840, his three sons were fighting over their rights to the territory. The two youngest sons, Charles II (the Bald) and Louis the German, allied against Lothar I, who as the eldest son had become emperor. Lothar sued for peace, and the treaty confirmed him in his title as emperor and he received the territory called Francia Media, which included a stretched out middle of the old empire including parts of modern Belgium, the Netherlands, western Germany, eastern France, Switzerland and much of Italy. Louis the German received Francia Orientalis, the land east of the river Rhine, while Charles received Francia Occidentalis, the remainder of modern France.

Lothar's kingdom, with long and vulnerable borders combined with difficult internal communications because of the distances, proved to be an entity which was not viable in the long run. The northern section of this territory became Lotharingia, and this section was in 855 disputed by the more powerful states of Francia Occidentalis (France) and Francia Orientalis (Germany). Generations of kings of France and Germany were unable to establish a firm rule over this territory. The southern third of this land, Alsace-Lorraine, was traded back and forth several times between France and Germany. During the 17th century Alsace was gradually conquered by the French king Louis XIV, while Lorraine passed to France in 1766 after the death of Stanislaw Leszcynski, who had acquired the region from the German Habsburgs by the Treaty of Vienna (1738). This treaty ended the War of Polish Succession (1733-1738). Stanislaw's daughter was married to the French king Louis XV.

In 1871, Alsace-Lorraine became German after the victory of Germany in a short war with France that ended that year. Alsace was the territory west of

the river Rhine and east of the Vosges mountains, and Lorraine was situated in the upper Moselle valley to the north of the Vosges. Brought together, they were Alsace-Lorraine, a territory which continued to be contested between France and Germany. Germany held the territory from 1871 until 1918, when Germany lost the first world war (1914 – 1918), and the territory was given back to France as part of the peace treaty drawn up in Versailles. The population of that contested region suffered much from these multiple changes of nationality, which entailed such strong changes of imposed cultural habits, education and national identity. The drawing of borders also led to examples of wars where families, who had members on both sides of the borders, ended up having cousins forced to fight against each other. In the second world war (1940 – 1945), which Germany also lost, many such examples were found.

However, from 1918 Alsace-Lorraine has been part of France, and now part of the greater region of Grand Est. Alsace is famous for its wines and related activities, and its villages with their vineyards attract many tourists – both because of its wines and because of their picturesque architecture and landscape. The economy of Alsace is quite dynamic and diversified, with a good industrial base that has managed to innovate along with structural changes in the world's economy. Agro-industrial activities in addition to wine include breweries, chocolates, refinement of meat products, and many others. Textiles, metallurgy, energy, car production, railway and aeronautics are among the sectors which have managed to stay solidly in business. Lorraine shows a different picture. Its economic history resembles that of the Ardennes. From an important industrial past linked to mining, metallurgy and textile, this sub-region has not managed to transform itself to meet new challenges. It is lagging behind the other French regions in economic terms, and depends largely on regionalization of government services and defense operations for its economic sustainability.

The region of Grand Est has seen many major historic events taking place in its territory. The cathedral of the city of Reims is the place where French kings were coronated. Jeanne d'Arc made it famous when she during The Hundred Years' War tipped the scales in favor of the French troops at Orléans, and subsequently escorted the heir to the French throne to Reims to ensure that he

was coronated as Charles VII, at a moment in history when the English kings and the dukes of Burgundy posed a great threat to his authority as heir to the throne after the weak and unstable Charles VI died.

The city of Nancy has also made its mark in history, not only as a major center of Art Nouveau in the early 20th century, but also as the place where the duke of Burgundy Charles the Bold died in 1477 in a battle with the aim of expanding his territories northwards, to unite his territories in Burgundy with those he possessed in Flanders. This was a major event, as it enabled the French king Louis XI (son of Charles VII) to take over Burgundy and include it in the domain of the French Crown.

One hundred and fifty years later, another major European war with implications for Grand Est took place, as mentioned in the quick overview above. From 1618 to 1648, The Thirty Years' War took place, a war ignited by the protestant reform of the Christian church launched by Martin Luther in 1517 in Wittenberg and the catholic response to this with a counter-reform. Although this war started out as a war between contesting faiths, it soon took on wider political aspects. The region of Grand Est was hard hit by Swedish troops who fought on the protestant side and destroyed numerous castles and forts as they moved southwards along the war fronts. One of these castles has been made famous because of its total renovation towards the end of the 19th century by Viollet le Duc (a famous French renovation architect) and into the 20th century by successive efforts of consolidation of this renovation. This impressive castle is named Haut Koenigsbourg.

In another domain of art, the city of Colmar is the proud host of one of art history's most famous pieces of art – the altarpiece of Issenheim, attributed to Mathias Grünewald. The city of Troyes is also notable, and it established its fame as a trading center in the Middle Ages. Strasbourg, the capital of Grand Est, has a long and rich history in itself – and it today houses the seat of the European Parliament.

The region of <u>Normandy</u> has many notable sides to it. It is very picturesque, with a coastline immortalized by great artists such as Gustave Courbet and Claude Monet as seen for example in their rendering of the cliffs of Etretat and the marine life along the coast. Aside from tourism, which is important here as well, it is famous for its apples and derived products such as calvados and cider, and for its dairy products where the cheese Camembert is notable and known all around the world. Its beaches are famous, in large part because of the allied invasion in the Second World War to beat back the German occupation troops, but also in more peaceful contexts as attractions for vacationers from France and abroad to such places as Deauville and Cabourg. Cabourg was also immortalized by the famous French author Marcel Proust in his masterpiece Remembrance of Things Past. The Viking invasion of Normandy in the 9th century and its consequences such as their descendant William the Conqueror's invasion and conquest of England in 1066 AD also have a high profile when we think of Normandy. Let us look a bit closer at what this region represents in the French consciousness.

Normandy's coastline and its link to the Channel are important for understanding many of its historic developments. In its early history, Normandy was gradually a place of settlement for Celtic tribes. These tribes came from the east and settled in Normandy in the 4th and 3rd centuries BC, more than 2400 years ago. As the Romans expanded their empire into Gaul when Julius Cesar beat the Celtic tribes and took control of the territory, the Celtic culture was gradually transformed into what we call Gallo-Roman culture. As time went by, the Roman Empire started to disintegrate, and was divided into a Western and Eastern Empire in the 4th century AD. This weakening of Roman influence and power led to a weakening of the cities of Gaul which had thrived under the Pax Romana, due to flourishing trade facilitated by good roads, river transport and military protection. As military presence, and road and river maintenance weakened, the economic foundation of cities was undermined by the disintegration of trade routes.

A long period of political disintegration followed, with the emergence of local rulers who fought against each other and oppressed peasants. The arrival of Charlemagne in the latter half of the 8th century brought stronger political integration of France, including Normandy. In the middle of the 9th century AD, Normandy's link to the Channel made itself felt strongly for the first time. The Vikings came from Denmark and Norway and sailed along the Channel, where they found the mouth of the River Seine. Raiding the coasts of Normandy and then sailing up the Seine as far inland as Paris, they were seen as a great nuisance and – for those who were victims of raids – life-threatening. In the 10th century, Charlemagne's grandson Charles the Bald made a treaty with the Vikings and their chief Rollo. They were allowed to occupy territories in Normandy, in exchange for stopping raids and keeping other bands of Vikings at bay.

As time went by, the Vikings settled well, married local women and developed the territory. Rollo's great grandson, William, was Duke of Normandy. And now we see the second major event in history showing the importance of Normandy's relation with the Channel. There had been extensive contacts across the Channel, and William had family ties to English rulers. At one stage, the English throne became vacant, and William proclaimed himself rightful heir of the English kings. This claim was rejected by Harold, another heir to the throne who was actually residing in England. William was not inclined to back down, and crossed the channel with a fleet of warriors. They made a landing as Harold was fighting a Viking incursion at Stamford bridge. When Harold heard of William's arrival in England, he hastened south to where William had landed. They met at Hastings, where William beat Harold and his troops in 1066 AD. William then became king of England, as well as Duke of Normandy. This consolidated the ties between England and Normandy, which stayed strong until The Hundred Years War, when the French king succeeded in including all the mainland coastal territory into the French Crown's possessions.

When we travel to Normandy today, we can find a remarkable tapestry made by Queen Mathilda, William's wife, where she describes William's conquest of England in stitched images on a space covering more than 60 meters of tapestry. This can be seen in a special museum in the city of Caen.

Normandy has many other remarkable historic and cultural sites. Along the river Seine, at Les Andelys, you will find Chateau Gaillard. This fortress was built in 1196 AD by Richard the Lionheart, the oldest son of the English king Henry II. Richard was at that time Duke of Normandy, and later also became king of England when Henry II died. Richard was beaten at Chateau Gaillard by the French king Philip II. Chateau Gaillard changed hands between the English and the French several times during The Hundred Years War, but was definitively taken over by the French in 1449. In 1599, the French king Henry IV ordered the destruction of the fortress. Today we will find an impressive ruin of that fortress when we visit Les Andelys.

On the border between Normandy and Bretagne, situated in the territory of Normandy, we will find another remarkable place – the monastery of Mont St.Michel. This was established as a Benedictine monastery in the 10th century AD and developed into its present form in the period between the 11th and the 16th centuries. It is one of the most important sites of medieval Christian civilization. The Gothic-style Benedictine abbey dedicated to the archangel Saint Michel and the village that grew up in the shadows of its great walls are together known as the "Wonder of the West" (cf. UNESCO).

Its place in the landscape is extremely refined. The sea levels in Normandy vary greatly according to the movement of the tides. At high tide, the monastery sits on an island. At low tide, it is part of the mainland. When water levels move from low tide to high tide, the sea moves so fast on the flat, sandy beaches that only a galloping horse will be able to keep the pace at which the water moves to cover the ground. This phenomenon gave the monastery good protection in times of unrest.

The secluded location of the monastery also led to its use as a prison for a period later on in history. Today the monastery is a world famous landmark on UNESCO's list of World Heritage Sites, and it draws millions of tourists every year.

Yet another remarkable site is the village of Honfleur, an old fishing village containing interesting buildings with special architecture as well as an extremely picturesque port, also attracting huge numbers of tourists. Honfleur has played an important role in history because of its location at the southern banks of the estuary of the river Seine, and because of its well-protected port. These two characteristics determined Honfleur's role as a major trading port, a role it kept for several centuries – until it became too small for the larger boats that came along over time and thereby lost out to the larger ports of nearby Le Havre.

Honfleur's picturesque port and architecture around it has over time attracted many artists as well, as can be seen in art history. The church of St.Catherine, which is not far from the port, is the oldest church built entirely in wood in France. The construction details of this church contain many links to Normandy's Viking heritage. It dates from the 15th century, and its beauty explains its attraction.

Claude Monet, the world famous impressionist painter, has produced many masterpieces of motives along the coast of Normandy, including Honfleur, Etretat, Le Havre (Ste.Adresse), and many other. Monet established himself and his family in the village of Giverny in Normandy, where he developed a garden with masses of flowers. This garden was the object of many of his greatest paintings, including the world famous motives of the water lilies. Giverny is now a place of pilgrimage for fans of impressionist art.

The region of <u>Ile de France</u> is the region where Paris is located. Aside from Paris itself and the activity it generates in the surrounding areas, it is a region with many remarkable features.

From the time in the 15th century when the French kings gradually returned to Paris at the expense of their earlier preference for the Loire Valley, the history, architecture and social life in Paris was transformed. Paris gradually acquired the combination of monumental features, splendid parks and picturesque local places that we know today. The history of Paris, the history of France, as well as cultural and artistic high points from all over the world are all told in numerous great museums which never stop displaying great exhibitions that cover all imaginable interests and tastes. The social life to be found along boulevards, streets and large and small squares, as well as in its cafés and restaurants, is unique and attracts visitors from all over the world. All over the world, people have images and ideas of Paris in their heads, either from experiences from

earlier visits if they have been there or dreams about what it must look like if they have not been there. Nobody is indifferent to Paris.

Ever since the time of Napoleon, when he rose to power at the end of the 18th century, Paris has been the epicenter of political and administrative power, cultural trendsetting, lines of transport of goods and people in France. All major roads and ideas were focused on Paris. Although, as we know, France contains numerous regions with strong senses of cultural and political identities, they have all had to bow to the power of Paris after the political and administrative centralization was firmly established by Napoleon. His laws and edicts still have a grip on people's minds in many areas.

Napoleon brought strict order to a France which had experienced chaos and destruction during the French Revolution. Many of the splendid castles, churches and monuments left by the French nobility had been destroyed at that time – an extreme accumulated reaction by the people against centuries of domination and abuse of power by the French nobility. Yet, in spite of this violent reaction which could be seen during the Revolution, a massive cultural and architectural heritage still exists. The conservation of this heritage comes at an enormous cost, but it also yields large revenues through the influx of tourists – France being the most important tourist venue in the world (measured in numbers of tourists).

The kings and nobility of Paris have left major monuments in and around Paris, which all contribute to the cultural importance of Ile de France as a region. King Louis IX (Saint Louis), an active crusader and devout Christian, bought Christ's thorn crown at a huge price, and in order to house that relic he built the Sainte Chapelle in the 13th century in Paris. This chapel is a great wonder, attracting millions of people every year. The castle of Vaux-le-Vicomte, to the south of Paris is famous, not only for its magnificence but also for its history. During the reign of Louis XIV, the Sun King, he had a Finance Minister who was named Nicolas Fouquet. Nicolas Fouquet was very rich, in part because he was a successful tradesman. At one point, before Louis XIV had built the magnificent castle at Versailles, Fouquet built the marvelous castle Vaux-le-Vicomte. For the inauguration of this castle, Fouquet organized a monumental party, with fireworks and all the amusements one could imagine. At dinner, he served the food in gold plates. Considering the fact that Louis XIV served his dinners in

silver plates, and that Vaux-le-Vicomte was outshining all other castles built in France up to then, it is no wonder that this was felt as a provocation by the king. Fouquet was accused of misappropriations of public funds and put in prison. His possessions were confiscated by the state. Fouquet's castle remains intact, for us to admire.

Another major cultural heritage in Ile de France is the castle of Fontainebleau. This castle was brought to its present splendor by King Francois I, in the middle of the 16th century, and further embellished by his successors. From an artistic point of view, the sum of France's acquisitions of art as well as its own production of art, are at display in the Louvre museum in Paris, without contest the largest and most magnificent museum in the world. Big books are written about all the splendors one can find in Paris, and it is not an ambition here to reproduce that information.

The region of <u>Bourgogne-Franche-Comté</u> also has a glorious history and a strong sense of identity. Already in Celtic times, around the 5th century B.C., its identity was established as the area of the Celtic tribe of the Burgondes. This was one of the major Celtic tribes of the area of what was later to become France. In the 5th century A.D. it established itself as a kingdom, which lasted until the 8th century. Later on it was split into the Duchy of Burgundy in the west, as part of France, and the County of Burgundy (today's Franche-Comté) in the east, which became part of the Holy German Empire. This division was firmly established around the 14th century. Not long after The Hundred Years War, in the latter half of the 15th century, the French king Louis XI beat the Duke of Burgundy, Charles the Bold, at Nancy, where the Duke died. From this time the Duchy of Burgundy came under direct French rule, with the exception of the Low Countries (today's Belgium and the Netherlands), which stayed under the rule of the Holy Roman Empire. At that time, Louis also managed to take back the County of Burgundy into French dominance, where it has stayed since.

The Duchy of Burgundy had the most glorious period in its history during the 14th and 15th centuries. The Duchy was very rich, on account of its strong agriculture and important trading cities, like Antwerp and Brussels. At that time Antwerp was the world's most important trading city. The court of the Duke of Burgundy, in reality although not formally independent of the French king, was the richest and most flamboyant court of Europe. During The Hundred Years War, the Duke of Burgundy kept his independence from the French king. He even leaned towards supporting the English king when he captured Joan of Arc and delivered her to the English forces during the reign of Charles VII, Louis XI's father. This contributed to the later downfall of the Duke Charles the Bold, who had territorial ambitions overstretching his military and economic capacities, leading to exhaustion of his troops and his treasury, and his death at Nancy.

In spite of its subsequent inclusion into the French king's domain, Burgundy maintained its strong cultural identity and economy. It is a vast and varied territory, with many important cities and types of activity. Burgundy is of course famous for its wine production, and the region between Dijon and Beaune is the heart of this, with the most famous wines being produced there. Beaune is also famous for its old hospital, L'Hospice de Beaune, which was built

in the 15th century and is intact today. Aside from the marvelous hospital itself, it contains a triptych by Rogier van der Weyden, a world famous painter from that period.

Southwest of this part of Burgundy is the area of Morvan with extensive forests which supplied Paris with wood for heating during earlier times. Not far from Dijon is Saint-Seine-L'Abbaye, where the river Seine, which flows through Paris and out to Normandy, has its source. Dijon was the seat of the Dukes of Burgundy, and it is remarkable in itself. Another city with a remarkable monument is Lons-le-Saunier, where there were old salt mines which enriched Franche-Comté for thousands of years. A particular site of salt production is Les Salines de Lons-le-Saunier, which had its heyday at the time of Louis XIV in the 17th century. Other important cities in Burgundy and Franche-Comté are Besancon, Mâcon, Nevers, Auxerre, Vesoul and Belfort.

The region of <u>Brittany (Bretagne)</u> has a history linked to its Celtic ancestors in a stronger way than the other French regions, due to its long coastal area neighboring the longstanding Celtic areas of Ireland and Cornwall in the United Kingdom. This Celtic identity is also reflected in its local dialect. Like Burgundy, Brittany stayed independent of the French crown for a long time before being integrated in the Kingdom of France.

Brittany has a Neolithic heritage which can be seen today through the megalithic alignments of Carnac and in Locmariaquer in the area of Morbihan. These megaliths are dated from the period between 4500 and 3000 B.C. Later on in history, five Celtic tribes developed in the area of Brittany around the 5th century B.C. Cultural interchange between Celtic Brittany and Southwestern England and Wales was strengthened when large groups of Britons emigrated to Brittany in the 4th century A.D. These migrations were reinforced after the disintegration of the Roman Empire when, in the 5th and 6th centuries, Anglo-Saxon tribes invaded England.

The different groups of people in Brittany were often in conflict with one another, but that changed when the Frankish kings tried to take control of Brittany. The people of Brittany united to resist the Frankish king Charles the Bald, and Brittany became a kingdom in its own right in 840 A.D. However, the incursions of the Vikings weakened Brittany's unity, and about a hundred years later Brittany sought cooperation with the French king, and then became a Duchy under the protection of France. Nevertheless, it retained a strong sense of independence, and the succeeding French kings sought in vain to take proper control of this territory. A change was initiated when the Duchess Anne of Brittany married the French king Charles VIII in 1491. Even though she retained her rights as the Duchess and ruler of Brittany, this union brought the Duchy closer to the French throne. Charles VIII died prematurely from an accident at the castle of Amboise, and Anne then married the successor of Charles, Louis XII, in 1499. Anne then died in 1514. Louis XII died the year after, and a period of negotiation then followed, with the result that Brittany became entirely integrated with France in 1532.

Much of Brittany's present identity is related to its long coastline. Ever since the time of Louis XIV, the French naval forces have had major strongholds in Brittany. Historically, the so-called Corsairs were playing an important role in

the 17th century under Louis XIV's rule. They were in fact pirates, but operated under the protection of the king, on the condition that they would only attack enemy vessels. The corsairs would in particular attack Spanish vessels carrying gold from Latin America and English vessels carrying all sorts of trading goods. This activity was very lucrative and the French king got a part of the proceeds. The most famous port of corsairs was St.Malo, a strongly fortified city on the northern coast of Brittany. St.Malo is even today architecturally intact and shows what it was like in the 17th century.

Other activities which have been important since ancient times are fishing and agriculture. They are important for Brittany's economy also today. Over time, naval forces, fishing and agriculture have also generated industrial development directly derived from these primary activities. Food industry and shipbuilding are important industries. Along with these, automobile and aerospace industries have also developed. In sum, these activities have given Brittany a strong economy.

Brittany's sense of identity can be seen directly from its architecture. Houses along the coast have a clear common style based on construction in stone, and building rules are strict as regards architecture, choice of colors and materials. This gives the region a strange sense of unity as you travel along the coast, and even further inland. Major cities are Rennes, Brest, Vannes and Quimper, and famous areas are Armorique, Finistère, and Morbihan. Many French and foreign citizens have invested in vacation homes in these areas, and tourism is also important for the economy.

The region of <u>Pays de Loire and Val de Loire</u> is famous for its numerous magnificent castles built by French kings and nobility for many centuries, in particular in the period between the 14th and the 16th centuries. The Loire Valley is a notion in itself, with magnificent natural landscape that for centuries have been hunting grounds for French kings, a rich cultural history linked to the strong presence of French royal families and their courts, and the economic activities derived from the Loire river's function as a major artery for transport of goods.

The Loire river covers a vast area and distance, and has for thousands of years provided livelihood for numerous people. Local hunters-gatherers with pre-historic origins have lived there for more than ten thousand years, later replaced by agricultural tribes that migrated from the Near East and settled on agricultural land along the Loire and also raised cattle. These later became more consolidated societies, enlarged by further migrations from the East, and then forming a central part of Celtic culture. In the 4th century B.C., in the

region that is now around the city of Orleans, the Celtic tribe of the Carnutes was dominating. This was the center of Celtic Gaul, where the spiritual leaders of all the Celtic tribes in Gaul – the druids – used to assemble once a year in the forest of the Carnutes.

When Julius Cesar invaded Gaul, this region made little resistance and quickly adopted the roman lifestyle. The so-called Gallo-Roman culture found a fertile breeding ground here, with a flourishing of production and trade. Later on, from the 4th century A.D., Christian faith took hold under the impulse of the bishops of Tours, Orleans and Angers. The most famous among these was Martin of Tours, who played a major role in developing Christian faith in the region. Barbaric incursions in the region took place later on, first with the muslims who were pushed back by Charles Martel in the 8th century, thus stopping them from crossing the Loire in their efforts to move north from the Iberian peninsula. More damage in the Loire region in this period was done by the Vikings, who from the middle of the 9th century moved up the Loire river with their longships and pillaged cities and monasteries of the valley.

In the Middle Ages, minor and major wars took place almost continually as a result of hereditary fighting for the thrones of England and France. The Hundred Years War was the culmination of these wars, and its end in the early 1450s marked the start of a new era for the Loire region. The victor, King Charles VII and his son Louis XI embarked on a major period of construction of fortified castles, leading to an assembly of major castles in the region which historically have been branded the Castles of Loire (Chateaux de la Loire).

This development reached its zenith during the Renaissance, when the French kings – inspired by the Italian Renaissance – introduced new arts and culture that gave rise to the French Renaissance. The castle of Chambord, constructed by order of Francis I, stands as the most visible example of the splendor of this period. Other castles in the region also stand witness to this period, such as Blois, Saumur, Chaumont, Chenonceau, Azay-le-Rideau, Chinon and many, many others.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, the region acquired increased importance as a fluvial axis of communication through the importance of the river itself, but also because of the creation water channels linked to the river. In the 19th century, the advent of railroads dealt a strong blow to the role of fluvial navigation in the region's economy. Many ports along the Loire lost their economic importance as a consequence.

The Loire Valley's multi-faceted history has led to a rich cultural life, where Italian, Flemish and French culture mixed to produce castles, gardens, pictural art and poetry that have influenced the whole of France as well as the world at large. The literary works of Rabelais, Ronsard and du Bellay are great classics. The beauty of the region has been celebrated by famous artists inside and outside France, as illustrated by Turner's series of paintings from the Loire Valley in the early 19th century.

The Loire Valley has a diversified economy where agriculture, manufacturing, and technology are important. Tourism also stands out, as is the case for most of France as well.

The region of <u>Nouvelle Aquitaine</u> comprises the sub-regions of Acquitaine, Limousin, and Poitou-Charentes. It is the largest administrative region in France, and has almost 6 million inhabitants (Wikipedia). It has 25 major urban areas, with Bordeaux (about 850 000 inhabitants), Bayonne (288 000), Limoges (283 000), Poitiers (255 000), Pau (241 000) and La Rochelle (206 000) being the largest. Nouvelle Aquitaine outperforms all the other French regions in demographic dynamism and is second only to Ile de France when it comes to research and innovation. It has five universities (Bordeaux, La Rochelle, Limoges, Poitiers and Pau) and several Grandes Ecoles.

As an agricultural region it has the greatest turnover, and it is the French region with the most jobs in tourism (Wikipedia). The region has three of the four historic resorts on the French Atlantic coast (Arcachon, Biarritz and Royan). Its economy is based on agriculture, viticulture, tourism, aerospace industry, digital economy and design, parachemical and pharmaceutical industries, financial sector specializing in mutual insurance, and industrial ceramics. Companies specializing in surfing and related sports have located along the coast.

Still following Wikipedia's excellent article, Nouvelle Aquitaine geographically includes the major western parts of Southern France, marked by Basque, Occitan and Oïl cultures. Historically, it is the successor to medieval Aquitaine as it extends over large parts of the former Duchy of Eleanor of Aquitaine in the 12th century. The region's identity goes back to the time of the Roman Empire, when it was called Gallia Aquitania. At the time of Julius Cesar, the region was populated by fourteen Celtic tribes and twenty Aquitanian tribes. Roman rule consolidated the region's unity, but in the 5th century AD - following the division and weakening of the Roman Empire - Aquitania was invaded by the Germanic Visigoths who then formed a kingdom in the region. Later on it was integrated into the Carolingian Empire, and subsequently emerged as a duchy in the Middle Ages, as an enlarged Aquitaine that pledged loyalty to the Angevin kings of England. This evolution brought about the English kings' territorial claims in France, that in turn led to the Hundred Years' War. At the end of this war, around 1450, the region came under the rule of the French kings.

The cultural identity of Nouvelle Aquitaine is strongly associated with its long and solid traditions as wine producers and makers of luxury foods and drinks such as foie gras and cognac. There are numerous castles linked to these activities, forming very handsome properties that attract tourists and investors from all over the world. These links to a powerful and glorious past go hand in hand with the region's advanced technological activities such as its aerospace industries, which together form a dynamic identity for the region.

In many respects, Nouvelle Acquitaine carries with it many of the features that together form the identity of France as a whole: a rich cultural past, agricultural specialties that form the basis of good living, glorious castles and estates, production of luxurious and fashionable goods, as well as modern technological industries with advanced technology.

The region of <u>Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes</u> has very varied qualities, embodied on the one hand by the Alps and its numerous and famous ski resorts like Chamonix and Megève with the Mont Blanc – Europe's highest mountain – at its peak, and on the other hand by the city of Lyon, by many considered as the culinary center of France. The river Rhône runs through the center of the region, forming a historic and cultural heart of it all. In topographical terms, the region is embraced by the rural areas around the mountains of the Massif Central in the west and the Alps in the east, with the valley of the Rhône forming its center.

In historic terms, the river Rhône was an important transport route already in Roman times two thousand years ago, with Lyon as a major Roman city. The region is the third largest region in France in terms of surface and the second largest in terms of population, with almost 8 million inhabitants. In economic terms it accounts for more than 11 percent of the economy of France, and the purchasing power of its population is the same as the EU average.

Lyon is the capital of the region and has been an important city ever since its growth from Roman times. It was established as a Roman military colony in 43 B.C. with the name of Lugdunum, and went on to become the capital of the Roman region of Gaul. Gaul in Roman times corresponded roughly in geographical space to today's France. Since Roman times many political upheavals have taken place resulting in partitioning and reconfiguration of the area's political space. Lyon was annexed to the kingdom of France in 1312. From the 15th century the Renaissance period led to economic prosperity and cultural flowering. Commercial fairs, together with the arrival of merchant bankers from Florence and Siena, made Lyon flourish. Printing was introduced already in 1473, and Lyon soon became one of the most active printing centers in Europe. By the 17th century it was the silk-manufacturing capital of Europe. Later on, industrial development has followed, and Lyon is today one of the most prosperous cities of France.

The development of Lyon has been important for the whole region. The alpine part of the region has a strong economy linked to both winter and summer tourism. Grenoble, the major city of that part of the region, has a history that goes back over 2000 years – when it was a small Gallic village. Since then, it has grown steadily in importance. Industrial development increased the prominence of Grenoble through several periods of economic expansion over the last three centuries. This started with a booming glove industry in the 18th and 19th centuries, continued with the development of a strong hydropower industry in the late 19th to early 20th centuries, and ended with a post World War II economic boom culminating with the holding of the Olympic Winter Games in 1968. The city has then grown to be one of Europe's most important research, technology, and innovation centers – with 20 per cent of its population working directly in these domains (Wikipedia).

In the west, in the Massif Central, the city of Clermont-Ferrand is the major center. Its principal industrial base is linked to the global tyre company Michelin, which has its corporate headquarters there. The southern part of the region is closer to the culture and economy of Provence. The region contains several iconic mountains. Puy-de-Dôme is the major landmark of the Massif Central, standing out as a majestic peak in a vast natural volcanic area. The Mont Blanc is the principal mountain area (Massif du Mont Blanc) of the Alps, with its peak being the highest point in Europe at an altitude of around 4800 meters.

The area around the west bank and the east bank of the Rhône has beautiful scenery and is prosperous, with its many vineyards and with the commercial activity linked to tourism and to being a major transport route from ancient Roman times and up to the present. The city of Vienne is famous for its perfectly preserved Roman Temple, which is an important example of the many historic and cultural attractions to be found in this part of the region. Another notable example of the cultural importance of the region is Puy-en-Vélay, a city heavily marked by its position as a transit point on the pilgrim route to Saint-Jacques-de-Compostelle. From ancient times and up to the present, numerous pilgrims have travelled through France and Spain by foot to the tomb of Saint Jacques. The city of Bourg-en-Bresse is yet another example of a tourist magnet linked to the region's past, provided by the

Abbaye de Brou. Margaret of Austria, daughter of the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I, built this as a burial place for her husband, Philibert II, Duke of Savoy. Philibert's mother, Margaret of Bourbon, is also buried there. The church, a magnificent monument built in Flamboyant Gothic style in the early part of the 16th century, also contains the tomb of Margaret of Austria herself.

The region of <u>Occitanie</u> is marked by the Pyrénées, the vast chain of mountains that forms the border between France and Spain. The contrast between ancient and modern is particularly striking here, with all the old, beautiful cities and monuments embodying so much of France's rich history, together with the majestic timeless mountains, sitting alongside with Toulouse, France's major center of space and aéronautics industry.

The imprint of the region's past as a part of the Roman empire is easily seen today through some major monuments. The Pont du Gard is a Roman aqueduct bridge built in the first century AD to carry water over 50 km to the Roman city of Nemausus (now the city of Nimes). It is the highest of all Roman aqueduct bridges, and one of the best preserved. Originally its length was 360 meters, while its present length is 275 meters. Its height is almost 50 meters. In the city of Nimes, there is a monumental Roman arena similar to the Colosseum in Rome, although not quite as large. A third impressive Roman monument from the same period in this region is the theatre of the city of Orange, where a famous music festival now takes place every year. These three monuments bear witness to the important Roman presence in the region of Occitanie.

Another important part of the identity and history of the region is derived from the time of the Cathars between the 12th and 14th centuries AD. The Cathars (from Greek "the pure") appeared in the Languedoc part of Occitanie, and were sometimes called the Albigensians after the city of Albi where the movement first took hold. It started as a movement of protest and resistance against the extravagant lifestyle and habits of the clergy in Rome and its representatives in the region. After taking hold among ascetic leaders in the region, it developed strongly over a long time, and it produced some dramatic events that have left deep traces in the history of the region. The Catholic Church denounced its practices as heretic, which among other things included the Zoroastrian distinction between a good and an evil god. The movement grew to such importance in the region that the Pope initiated a persecution against the Cathars after having first tried more peaceful means such as sending missionaries. Pope Innocent III launched the Albigensian Crusade in 1209, and the Cathars were defeated in 1229. This was followed by persistent persecution of individuals suspected of Cathar sympathies by the Medieval Inquisition, which succeeded in eradicating the movement by 1350.

The Pope's war against the Cathars was supported by Philip Augustus, King of France, who had his own dynastic reasons to weaken the power of the Cathars. A papal decree permitting the confiscation of lands owned by the Cathars, although not supported by the French king, produced enthusiasm among the northern nobles who were eager to seize this occasion to acquire new land for themselves. This pitted the nobles of France against the nobles of the Languedoc. The war contained several violent battles and left deep traces in the region's history, where Cathar heritage and history holds a special place.

The region of Occitanie accounts for a little more than 7 per cent of the economic output of France, and its income level is at slightly more than 85 per cent of the EU average. With the exception of a few important cities, such as Toulouse and Montpellier, the region is rural and depends largely on tourism and agricultural activities such as wine production. Montpellier is known for its universities and higher education institutions, and one third of

the city's population are students. The city has been the fastest growing city in France over the past 25 years, and its cultural life is thriving, largely as a result of its important student population. The main city of the region is Toulouse, the fourth largest city in France, with more than 1,3 million people living in the greater metropolitan area and almost 500 000 in the city itself.

Toulouse is the center of the European aerospace industry, with the headquarters of Airbus and several other prominent aerospace companies located there. It also hosts the fourth largest university in France, the University of Toulouse, which is famous for its scientific branches. Toulouse was founded by the Romans, but when the Visigoths invaded the Roman empire in the 5th century they made it their capital. The cultural heritage of the city, due to its historic past, is important.

Tourism is also a major part of Occitanie's economy, with many attractions. The city of Carcassonne is an example in addition to the great Roman monuments mentioned initially. Inhabited since the Neolithic, it is located along historic trade routes, linking the Atlantic to the Mediterranean Sea, and the Massif Central to the Pyrenées. Its strategic importance was quickly recognized by the Romans, who occupied its hilltop until the Western Roman Empire disintegrated and Carcassonne was invaded by the Visigoths. The strategic location of the city led successive rulers to expand its fortifications until the Treaty of the Pyrenées in 1659 (Wikipedia). Its citadel, known as the Cité de Carcassonne, is a medieval fortress dating back to the Gallo-Roman period and restored by France's most famous restoration architect, Eugène Viollet-le-Duc, in 1853. The fortress is yet another of the region's monuments that is included in UNESCO's list of World Heritage Sites. In addition to Carcassonne, other places of renown are Cahors, with its famous bridge, as well as Logère and Tarbes.

The mountain chain of the Pyrenées is forming the entire border area between France and Spain, and is an impressive area with numerous mountains with altitudes of above 3000 meters. Needless to say, it has, and has had, a strong bearing on the mentality of its local population. It is home of the Basques, a cultural entity quite apart from the other French groups of people, with its own language and an independence movement that is still alive both on the French side and on the Spanish side of the border.

The region of <u>Provence-Alpes Côte d'Azur (PACA)</u> is yet again different from Occitanie, and has much of its identity linked to the Mediterranean Sea. A large number of people around the globe have associations and dreams related to the names of Provence and Côte d'Azur.

Provence gives associations of an ideal of life, where you live in harmony with your surroundings and yourself, in a comfortable climate, with a rustic material life close to a hospitable and luscious nature – yet lacking nothing. This stands out as an attractive dream, especially for people who have been living busy lifes with good incomes. They have the material basis for making the dream come through, and many people from around the world seek it actively and carry it out.

Côte d'Azur has a different aura, even though it also carries with it some of the same elements as Provence. Côte d'Azur is a coastal area, and it has attracted the rich and famous for more than 150 years. The word glamour is more appropriate as a key word to describe the attraction of this part of

France. Ever since the time when Queen Victoria of the British Empire came to Nice and Menton to spend parts of the winter there, thus escaping from the fog and chill of London, royalty and nobility from all over Europe has gathered there – along with all types of rich people who came flocking to rub shoulders with the high and mighty. Rich people have over the years since then invested heavily in palaces and estates. The character of the real estate development along the Côte d'Azur has changed gradually over time. The early period of development was concentrated on the building of palaces and hotels to accommodate the rich, as well as the development of all kinds of services that the investors and the visitors required. This was an economy and activities linked to luxury consumption.

As time went on and income was increasing for a gradually evolving middle class after World War II, a more diversified investment and consumption pattern evolved. Apartment buildings and smaller villas cropped up, to meet the demands of well to do middle class people from all over Europe. The Côte d'Azur subsequently became more urbanized along its busy coastline. The area's popularity increased strongly with its improved accessibility for people with more ordinary incomes. In the upper income brackets, a gradual change in the composition of the public took place. The families with old money and old titles, and the super-rich who wanted more privacy, withdrew from the more crowded and less exclusive environment that was evolving now. There are still numerous properties attracting very wealthy people, but a larger part of these properties are now taken up by people with more recently acquired wealth – such as the Russian oligarchs and other Eastern European magnates. Apart from these, the area is now dominated by comfortable middle class people from around Europe, along with – of course – the local population.

There is a marked contrast between the life along the busy coastline, centered on activities linked to the beaches, with its more or less luxurious related activities, and the simple, basic life removed from the coastline – linked to the numerous small villages and rural areas that are to be found behind the coastline on the Côte d'Azur, but even more so in the beautiful rural landscape of Provence.

The capital of the region of PACA is Marseille, a large port city with a population of more than 1,8 million in the metropolitan area, of which close to 900 000 live in the city itself. Its foundation dates back more than 2500 years ago, when the Phoenicians had established a trading post there. Later on, the Greeks had a trading post there until the Romans took control of it as the Roman Empire expanded. It has since then been a major port and trading city.

Marseille is surrounded by several iconic areas. Close to the north is the Mountain of Sainte-Victoire, made famous by the painter Paul Cézanne, who

had this mountain as one of his favorite motives. Cézanne was a native of the idyllic city of Aix-en-Provence, where he lived most of his life. Staying with the subject of painting, the famous former artist colony of L'Estaque is to the west of Marseille. The Calanques, a rugged coastal area with white cliffs and small fjord-like inlets, are also close to Marseille – to the east. Further west, Camargues is renowned for its spectacular white horses who roam wildly in this big Rhône delta.

The port of Marseille has been made famous by Marcel Pagnol's trilogy Marius, Fanny and César. Marcel Pagnol, a native of the city of Aubagne, is Provence's most loved writer. He has given expression to the spirit and nature of Provence in a uniquely human and warm way. A more somber and mysterious outlook is given by another of the great writers of Provence, Jean Giono from the village of Manosque. Still staying within the domain of the arts, the city of Arles (an old Roman city with a beautiful arena from that time) has been made famous by Vincent van Gogh and Paul Gauguin, who lived and worked alongside there, albeit in a tumultuous way.

The Côte d'Azur is further east from Marseille, and its major cities are Nice, Cannes and Menton. The French film actress Brigitte Bardot made the fishing village of St.Tropez known in the 1960s, and it is hard to talk about the Côte d'Azur without mentioning this village. Integrated in the Côte d'Azur is the city of Monte Carlo in Monaco, not formally part of France – although locked into it, and subsequently not really independent of it, even if it has the status of a country in its own right.

The island of Corsica is part of France, but is has a strong sense of autonomy which regularly shows up whenever French regional policy is on the agenda. Some very vocal, and occasionally violent, minorities agitate for independence from France – but they are minorities. Aside from this strong feeling of local identity, Corsica is a Mediterranean island culture, linked to the long cultural history dating back to the Phoenicians, Etruscans, Romans, and other sea-faring peoples that made their mark through trade and warfare as they visited or established themselves in the island.

In the text above, I have attempted to give an impressionistic flavor of the different regions of France. France has such a geographic and cultural diversity that I felt it was necessary to give this description in order to convey an impression of this remarkable diversity. The variety of the natural scenery, the types of economic and artistic activities, and the cultural identities associated with these is such that it cannot be grasped in a few sentences.

Let us now say a few words about some of France's major historical moments and important historical markers that have been left from these strong moments. The aim of these remarks is to dwell on certain remarkable periods of French history which did not naturally fit into the short historical overview given in the first part of this book. France's history is just as rich and multifaceted as is its geographic and cultural variety, but there are a few periods in its history which stay on in the public imagination of everybody.

Artistic traces from pre-historic times are numerous, with the rustic grotto paintings of Lascaux as the most famous example. Many other examples are found, and they show that France already had a rich human culture around 25 000 years ago. Moving closer to the present, the Celtic period in France's history lasted about five centuries, and came to an end when Julius Cesar defeated Vercingetorix, the representative of the Celtic tribes that were united against Roman invasion of Gaul, in the battle of Alésia in the year 52 B.C.

The Roman conquest gave rise to what is called the Gallo-Roman period in French history. The name of this period alludes to the amalgam of ancient Gallic culture with the culture of the Roman conquerors. After Cesar's conquest, the Celtic tribes cooperated increasingly with their Roman masters, as illustrated by the eagerness of Celtic nobility to merge socially and culturally with the upper echelons of the local Roman social elite. As this was

also in the interest of the Roman masters, this integration went quite smoothly.

The Gallo-Roman period lasted until Germanic tribes in successive waves invaded the Roman Empire in the 4th, 5th and 6th centuries AD. By that time the Roman Empire had been seriously weakened, and was already split into a Western and Eastern Empire. Although the Eastern Empire subsisted with its capital in Constantinopel until invaded by the Ottomans in 1453, the Western empire disintegrated quickly after these waves of invasions. The Frankish tribes of the warlord Merovée took in the middle of the 5th century control of, and gave its name to, an area which formed the nucleus of what later became France. This established the Merovingian dynasty, which became strongly solidified by his grandson Clovis, who converted to Catholicism and thereby managed to form an alliance with representatives of the church. This alliance

fortified both Clovis's kingdom and the role of the church in the affairs of the state.

The Merovingians stayed in power for about three hundred years, but their rule gradually disintegrated until such a point that the Master of the Palace, Charles Martel, in the early part of the 8th century found that the time had come to put things in order. He took power, and when his son Pepin inherited the throne in 751 the Carolingian dynasty had been established. The zenith of the Carolingian dynasty was reached under the rule of Charles Martel's grandson, Charlemagne, who in the year 800 AD was named emperor of the Holy Roman Empire by the Pope. He had by then conquered large parts of what is now Germany and Italy, in addition to France. Charlemagne's three grandsons fought over the throne and the result was a split of Charlemagne's empire into three parts, sanctioned by the Treaty of Verdun in 843, of which Charles II the Bald took over the part that went on to be France.

During the reign of Charles the Bald the invasions of the Vikings into Normandy created a nightmare for the king, and he had to come to terms with them by giving them regional power over Normandy. A descendent of these Vikings, William – Duke of Normandy – entered into a dynastic fight with an English rival to the English throne, Harold. William decided to take the fight for it, and left the coast of Normandy (at Dives-sur-Mer) with a large fleet of fellow Viking descendants, and beat his rival at the battle of Hastings in 1066. After that, William became king of England – but this story, remarkable though it is, does not belong in this book.

The reign of the Carolingian dynasty went on for two hundred years, but weakened like its Merovingian predecessors towards the end and – again like its predecessors - were taken over by a powerful palace master, Hugues Capet in 987. This established the Capetian dynasty, the backbone of all later dynasties in France. Crusades is a keyword for one of the major features of the early part of Capetian dynasty. Firstly, the above mentioned crusade against the Cathars where Philippe Auguste assisted the pope, and, secondly, the participation of Louis IX (Saint Louis) together with Richard the Lionhearted of England in one of the great crusades to capture Jerusalem (without success).

A dominant development during the period 1337 to 1453 was The Hundred Years War, a war of succession waged between the kings of England and the kings of France involving important parts of French territory.

There was, however, an important prelude to this war. Eleanor, Duchess of Acquitaine (1122 – 1204) and a very forceful woman, was Queen of France,

but she divorced the French king Louis VII by obtaining an annulment of the marriage in 1152. As soon as the annulment was granted by the pope, Eleanor married the Duke of Normandy, Henry, who two years later inherited the English throne, and became king Henry II of England in 1154. This alliance brought both the Duchy of Acquitaine and the Duchy of Normandy under English influence, even if Eleanor, a fiercely independent woman, retained the rule of her Duchy firmly in her hand. This situation greatly influenced the aspirations of the English kings towards taking over the kingdom of France. Later intermarriages between the two royal families did nothing to clarify the situation. And thus, the conflict turned into war in 1337, as described earlier when reviewing the succession of French kings.

With a spectacular and historic intervention by Joan of Arc in the city of Orléans later on during this war, at a crucial tipping point in the conflict, Charles VII is helped to accede to the French throne and he subsequently succeeds in driving the English troops out of France. Louis XI, Charles VII's successor to the throne, follows this up by destroying the Duke of Burgundy, Charles the Bold, at Nancy and thereafter incorporating parts of the Duchy of Burgundy into France. This action was dictated by the fact that the Dukes of Burgundy to a certain extent had been supporting the English in the Hundred Years War, notably by delivering Joan of Arc to the Englishmen.

The Rennaissance in France was highlighted by the accession of Francis I to the throne in 1515. He invited many Italian Rennaissance artists to come to France and decorate Royal castles, notably the great castle of Fontainebleau. His most famous guest was Leonardo da Vinci who was invited towards the end of his life to stay at the Clos Lucé, a beautiful manor near the castle of Amboise, where Francis I was happy to use Leonardo's technical talents to animate celebrations. Otherwise, Leonardo was left to do what he wanted, at his own leisure. He ended his life there.

Francis I's son, Henry II, inherited the throne in 1547. Henry II was married to Catherine of Medici, from the illustrious Medici family of Florence. Unfortunately, Henry II wanted to show that he was still youthful and strong at the age of forty, and organized classic jousts of chivalry at the Royal Square in Paris (later named Place des Vosges) in 1559.

By accident, Henry II was killed during those games. He left three sons, the first two of fairly poor health. The oldest, Francis II, who was married to Mary Stuart, lived only one year as a king. The second, Charles IX, was only 10 years when he acceded to the throne, and also in weak health. His young age and weak health proved fatal at a crucial moment in history. His mother, Catherine, was regent in his first years of reign. At this time, the open conflict between Catholics and Protestants was very tense, and the leader of the catholic movement in France, the Duke of Guise, was building up threatening military strength. The Duke of Guise had the sympathy of the very catholic queen mother, who was playing an active role behind the scenes – filling a power vacuum left by her weak son.

In 1572 (on the 24 of august), the protestant leaders were invited to a large gathering purporting to be a peacemaking initiative. As it turned out, the Catholics used the event to carry out a bloody massacre, in what became

known as the Night of Saint-Barthelemy. Two years later, as the civil war was raging, Charles IX died, and Catherine's third son, Henry III, acceded to the throne. By this time, Henry III sensed that the Duke of Guise felt strong enough to challenge him for the throne. Henry III invited the Duke to his castle at Blois, where he arranged to have the Duke killed. Not long after this, a fanatic monk, Jacques Clément, killed Henry III.

This series of events prepared the ground for compromise. The next in line for the throne was the Duke Henry of Navarre, a protestant. He agreed to convert to Catholicism, and he became a very popular king under the name of Henry IV. He introduced the Edict of Nantes, a law that opened up for religious tolerance and established freedom of practice of faith. This is a major marker in French history. His reign was the start of the Bourbon dynasty, which stayed in power until the French Revolution. This popular king contributed to create an atmosphere of optimism in France. However, he was - like Henry III - killed by a fanatic catholic (this one had the name of Ravaillac) in 1610, after 21 years on the throne.

The Bourbon dynasty produced stability in the political leadership of France. During 203 years of reign, it had only five kings – an average of more than 40 years per king! These were Henry IV (1589 – 1610), Louis XIII (1610 – 1643), Louis XIV (1643 – 1715), Louis XV (1715 – 1774) and Louis XVI (1774 – until he was decapitated during the French Revolution in 1792). Three of these, Louis XIII, Louis XIV and Louis XV, acceded to the throne when they were children and subsequently reigned in their early period under the tutelage of their mothers (the wives of the preceding kings). These mothers were – respectively – Mary of Medici (another Medici!), Anne of Austria (Habsburg dynasty), and Marie Therese of Austria (Habsburg dynasty). When they matured, all three of these kings set their own strong personal imprint on the exercise of power.

Louis XIII had to put up a fight to liberate himself from the strong tutelage of Mary of Medici and her ambitious Italian councilor Concini. He subsequently allied himself with a strong and determined councilor, the cardinal Richelieu. Together, they successfully subdued the powerful French nobility, in part by physically destroying their multiple strongholds across France. They thereby greatly consolidated the Royal power in France.

Louis XIV had, in his early years as king, to live under the tutelage of cardinal Mazarin who was an ally of his mother. Louis XIV had a particularly strong personality, and when he matured he took firmly hold on power and established an autocracy and ordered the most powerful nobles to reside at the Royal palace. This was a legacy of the uprising that the nobility had attempted when Louis XIV was a child (La Fronde), as a reaction to their subdued years under Richelieu's iron hand. Louis XIV never forgot this, and kept a sharp eye on the behavior of his nobility. This was best done by having them close at hand. Louis XIV had grand visions for the display of Royal power and magnificence. This was part of his strategy for intimidating anybody who might want to challenge him. He built the greatest of places (Versailles), embarked on several military campaigns to enlarge his territories in the north, and spent vast amounts of resources on infrastructure such as fortresses built by the famous military architect Vauban.

Louis XIV's very competent finance minister Colbert could not prevent that Government finances became strained, and when he died in 1715 his successor Louis XV was faced with a financial challenge. He was favored by a period of relative peace and order in his country as well as with neighbor countries. This contributed to improvements and he became popular. However, his personal behavior was quite lax and promiscuous – which did not did not prepare the ground too well for his successor, Louis XVI.

By the time Louis XVI acceded to power, government spending and poverty among ordinary people had undermined the fragile balance between the power of the nobility and the social patience of people at large. The people wanted a larger say in how government money was spent, and their representatives demanded the reestablishment and subsequent improvement of the dialogue between The Three Estates. Louis XVI went along with the initial demands for improved dialogue, but proved incapable of seeing that he also had to listen to the demands of the people and reach

for compromises. Whether this was due to inflexible advisors among the nobility who were not ready to relinquish absolute power in exchange for compromise or whether the king himself also held this inflexible view, is not clear. Popular revolt exploded, and on the 14th of July 1789 the prison fortress of the Bastille was taken over by the people, and the French Revolution was under way. The final result, as regards the fate of the king, was that the king's behavior along with his clumsy attempt to flee to Austria when things got bad, emboldened the most fanatic republicans to put forward a proposed death sentence for the king. This sentence was voted by a narrow majority. Although the king was still well liked by many, his behavior had made it impossible to save him and the monarchy.

As the Revolution took its course, the use of violence and the spirit of revenge inspired ever more bloody acts by the use of the famous Guillotine. The guillotine was designed by a man named Guillotin, as a human way to

carry out death sentences. However, its extensive and abusive use during the Revolution gave it a bad name.

We have earlier seen how the political development of France took its course after the revolution, and we will not repeat any of that. After a short stint with a return to monarchy after Napoleon's dictatorship, an aborted new attempt at republican democray, followed by Napoleon's nephew Napoleon III's dictatorship, France has opted for democracy since Napoleon III's humiliating defeat by German Emperor William II in 1870. Republican democracy has not been challenged since then, in spite of two World Wars and several other crises.

The 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s were good years economically, socially and culturally in France. The Western world had put its political and economic affairs in good order after the Second World War and this ushered in a long

period of economic development and social improvement. In French, this thirty year period is labelled "Les Trente Glorieuses" (The Thirty Glorious).

This period was accompanied by increasing cultural exchange and development of tourism. Measured by the flow of tourists, France is the world's most attractive country. The conservation of its vast cultural heritage, the great variety and beauty of its landscape, its culinary culture and rich social life produced by good restaurants and cafés, all contribute to produce this impressive result.

Art and culture are important keywords associated with France. Architecture, visual arts such as painting and sculpture, music, traditional crafts, a strong museum culture, traditional foods and local culture such as festivals, restaurants and cafés all have strong positions as attractions.

The strong presence of history, art, traditional crafts and foods, old and modern architecture, music, and social manifestations in the collective French consciousness, is seen very clearly by the number of museums to be found around the country, the quality of their curator work, and – not least – by the strong attendance by the public whenever new events take place at the museums. The museums are very much alive, and going to museums is an integral part of normal life in France.

When travelling around in France, traces of cultural history are seen everywhere. Churches, castles and mansions are fond in or around every village in France. Most of them are several hundred years old, and many are more than thousand years old. Castles were built in great numbers in the Middle Ages when feudal lords wanted to consolidate their power and maintain control over their land possessions. The feudal system was founded on a bond of loyalty between local lords and regional lords and the king, where the king protected the power of the regional lords, and the regional lords protected the local lords. In exchange, the local lords provided manpower and arms whenever the regional lords needed military assistance. Likewise, the regional lords had a duty to assist the king whenever he needed military power in conflicts. This bond of loyalty was not a stable arrangement that could be counted on forever. It depended on the individual ambitions of lords and kings, and it depended on how strong or weak the lords and kings were relative to each other. Therefore, conflicts were a normal occurrence. Lords might sometimes be rebellious, and some kings might be too despotic for the regional or local taste. As a result, fortifications were built in great numbers, and they are still to be found – either intact or in ruins – all over the country. Today they are tourist attractions.

Historically, the bonds between the kings and the lords on one hand, and the Church on the other hand, were very close. It was hard for the lords to maintain power over their lands without the spiritual support of the local priests and the regional bishops. Reciprocally, the Church needed the military support of the lords to wield their spiritual power, whenever necessary. The spiritual power of the Church in local communities is easily seen by the proliferation of churches, even in the smallest communities. Even small villages often have large churches, built already in the early Middle Ages.

In the city centers of larger regions, the churches were built as seats for bishops. These were the cathedrals. In the 12th century and onwards, there was an impressive surge of construction of these cathedrals. Hundreds of them. Building technology from this time on were based on a gothic style of construction, which permitted the builders to build much taller buildings – thus lifting the physical and spiritual space within the cathedral to awesome heights. Quite as intended by the bishops. This was a robust building technique, as we can see today from the numerous Cathedrals that still stand firmly after surviving nine hundred years of wars and other conflicts, such as the French Revolution. These cathedrals are today, as are the major castles, tourist magnets all over France.

The churches stand cathedrals stand in the centers of cities and villages all over France. Old villages are, as are the castles, churches and cathedrals, tourist attractions in themselves. They stand witness to how life was in

earlier days, and they highlight how economic and cultural development gradually has transformed our daily lives. Old crafts still exist side by side with modern technology. Although the know-how associated with the exercise of old crafts is dying out slowly along with the last masters of these crafts, there are still some masters who manage to stay in business, and you can find them in villages or small low-rent side streets in the cities. Wherever old crafts are dying out, the vibrant museum sector manages to keep up the memory of them. France is one of few countries where old crafts are held in high esteem. Luxury companies like Louis Vuitton and Hermès are very attentive to keeping these crafts alive, because they are the basis for the high quality products they get such high prices for.

Feudal life was dominated by the presence of the local lord and his (it was almost always a man) association with the clergy. Most of the land around the villages was owned by the lord, and agriculture with hired labor was the dominating activity. Most of the produce from the land went to the lord or to the clergy. Aside from the lord, the clergy – either the local church parishes or any monastery located around there – would also own much land, in large parts obtained as gifts from testaments of earlier lords or other wealthy people. As economic development picked up, landowners and craftsmen obtained economic and financial surplus from their production, based on cheap labor which had nowhere else to go. This set the development of trade in motion.

The people who carried out trade developed trading skills. These people lived in the cities, and together with trading skills they acquired financial skills, and many of them became bankers along with their activities as traders. This combination produced tremendous wealth over time. The same was the case for good craftsmen, organized in guilds. As a result, the economic power of and levels activity in the cities grew and the destitute land workers could increasingly find work in the cities. The cities subsequently became power centers in their own right. These power centers had a more open mind set than the lords and the clergy, because of their ongoing contacts with traders from other cities, regions, and countries. They were less oriented towards keeping the social structures of the past, and consequently developed a countervailing and balancing power for society as a whole. The lords and the

clergy saw their dominating power being slowly and imperceptibly diluted as time went on.

Rich merchants were attractive allies for lords who gradually had their financial power eroded by the cost of upkeep of vast estates inherited from more powerful and flamboyant ancestors. The vast inherited estates came from a time when the lords' incomes were not diluted from, firstly, having to share the wealth with increasing numbers of other family members who had inherited parts of the estate, secondly, from competition arising from the city traders' pressures put on the prices in the markets for products, and, thirdly, from having to pay increasing wages in the markets for labor where city demand had become a major competitor for available labor.

The daughters of rich merchants represented a win-win opportunity for the merchants and the local lords. By marrying their daughters to sons of the

lords, the merchants acquired social dignity and entrance to the ranks of nobility through the back door. For the lords, the gain was an increased financial capacity to keep up the material standard of their possessions. Those lords who did not manage to get such solutions often slided gradually into bankruptcy, because their pride prevented them from selling off those parts of their properties that their reduced revenues could not keep up. The shame of having to expose their financial weakness to the public was greater than the common sense associated with keeping their finances in good order.

The social transformations associated with the strengthening of the cities, and the weakening position of the lords, placed the kings in a new position. The kings depended heavily on the loyalty of the local and regional lords for the exercise of their power in earlier times. Powerful lords were, however, a constant threat to the authority of the king, and the combination of a weak king and powerful lords was always dangerous and potentially destabilizing.

The kings saw this danger, and they gradually tried to build up power to meet this challenge. The best way to do this, was to depend less on the lords' promises to give them military support in times of need, and more on backing up their power with their own military strength. This reasoning led kings to realize that they needed to have their own armies, strong enough to dissuade lords from doing anything that they might regret. In order to acquire strong armies, the kings needed money. The strength and affluence of the cities gave a solution to this problem. The cities saw that the king was a good ally for them in facing the power of the lords. This gave the kings the opportunity to raise higher tax revenues than before. Taxation of trade, which the cities traditionally had been doing by raising levies when goods entered or left city walls and markets, was something the king could be doing also. Taxation, in numerous forms, and the building up of armies under the command of the king, operated the transition from the feudal society to a society governed by a strong state. The National States took form. France was among the first countries to operate this change.

Royal families and the splendor surrounding their life styles evolved as a consequence of their need to display intimidating power. Building palaces and other public monuments, in addition to having an army, was a good way to ensure that the lords and the public at large could sense their power.

Royal palaces are found in many places around in France. Before the time when the kings had built up enough power and chosen Paris as the seat of their rule, kings used to travel much around the country in order to keep the nobility in check. In doing so, they built palaces in many different places, to ensure that they could live comfortably wherever they went. After some time, the kings came to enjoy the region around the Loire river. The climate was good and the attractive hunting grounds gave the kings ample opportunity to enjoy their favorite pastime.

Different generations of kings had different favorite places in this region, and they built their own palaces in these places. They did not, as today, stick to the palaces built by their fathers. Charles VII had the castle of Chinon, where Joan of Arc went to meet him and join forces in order to beat back the English forces during The Hundred Years War. The successor of Charles VII, Louis XI, was a secretive and suspicious person who feared plots against him through most of his reign. He built a strong fortress at Loches, the place where he felt

the most secure. His son, Charles VIII, had Amboise, where he died young after hurting his head against a large beam, leaving his beautiful wife Anne, Duchess of Brittany, a widow. In addition to being beautiful, Anne was attractive in her capacity as ruler of the strongly independent Duchy of Brittany. The successor of Charles VIII to the throne, Louis XII, divorced his wife, Jeanne de Valois, in order to make it possible for him to marry Anne and integrate Brittany properly into French rule. Louis preferred the city of Blois for his seat, and built his castle there. When Louis XII died, his successor as king, Francis I, built an adjoining castle in Blois, next to the one built by Louis XII. However, this flamboyant Renaissance King was not satisfied with this solution. He needed an entirely separate castle to suit his visions of splendor.

Francis I developed a grand project at his favorite hunting grounds, Chambord. This project was so momentous that it took very long to build it. In fact, it took so long that Francis hardly had time to live in it. However, posterity has enjoyed it greatly, as it is the major tourist attraction of the region (see below, taken from Wikimedia Commons).

By the time Chambord was being completed, Francis had developed a liking for another castle closer to Paris, Fontainebleau, where he had drawn in Italian Renaissance artists to decorate. However, by now Paris was becoming the headquarters of French kings, and the castle of Louvre – an old castle – had gradually been expanded and renovated. When Francis I died, his son Henry II succeeded him, and during his reign and the reign of his three sons, supervised by the Queen mother, Catherine of Medicis, split their time between Paris and Loire. The disastrous Night of Saint Bartholomew took place at Amboise, and Henry III's murder of the Duke of Guise took place at Blois. After this dark period, Henry III's successor, Henry IV, settled in Paris.

With Henry IV, the royal family of the Bourbons acceded to the throne and Paris firmly established its position as the nation's capital. Henry IV was a much loved king, but – as already mentioned – he was killed by a fanatic munk and did not get enough time to make his cultural mark properly. His

successors, however, had long reigns and left durable cultural traces. Henry IV's son, Louis XIII, spent his reign consolidating royal power with the help of cardinal Richelieu. An important part of this work was the destruction of strong and menacing fortresses owned by powerful lords. The traces of this can be seen as ruins of great fortresses scattered around in France today. Louis XIII's successor, Louis XIV, left entirely different cultural traces.

In the early period of his reign, when he still was a child, Louis XIV got the fright of his life when powerful lords in France tried to take over the kingdom through the insurrection called "La Fronde". This left such marks in his consciousness, that any threat to his authority gave rise to strong reactions from him. One such reaction produced one of French history's most famous cultural results. Louis XIV's Finance Minister, Fouquet, had built a marvelous castle, Vaux - Le – Vicomte. For the inauguration of this castle, Fouquet had invited all the great people of France – including the king – to a lavish party. Dinner was served in gold plates, while the king always served in silver plates. The rest of the party was held at similar lavish levels.

After the party, Louis XIV left in a rage. His trust in Fouquet was destroyed, and he was furious at being outstaged in such a visible manner. Fouquet was put to prison for mismanagement of public funds, and Louis XIV decided to build a castle that was not to be outstaged by anybody. The result was the castle of Versailles.

From this time, Versailles became the seat of French kings, up until the French Revolution, when the famined people marched in great numbers to the castle to demand bread from Louis XVI, who was then the king. This was when the Queen, Marie Antoinette, was supposed to have said: "If people do not have bread, why don't they just eat cakes?"

The French royal families thus left us many flamboyant castles. The building of great castles was not limited to the kings themselves. They built castles for their mistresses as well. The most famous of these is Chenonceau, built for Henry II's mistress, Diane de Poitiers. Cardinal Richelieu, Louis XIII's powerful minister, built several castles for himself around the country.

All these castles have left France with a cultural heritage of momentous proportions, which costs the country vast resources for the upkeep of the heritage, but also gives back enormous revenues deriving from tourism.

This multitude of old stones - be they castles, churches, monasteries, idyllic villages, or monumental cities - represent the immediate, physical cultural heritage of a rich and colorful history. All the activities linked to the building of these monuments have in sum produced a cultural diversity and opulence of impressive magnitude. When building castles and churches, to mention only these, numerous arts and crafts were in play, solving great technical and artistic challenges along the way. When we look at these buildings today, only the greatest experts are capable of judging the high levels of competence found in architects, builders and stone masons nine hundred years ago. What is easier for us to see today, is the artistic competence of painters and sculptors who were given the tasks of decorating all these great buildings. This formed the basis of artistic traditions which have made France one of the major centers of visual arts in the world, both as regards historic works to be found in museums and as regards living artistic activities today.

Royal collections of art, gathered over hundreds of years of reign, form the backbone of collections in French national museums of art. One outstanding example is the famous painting of Mona Lisa by the Italian renaissance artist Leonardo da Vinci. This work entered French collections when the French king Francis I invited Leonardo da Vinci to stay and work at the Clos Lucé, near Francis' castle Amboise. Leonardo had brought this painting, as well as others, along with him. He did not like to part with his works, because he always wanted to work more with them, feeling that they were never perfect. When Leonardo died at Clos Lucé, in the arms of Francis who was present at that moment, all the works he had brought with him were taken over by the French royal collections. Other donations, from wealthy benefactors, family members of famous artists, or other art lovers, have come as great additions to these collections.

Through these collections we can see how arts have developed over time in France and elsewhere. The interaction between French artists and artists

in other countries can be traced in the great museum collections. The history of art is traced from pre-historic art like the grotto paintings of Lascaux, to art forms practiced by the different cultural movements present in France through the ages, such as the Celtic, Gallo-Roman, Byzantine, Renaissance, as well as Baroque and Classical art. An important break in this timeline came when the Impressionist movement arose towards the end of the 19th century. This movement was in the beginning primarily a French movement, represented by French artists such as Claude Monet, Pierre Auguste Renoir, Camille Pissarro, Edgar Degas and others. Although inspired by nature painters of the Barbizon school, and by such original masters as Eugène Delacroix, Gustave Courbet and Camille Corot, the impressionists broke new ground and suffered a lot of abuse from critics and the public at large before gradually being understood and accepted. Edouard Manet was a friend of these painters, and a famous painter in his own right, but he did not quite associate himself with the impressionist movement as such. The daring artistic break in style and manner of painting operated by the impressionists

broke ground for many others, and it opened up for many experiments once it had been admitted that painting and sculpture did not have to be as close to "real life" as possible.

Paul Gauguin and Vincent van Gogh dived straight into the breach that had been opened by the impressionists and developed their own very personal style, at great cost for themselves. They had a hard time selling their paintings. Vincent van Gogh had a particularly tragic destiny. He sold no paintings in his lifetime, and subsisted mainly through the support of his generous and kind brother Theo. He committed suicide in the middle of his life. What makes this particularly sad, is that any one of his major art works today are sold for around one hundred million dollars. Considering his vast production, one can only speculate about the total value of his work.

One of the major ground breakers for the path of the next phase of modern art was Paul Cézanne. He also had such a strong personal style that it took a long time before the public was ready to understand and accept what he was doing. However, he had the luck of being recognized for his achievements as a major painter and ground breaker towards the end of his life. Young enthusiasts had supported him long before the public at large came on to his art. Today, we can say that artists such as Picasso, Modigliani, Matisse, Chagall, and all the others who have followed later have a great debt to Cézanne's innovative way of seeing the world. He opened the way for abstract art, which has brought us where we are today.

The central art scene for these artistic developments was Paris. From 1870 - after the Franco-German War when the German Emperor William II beat Napoleon III - to the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, Paris was the artistic and intellectual center of the world. This period was called "La Belle Époque", thus designating a zenith in the city's cultural life. Nobility and bourgeois society lived a great period, based on high incomes of capital invested and low wages for services provided by ordinary people (who lived material lives in, or close to, poverty). The famous writer Marcel Proust gives us the flavor of what this period was like.

The First World War changed much of this, as many fortunes were destroyed during that war. Nevertheless, Paris retained its cultural and intellectual shine after the war, during the 1920s and 1930s – as can be seen from the novels of Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway, among many others.

The people who practised the arts and crafts that had been flourishing during La Belle Époque because of the luxurious consumption of the rich upper classes, developed unmatched professional standards for all types of luxury goods. Leather goods for horseback riding, handbags, furniture, travel equipment and others are one type of example. Traces of this can still be seen today from the production of trade marks such as Louis Vuitton, Longchamp and Hermès. The development of luxurious wine production in the regions of Bordeaux, Burgundy and Champagne had a particularly strong expansion of world wide commercialization in this period, due to the image of luxury projected by French goods at this time. Champagne is the most iconic wine production illustrating the impact of this period. The Fashion industry is yet

another example. The very strong position of French production of luxury goods today owes its position to this legacy of know how.

A particularly interesting side of this story is the French culinary history. French regional diversity is very visible when it comes to food. French agriculture has always been a strong element in French culture, and each region has developed its own particular specialties, depending on the different types of available vegetables, fruits, wildlife and seafoods. Basic meals consumed by ordinary people varied greatly from region to region. During the Middle Ages the upper classes developed very luxurious consumption patterns. The food they consumed was, however, prepared by ordinary people under the direction of a very competent cook. They were learning on the job, and culinary culture was spreading. By the time they came to La Belle Époque, French culinary culture was so widespread that anybody who had the ambition of opening a restaurant knew what kinds of standards they would have to meet if they were to survive in the business. Even the most modest restaurant would serve exquisite food.

Later on, as tourism has grown enormously, the restaurant sector has grown at a similar pace. Like in all sectors that grow fast, there are charlatans who think they can make a quick profit. Today, one has to be more cautious about where one goes to eat. Not all restaurants are good. It is especially risky to go to places where there are big tourist magnets. In those places, the owners can earn money because of the sheer flow of people who stream through the place without the intention of coming back, and they do not need to keep up their high standards to survive as a business. Many of these allow themselves a more comfortable life, and relax their standards.

Any restaurant owner with a minimum of professional pride will want to keep a standard which makes the customers want to come back. French customers have inherited this culinary culture just as well as the restaurant owners, so they know what to expect and how to react when they do not get it. Most restaurants in France are up to these standards, but to a lesser degree those

that profit from large flows of tourists who will eat anything without asking questions.

Tourism is a great source of revenue for the French people. However, like in all other countries where tourism is important, there is a balance to be found between the benefits of tourism for the visitors and for the residents. The residents have to watch out for the wear and tear of their physical and cultural environments, in order to keep the quality of their attractions and their own life styles intact. The French are good at finding this balance, but the quantity of important historic monuments is so vast that the normal upkeep of these is a major undertaking. France is among the countries in the world with the highest number of listed World Heritage Sites in UNESCO's list.

Abbeys and cathedrals are an important part of this list. Castles are also prominent in the list, with those in the Loire Valley most prominent. Great

palaces, such as Versailles and Fontainebleau, are also important examples. Historic cities and villages such as Avignon, Lyon, Carcassonne, Le Havre, Saint-Emilion, Provins, Strasbourg and Véselay are also notable. Paris, with its river banks of the Seine, is another obvious example. Major historic constructions such as


Pont du Gard, Theater of Orange, Mont St.Michel, Place Stanislas in Nancy, Royal Salt Works of Arc-et-Senans, Canal du Midi, are other examples.

The notion of culture means different things to different people. I look at the notion of culture as the sum of attitudes, values and ways of doing things that you find in a society or community, and which is communicated and transmitted through different types of codes and rituals.

From this starting point, French culture can be viewed through many different angles. French cathedrals, abbeys, castles and villages have been constructed

in their own styles and with their own particularities. They are part of what is seen as French architectural culture. When French parents raise their children, they attach great importance to how they behave at a dinner table, how they address other people when they meet them, how they behave at school, what types of ambitions and achievements they reward, and so on. The behavior of children is an important part of French educational culture. The importance and priority attached to the quality and variety of food is another example of French culinary culture. Yet another example is how the consumption of food and drink functions socially in restaurants and cafés. The special atmosphere found in good cafés and restaurants is a result of long traditions of behavior that have been developed over hundreds of years. Tourists coming to France attach great importance to this atmosphere, and love to spend time in such places, feeling the atmosphere and looking at the people flowing into, out of, or past the restaurant on the sidewalk. For some tourists, this is the main attraction they are looking for.
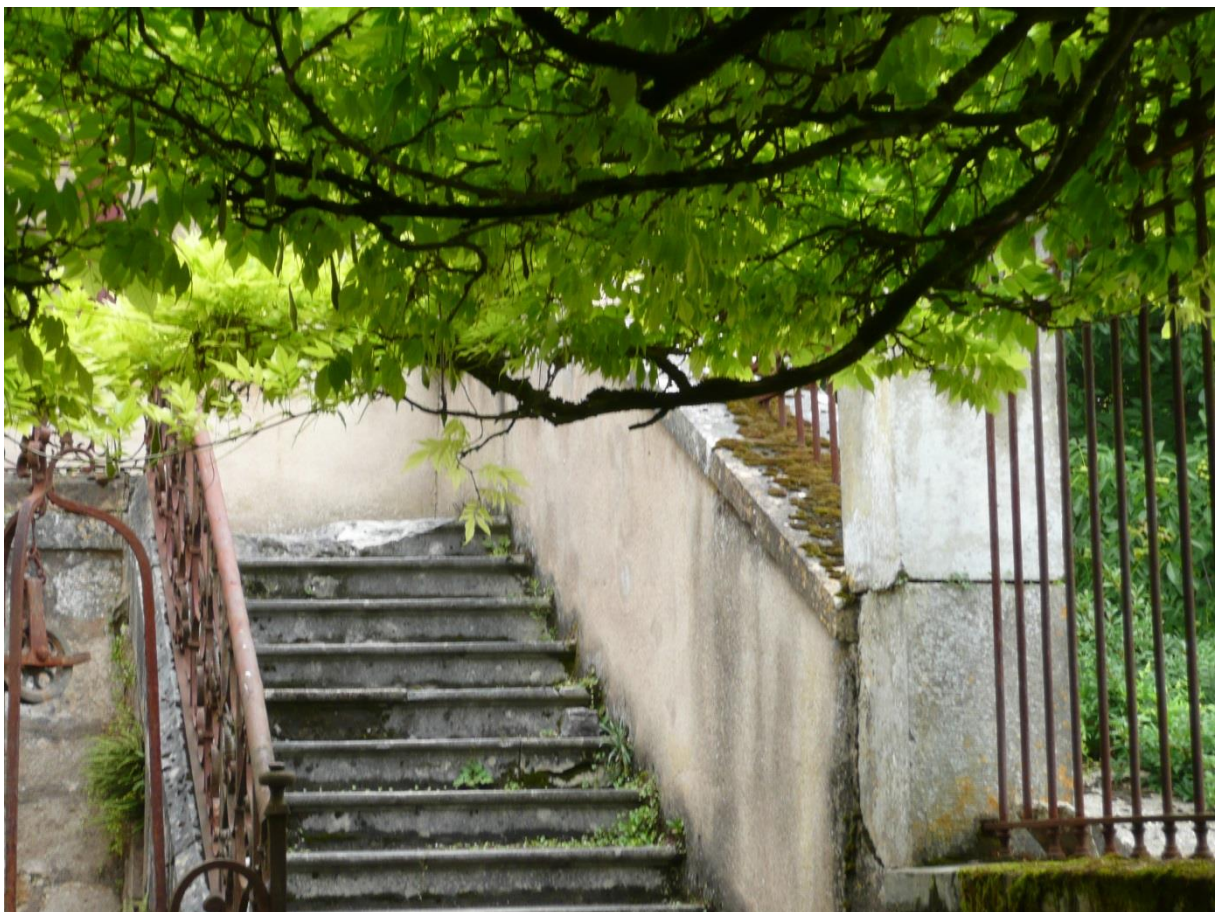
The French people's close relations to their museums reflect their interest in their cultural past and its relation to their life in the present. French conversation among normally educated people often covers vast areas of interest, among other things the latest exhibitions in an important museum, attractive concerts taking place, interesting films or books recently made available, as well as sporting events. A person with a narrower span of interests, like someone who is only interested in sports, may soon find himself or herself at a loss in small social gatherings among French acquaintances.

French culture has evolved from strong regional and ethnic identities originating from before the time strong French kings brought the regions together under a forceful integrating rule. Even after the French Revolution introduced changes in the country's language policy, regional dialects survived until the First World War. This dramatic war drew vast numbers of young men from all regions together in the trenches and the battlefields. They needed to understand each other. In the early phases of the war, they were grouped together by regional criteria, in order to better understand what was being said. As the war went on, and the death toll reached dramatic proportions, the soldiers from different regions were mixed together and brought under the command of officers speaking the dialect of Ile de France (Paris). They then had to learn this language, and their own dialect was pushed into the background. The language of the ruling elite was spread out among the soldiers from all the regions, and became the national language, not only among the social elite in the regions but also increasingly among people at large.

The underlying regional and ethnic identities that had evolved from the time before France became Nation State, were Alsatian (Alsacien), Basque, Breton, Catalan, Flemish (Flamand), Italian, and Occitan to name only the most clear-cut ones. Numerous others come in addition, where the regions of Provence, Massif Central and Burgundy are examples, as you go closer into local cultures. We will now look a little more into this, in the order they are named above.

The Alsatian language and culture is found in Alsace, a territory which has been disputed and passed between France and Germany several times since the time of Louis XIV. The language is a Franco-German dialect, and its architectural culture is distinctly German. The Alsatian language is recognized as a regional language in the French official list of languages of France.

By 1500 BC, Celts began to settle in Alsace, clearing and cultivating the land. Alsace is a plain surrounded by the Vosges mountains in the west and the Black Forest in the east. The soil is fertile, with good natural irrigation. Agriculture, in particular its wine production dating from Roman times, has made it an attractive region through history.

At the time of the Germanic invasions into the Roman Empire, the Germanic tribe of the Alemanni profited from the weakening of the Roman defenses and established themselves in Alsace. The language of the Alemanni formed the basis of the Alsatian dialect. Later, during the reign of Charlemagne, Alsace became part of the Holy Roman Empire. This empire was long

characterized by rivalry between the feudal lords and the local leaders of the church, especially the bishops. After the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century, Alsace gradually became a mosaic of Protestant and Catholic territories. This complicated situation prevailed until 1639, when France conquered most of Alsace, to prevent the Spanish Habsburgs from gaining a continuous territory between their possessions in Germany and the Netherlands.

When the wars between the Protestants and the Catholics, more precisely named The Thirty Years War (1618 – 1648), were concluded with the Treaty of Westphalia, most of Alsace was recognized as part of France. Some towns remained independent, however, and existing rights and customs of the inhabitants were largely preserved. Later treaties consolidated the French hold on these cities as well.

Religion has a strong position in Alsace. Most of the Alsatian population is Roman Catholic, but a large Protestant community also exists, due to its German heritage dating from the Reformation. Landowners had the right to decide which religion was allowed on their land. Many accepted all religions present in the country, including jews, without discrimination. Alsace became one of the French regions with a thriving Jewish community, and the only region with a noticeable Anabaptist population (see Wikipedia: Alsace). After having married the strongly catholic Madame de Maintenon, king Louis XIV in 1707 forced many Reformed and Lutheran church buildings to also allow Catholic services. About 50 such "simultaneous churches" still exist in modern Alsace. With the Catholic church's general lack of priests they tend to hold Catholic services only occasionally.


Alsace has a special cultural blend, deriving from the region's passing between German and French control during the centuries of rivalries and

wars that have taken place. German traits remain in the more traditional, rural parts of the culture, such as culinary traditions and architecture, whereas modern institutions are integrated in the French culture. The dominant language in Alsace today is French, and few young people speak Alsatian today. The weakening position of Alsatian has spurred a movement to preserve the language, as is the case in other regions of France where traditional regional languages are disappearing.

The traditional habitat of the Alsatian lowland consists of houses constructed with walls in timber framing and roofing in flat tiles. This type of construction was abundant in adjacent parts of Germany and Northern Europe, where wood was easily found. Other regions in France, like Normandy, used this building technique, but not to the same extent as Alsace.

Alsatian food traditions are based on German traditions, where the use of pork is widespread. A great variety of bisquits and small cakes are to be found, especially around the festivities of the year's end. The large cake, Kugelhupf, is popular. The gastronomic symbol of Alsace is the Choucroute, which is a local variety of the German Sauerkraut. The famous restaurant Lipp, in Paris, is widely known for this.
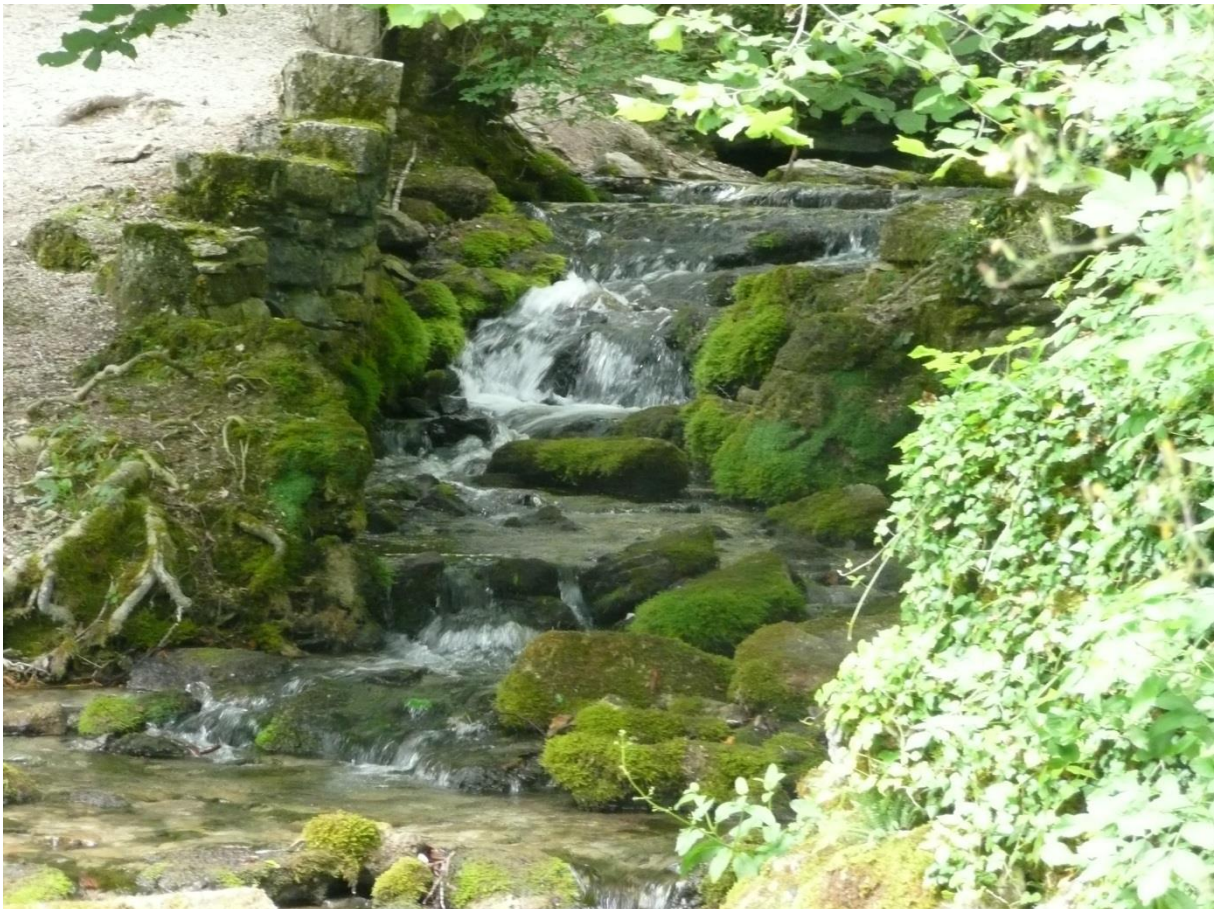
Alsace is famous for its white wines, notably dry Rieslings. From its German roots it also has developed an important beer production. The strong combination of advanced wine production and advanced beer production is unique among French regions. Aside from these production lines, Alsace is an important producer of products from forestry and it has an important automobile industry. Life sciences and tourism are also important.

Tourists can enjoy the Vosges mountains with its mysterious forests and many castle ruins. Most of the old fortified castles are ruins, because the Swedes destroyed them during The Thirty Years War. The most famous one, Haut-Koenigsbourg, has been restored completely and gives us an idea of what these castles were like. The many cities of Alsace, such as Strasbourg, Colmar, Sélestat and several others, have picturesque old towns. Smaller cities and villages also have remaining old buildings, showing the old typical architecture.


Another regional culture with distinct features in France is the Basque culture, which has the western Pyrenées as its geographical center. Given its place in the geography of France, it is clear that this culture is one that France shares with Spain. The Basque sense of identity is very strong and it has produced many violent separatist movements aiming at autonomy throughout history. It is a very old ethnic group with its own distinct

language, and its origins go back to the Vascones - a tribe in existence before the Roman Empire was formed. The Basque language is unrelated to Indo-European, and Basque genetic patterns have shown that their existence predates the arrival of agriculture in the Iberian Peninsula, about 7000 years ago (Wikipedia: Basque).

In the Early Middle Ages the territory between the Ebro and Garonne rivers in the southwest of France and northeast of Spain was known as Vasconia. This was a vaguely defined ethnic area and political entity struggling to fend off pressure from the Iberian Visigothic kingdom and Arab rule to the south, as well as Frankish advances from the north. Over time, this territory fragmented into different feudal regions that later were integrated into Spain and France, respectively.

The Basques enjoyed considerable self-government until the French Revolution. There have been several attempts by Basque separatist groups, in particular the ETA in Spain, to achieve autonomy for their territory. They have used violent terrorist methods as a means for this, but have been beaten back every time by both Spanish and French governments. The ETA has now been dismantled, and the Basques enjoy regional self-government in certain limited ways.
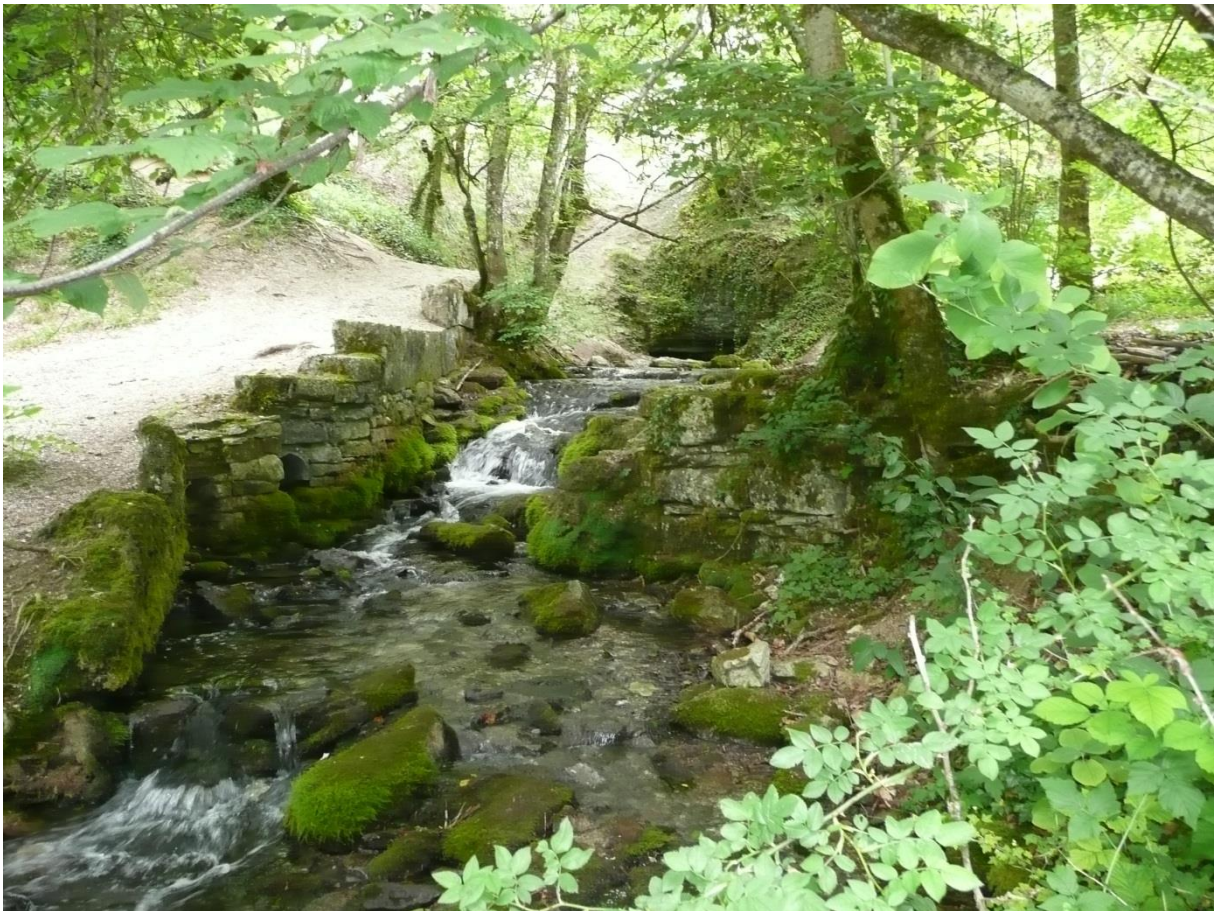
The Basque region is divided into three administrative units, namely the Basque Autonomous Community and Navarre in Spain, and the arrondissement of Bayonne and the cantons of Mauléon-Licharre and Tardets-Sorholus in the Département des Pyrénées Atlantiques in France. The main urban centers in Spain are the cities of Bilbao, San Sebastian and Vitoria-Gasteiz. On the French side of the border the urban belt of Bayonne-Banglet-Biarritz on the Atlantic coast has most of the Basque population.

The Basque language is losing ground, and the population is increasingly integrated into the culture of the national host states. Large numbers of Basques have in different historical periods left the Basque Country to settle in the rest of Spain, France or other parts of the world.

About 25 – 30 % of the region's population now speaks Basque (Euskara, in their own language). The Basques identify themselves by the term "euskaldun" (Basque speaker), and their country as "Euskal Herria" (Country of the Basque Language). This regional cultural identity is today not at odds with the national identity they have as citizens of Spain or France, respectively, with the exception of a small minority which still entertains separatist aspirations. There are extremely few Basque monolingual speakers. Essentially all Basque speakers are bilingual on both sides of the borders. (see Wikipedia: Basques.)

Basques have a strong attachment to their geographical homeland and family roots, with many family names being derived from the name of the farm from which they descend. Ancient Basque inheritance patterns favored survival of the unity of the inherited land. The farms were usually inherited by the eldest male or female child. The other brothers and sisters were, depending on the fortune of the family, more or less left to make their own living – like in all other cultures where primogeniture was the tradition. In periods where it was difficult to make a living locally, this led to emigration to Spain, France and the Americas (South and North).

The Basque society is somewhat less patriarchal than its neighboring cultures, and women have substantial influence in decisions about the domestic economy. Basque culinary culture is a strong part of Basque identity. Basques have traditionally been mostly Roman-Catholics, and as a group remained notably devout and churchgoing well into the 20th century. As in most of Western Europe, church attendance has fallen off substantially in recent years. Before Christianization, the Basques had their own local mythologies linked to their specific origins prior to the advent of the Roman Empire.

The Basques have many rural sports derived from the prestige attached to being good at everyday chores. Examples are rowing regattas (derived from fisheries), tug-of-war, stone-lifting, wood-chopping, stone-block pulling

(showing off strength), balancing weights, drilling stone blocks, and sheepdog trial competitions (skills based sports). Bull runs are also part of Basque culture, as they are in Spain. Otherwise, football, rugby and cycling are popular, like in neighboring Spain and France.

A third distinct regional culture in France, is the one found in Brittany in the west of France. As already mentioned, Brittany was an independent duchy for a long time before being integrated into the kingdom of France after Anne of Brittany, duchess of Brittany, died while being the wife of King Louis XII. At her death, he brought the duchy under French rule in 1532.

From ancient times, the Bretons were a Celtic group of tribes and their Celtic roots are still celebrated by numerous people in Brittany. A small minority is still entertaining nationalist dreams for Brittany, but in practice this movement is more important as motivation for the maintenance of

traditional folklore than for political activism, which does not have a strong following today. The desire for maintenance of traditional Breton culture is a desire which the Bretons share with other areas where Celtic culture is still alive, such as Cornwall and Wales in the United Kingdom.

Brittany has strong historic origins which serve to nourish its sense of identity. As we can see in Wikipedia, Brittany has been inhabited by humans since Paleolithic times. The first settlers were Neanderthals. One of the oldest hearths in the world has been found in Plouhinec in the Finistère part of Brittany. It is 450 000 years old. Homo sapiens settled in Brittany about 35 000 years ago. They replaced or absorbed the Neanderthals and developed local industries similar to the Magdalenian. Originally hunters and gatherers, they developed farming from the 5th millennium BC as a result of migration from the south and east. The Neolithic period is characterized by the development of megalithic sites, the most known today being the Locmariaquer megaliths and the Carnac stone alignments.

During the Gallic era, when Brittany's Celtic identity was developed in the 1st millennium BC, the region was inhabited by five Celtic tribes. It was not before Julius Cesar invaded Gaul that Brittany was first brought under foreign rule, in 51 BC. This introduced the Gallo-Roman era of the region. As Brittany was a remote region of the province of Lugdunum (Lyon), many small farmers remained free and lived in small huts. Celtic deities continued to be worshipped, alongside with some assimilation of Roman gods. From the 3rd century AD, when the Germanic tribes of Franks and Alamanni invaded the region, the local economy suffered greatly and many estates were abandoned.

The Anglo-Saxon invasion of Britain in the 5th and 6th centuries led to a substantial migration of Celts from Cornwall and Wales to the northern coast of Brittany (Armorica), thus reinforcing the Celtic culture of Brittany. After a long period of instability, Brittany was unified by the tribal leader Nominoe, who was then king of Brittany from 845 to 851. He was subsequently considered as the Breton founding father. The descendants of Nominoe successfully defended Brittany against attacks from the French king, Charles the Bald, grandson of Charlemagne. Its territory was extended eastwards, into parts of France. However, the arrival of the Vikings in the 10th century led

to the loss of the easternmost parts of its newly conquered territory. King Alan II of Brittany managed, with the help of his god-brother King Æthelstan of England, to expel the Vikings from Brittany, and then recreated a strong Brittany. This process consolidated its independence from France. During the Hundred Years War, English and French rulers fought over Brittany. This rivalry was brought to a definite end with Louis XII's action in 1532.

The Duchy, which had an economic golden age from the 15th to the 18th century due to its position by the Atlantic ocean, was legally abolished as a duchy during the French Revolution. Its economic privileges were also taken away, and the region went into economic recession. The recession lasted up until the early part of the 20th century, and was accompanied by migration of many Bretons to other parts of France, mainly Paris.

However, the region was gradually modernizing, with food processing, shipbuilding and other industries emerging.

Culturally, Brittany had become deeply Catholic during the centuries under the rule of the French kings. The Bretons remained so until the 20th century, when the strong position of the Church started to erode all over France as a result of the separation of the Church and the State introduced by the Republican rulers. The use of the Breton language had declined markedly during the 19th century, as a result of a strong linguistic repression operated under the Third Republic (after Napoleon III had to resign following his defeat in 1870 by the German Emperor William II).

At the same time, a revival of interest in ancient Celtic culture took place, and independence movements created links with similar Irish, Welsh and Scottish independence parties, leading up to ideas of pan-Celticism. In the 1920s an

artistic revival emerged, but some of the Celtic movements in Brittany collaborated with the Nazis during the Second World War, which strongly weakened their position after the war. In the 1960s and 1970s, the cultural distinctiveness of Brittany was celebrated in music, and Celtic culture still holds a strong position in the Breton imagination. There is no longer a strong political will of independence operating under the surface. This vanished after the Second World War.

The Catalan, Flemish and Italian sub-cultures in France do not have the same distinctiveness as the Alsatian, Basque and Breton cultures. The Catalan culture is strong in Spain, but what remains in France is linked to how the national borders were drawn between France and Spain. The same can be said of Flemish culture in the north of France, which was an integrated part of Flemish culture in Belgium before national borders between Belgium and France were drawn. The Italian culture still remaining in the southeast of

France, near the border between Italy and France, dates from the time when the region around Nice was part of the Ligurian region before Italy was unified in 1860. Napoleon III helped the Italian unification movement to victory, and received the region around Nice as a compensation for his efforts.

The Occitan culture, however, is of a different nature. The cultural area of Occitania is composed of the southern third of France, as well as a small part of Spain and of Italy, and Monaco. Occitania has been recognized as a linguistic and cultural concept since the Middle Ages, but has never been a legal nor a political entity (see Wikipedia: Occitania). The area we are talking about have about 16 million inhabitants, but only about 200 000 – 800 000 people are native speakers or proficient speakers of Occitan, respectively. They are mostly among the older generations.

Under Roman rule, most of Occitania was known as Aquitania. The earlier conquered territories were known as Provincia Romana (Provence), while the northern provinces of France were called Gallia. Under the later Roman Empire, these areas were groped in several provinces, and Provence and Gallia Aquitania are the areas covered since medieval times under the name of Occitania (what is today the areas of Limousin, Auvergne, Languedoc and Gascony).

Occitanian culture flourished in the High Middle Ages. Many writers, poets and participants in the troubadour movement used Occitan (Langue d'Oc) as their language of choice. Occitan literature flourished in the 12th and 13th centuries, and the troubadours introduced and cultivated the notion of courtly love, which spread throughout all European cultivated circles. It gave rise to a vast literature of chivalry, which rose to such levels of following that Cervantes wrote his famous Don Quixote in attack of the exaggerations this literature gave rise to. Successive French kings gradually conquered the regions of Occitania, and they were culturally brought closer to official French policy. In the 19th century there was a strong revival of Occitan literature and the provencal writer Frédéric Mistral was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1904. In spite of this, linguistic repression continued in schools, which led to a strong decline in the use of Occitan language. However, the language is still alive and gaining some impetus now.

There are political movements working for autonomy for Occitania, but they have little following. Occitan activists want the French government to adopt Occitan as the second official language for seven regions representing the south of France.

The culture of France has, as we have seen above, been shaped by geography, by historical events, and by foreign and internal forces and groups. France, and in particular Paris, has played an important role worldwide as a center of highly developed culture since the 17th century and from the 19th century on. From the late 19th century, France has also played an important role in cinema, fashion, cuisine, literature, technology, social science and mathematics. The importance of French culture has varied over the centuries, depending on France's economic, political and military importance. French culture today is marked both by great regional and socioeconomic differences and strong unifying tendencies. A global opinion

poll for the BBC saw France ranked as the country with the fourth most positive influence in the world (behind Germany, Canada and the UK) in 2014 (see Wikipedia).

With the background of old French stones, I have tried to convey how interesting and varied French history and culture is, and how much there is to gain about knowing more about this fantastic country. This text has only attempted to give an overview. All the regions of France, and all the traditional activities found in these regions, have cultural significances which are attractive and invite us to deepen our knowledge about them and to see how these old customs and professions merge with their evolution into modern times.