



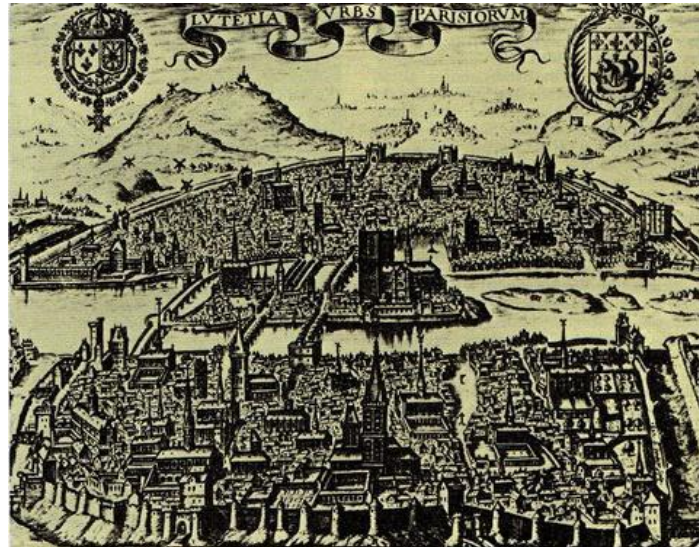
*To Marthe, new to the town, he had talked of it, as it might be a honey-bee straddling the river, its body an island, with the Cathedral of Nôtre Dame at its tail and as its head the Sainte Chapelle and the old Palais and gardens.*

*Outspread on either bank, you would say, were the wings, outlined with walls and with river-filled fosses. On the left, the University quarter flowed over its confines and into the Pré aux Clercs, where the religious houses lay in their vineyards, and students wandered, and cows plodded out to their grazing.*

*And on the right stood the Town, with its streets of artisans, its quays, its markets, its churches, its mansions. With its tiltyards and Town House and prisons and palaces: The Louvre, rebuilding; the royal Hôtel des Tourelles and the other great houses in the St Anthony quarter belonging to the Constable, to the King's mistress en titre, to the Guise family with whom the Scottish Queen, their niece was living.*

*The unpaved streets which were drains, and the lanes, fenced at either end, which had become refuse-dumps. The plaques, the shrines, the fountains. The holy statues, Huguenot-broken, encased in iron grilles with flowers wilting before them. The Gardens, with vine-arbours and pear trees and strawberries; the taverns and the private houses with their bright painted sign-boards; the bridges over the Seine, three joining the right wing and two joining the left with their mills and tradesmen and houses. Beneath which, they said, few men dared to look after dark, for under the piles lived all the evil women and cut-throats in Paris.*

*Marthe had not been interested.*



*It was Jerott's beautiful and evocative description which would come to mind whenever I wandered the streets of Paris, trying to envision it as it must have looked like to Lymond's eyes. More often than not I found myself in the company of people, who, like Marthe, were not interested.*

*And, like Jerott, I often found myself wishing for the company of likeminded people. People who would want to embark with me on such a journey, to walk in Lymond's footsteps and to try to see Paris as he and his companions would have seen it. Who, like me, would delight in tracking down obscure references. Who would follow Dorothy Dunnett's steps, unearthing vital bits of information and discovering traces of 16th century Paris. Trying to envision it all and trying to find the strands she used to spin her tale.*

*It isn't easy. There isn't really all that much of Lymond's Paris left today. That is, on the surface there isn't. There isn't much still visible, but a lot of it is still traceable and with a bit of imagination it is possible to evoke it and to envision it, the way Dunnett did.*

*This was my aim when planning Le Spit: evoking Lymond's Paris and Lymond's France in everything we do. Suivez Francois in as many aspects as we can. That is the overall theme.*

*The welcome reception will be held in old medieval „caves“ or cellars, smugglers' cellars perhaps, where many an illicit barrel of wine may have been stored, and where we may just hear someone sneeze if we listen closely.*

*Where we stay, where we eat and where we go, everything was chosen with this in mind: get as close to 16th century Paris as possible, find the places that evoke the spirit of Dunnett's world and help transport us back in time and into Lymond's world.*

*From the traces of the Hôtel d'Hercule to the Château d'Ecouen, home of Anne de Montmorency, compère of Henri II, a Renaissance jewel, not so very different to what Sevigny might have been. Or perhaps we will find that the Hôtel Carnavalet comes closest, with its portraits of Mary Queen of Scots and the Valois dynasty, and its wings, where one can just imagine Adam stepping out to catch the night air and seeing too much.*

*There is Ecouen's 16th century organ, shades of Thady Boy wooing Oonagh. Fontainebleau with its library and the Jeu de Paume where we will find out just what kind of game Henri II had invited O'LiamRoe to.*

*The Collège de St Barbe where Lymond invited the Ladies of the rue de Glatigny, the memorable late-night escapade to rescue Mme la Maréchale – the streets are all still there but here it might take all our imagination to shut out the modern world - the pedlars of tat. Then again maybe that is not five hundred years removed from the world Dunnett describes with its ancient filles publiques, its sellers of wine, roasting spits and food stalls. „Plus ca change, plus c'est la même chose.“*

*The Hôtel des Sphères, as we all know no longer exists, but the rue de la Cerisaye stands yet, as do many parts of the „town with its great houses and palaces... belonging to the King's mistress en titre and the Guise family.“ There is one place that comes close, very close to the Hotel des Sphères and is perhaps the inspiration for it. We'll explore it room by room, down to the kitchen and thence to Sevigny.*

*There won't be time to travel to the Loire with its grands châteaux but there is Chantilly, birthplace of Anne de Montmorency, and at its heart still very much a Renaissance palace, with magnificent collections. We'll have it all to ourselves, and it is up to us to evoke the balls and festivities Lymond and Philippa attended at court, as we walk through the château on our way to Vatel's Kitchen, Vatel, who must have been a descendant of Onophrion Zitwitz, surely.*

*I hope that our Gala Dinner will not remind anyone of the victory banquet at the Hôtel de Ville, but even if it does, I will take it in stride, claiming it was meant to be like that, because no Dunnett Gathering would be complete without such a re-enactment of one of the most memorable scenes in Checkmate.*

*Suivez Francois!*

*Birgit*