



**THE BASTILLE**  
MYSTERIES AND SECRETS OF FRANCE'S  
MOST FAMOUS STATE PRISON



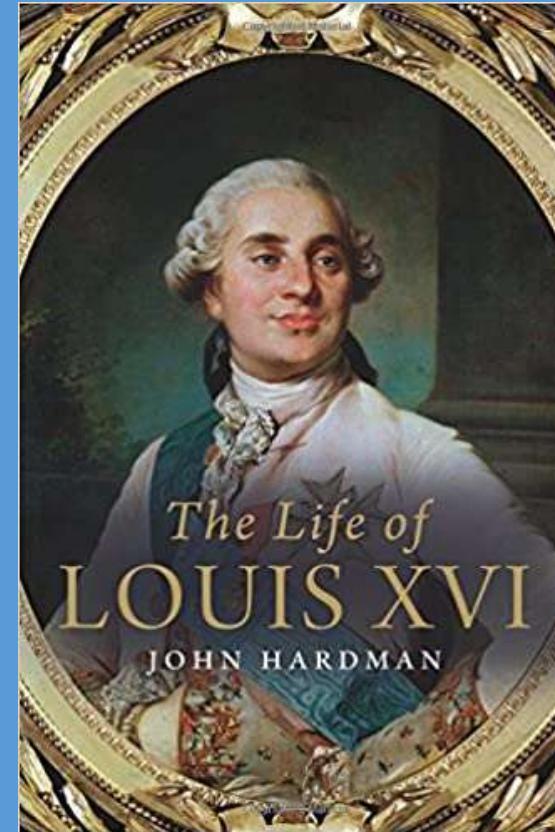
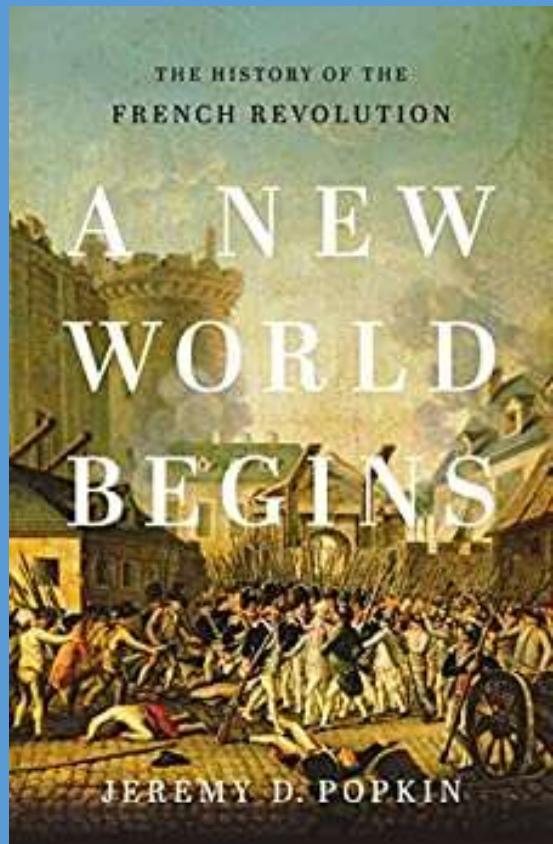
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## William the Conqueror (Duke of Normandy)

1066: the conquest of England

The kings of England: **to protect**  
their **French heritage** against the  
kings of France

**Allegiance** to the kings of France





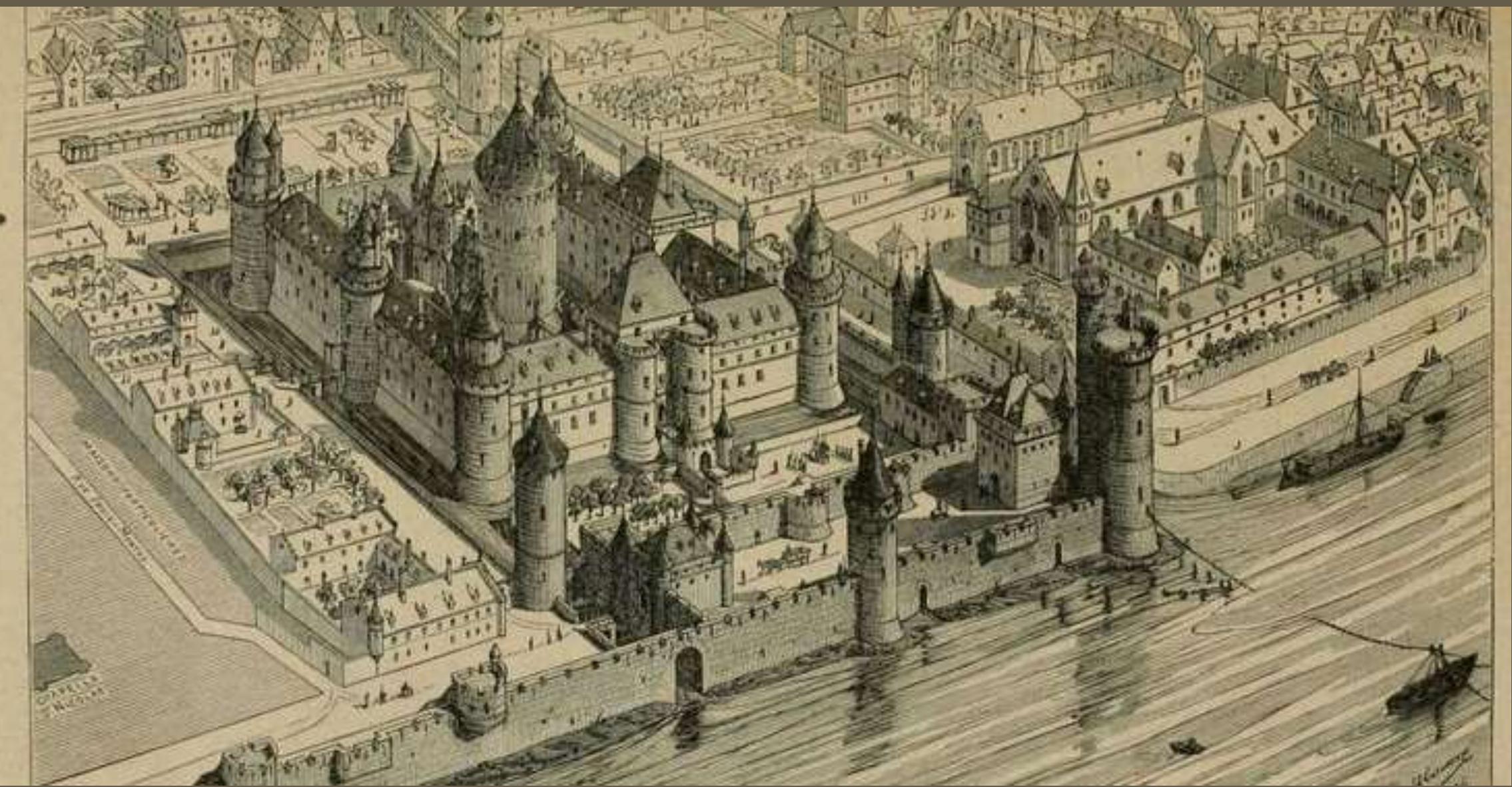
# Philippe-Auguste (1180-1223)

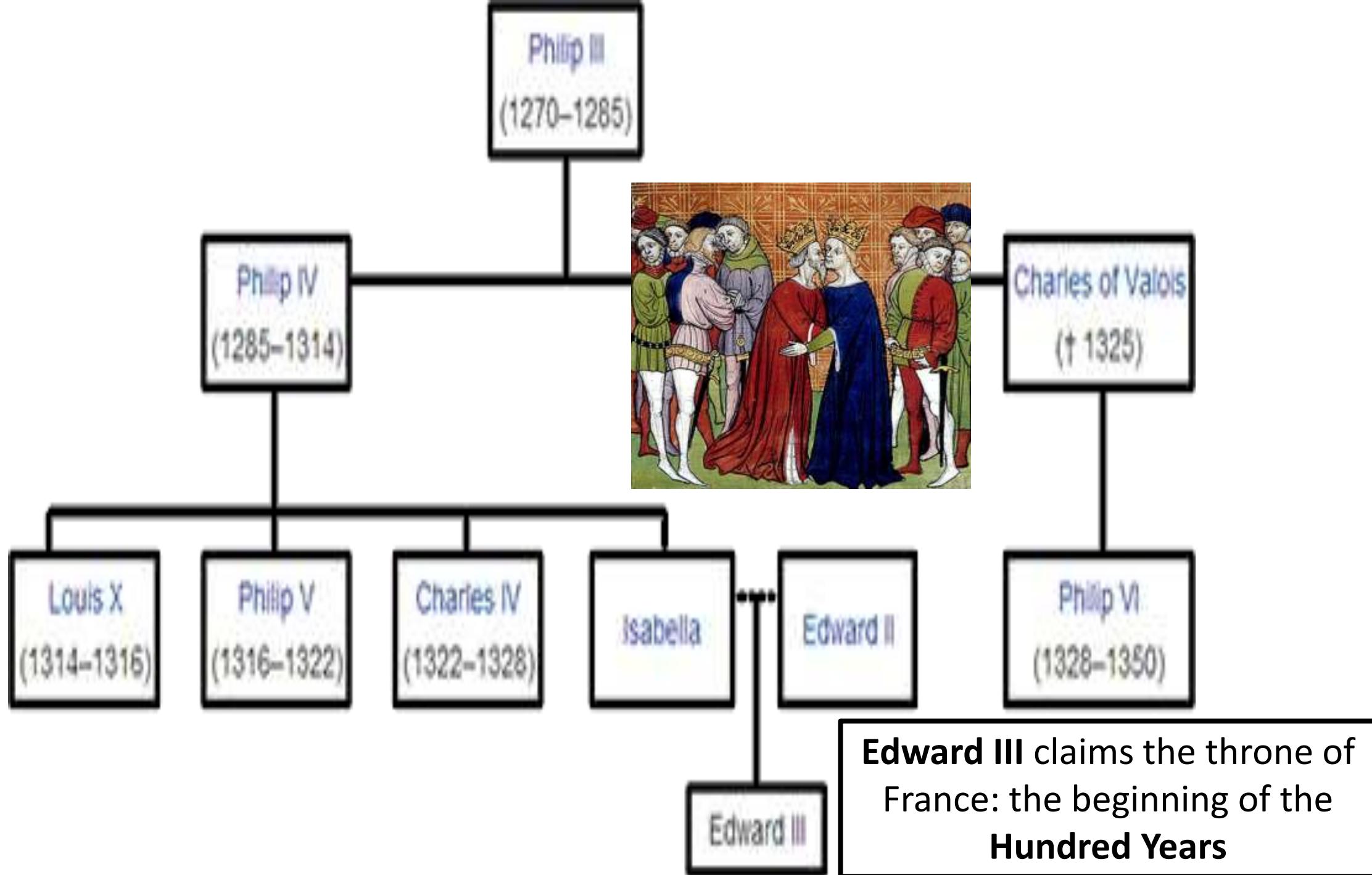
A wall to protect Paris

A **fortress** in the West End (facing Normandy & England): the **Louvre**









**1356:** the disastrous  
battle of Poitiers

French king Jean II  
**captured** by the English





Middle-Age: a *bastille* or  
*bastide*: two large towers  
aimed at protecting a  
gate



Charles V ordered the fortification of the Bastille St-Antoine

6 new towers built to give the Bastille its iconic shape

A highly innovative design





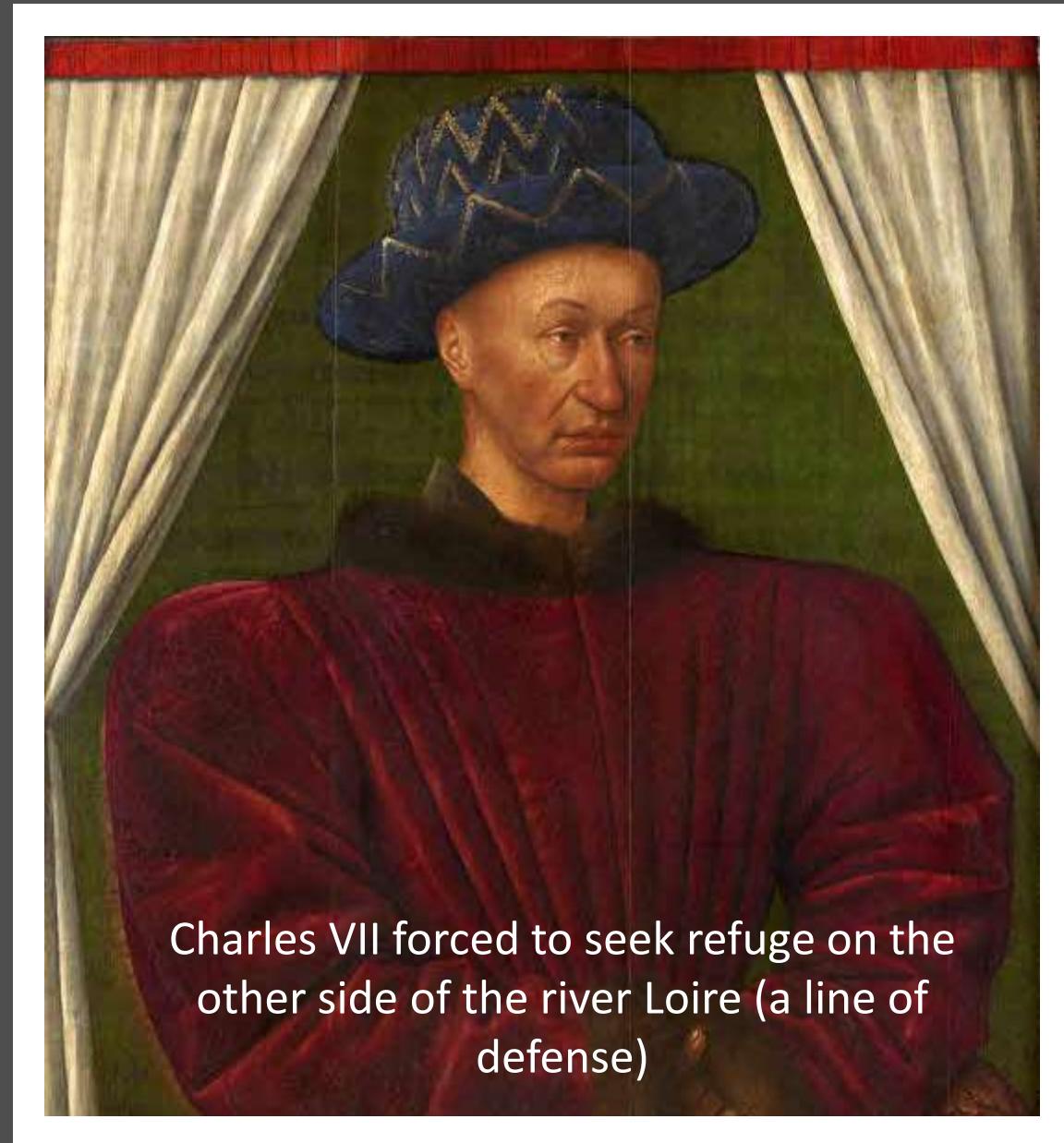
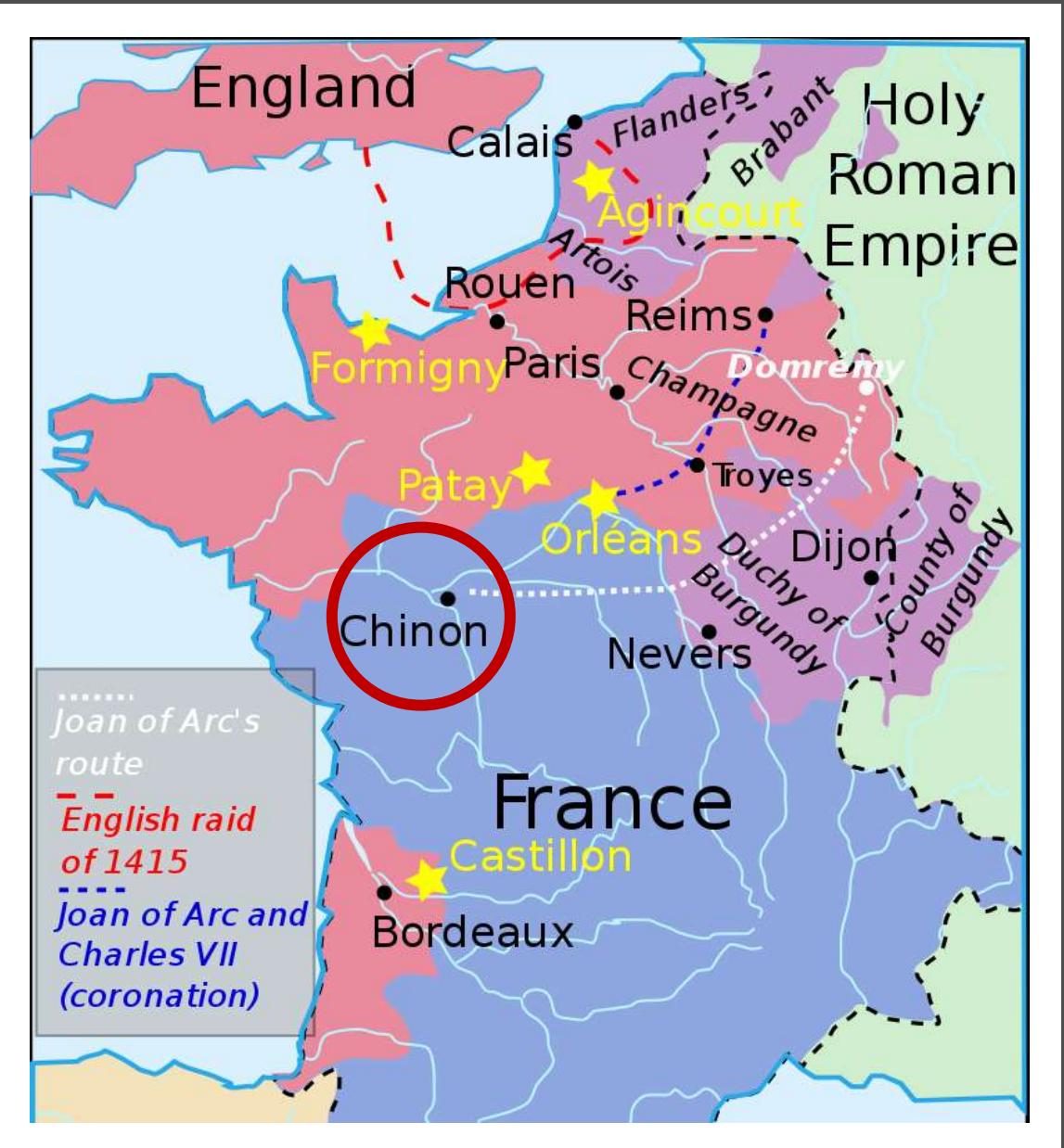
The Bastille: a **strategic fortress** that surrendered far too often!





**1420:** Paris & the Bastille captured  
by Henry V of England

## 1422: Charles VII becomes king of France



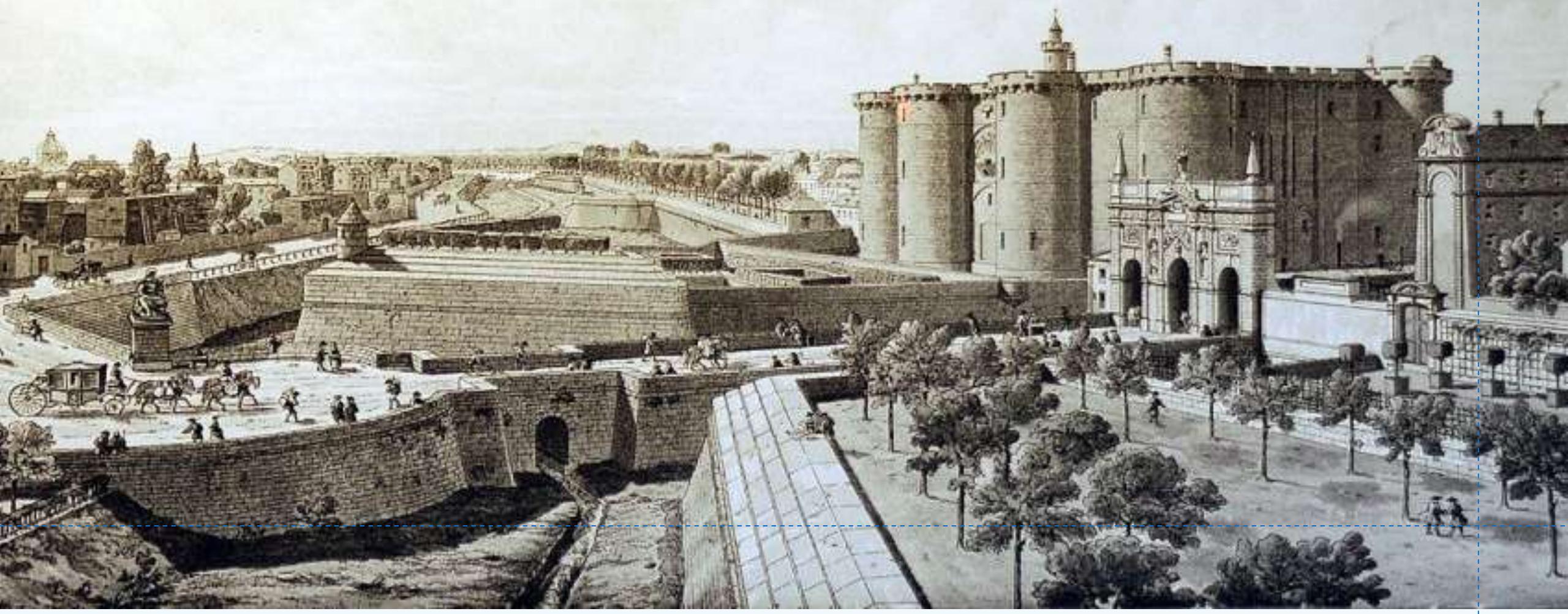
The North of France (including Paris) occupied by the English and their allies from Burgundy for 16 years

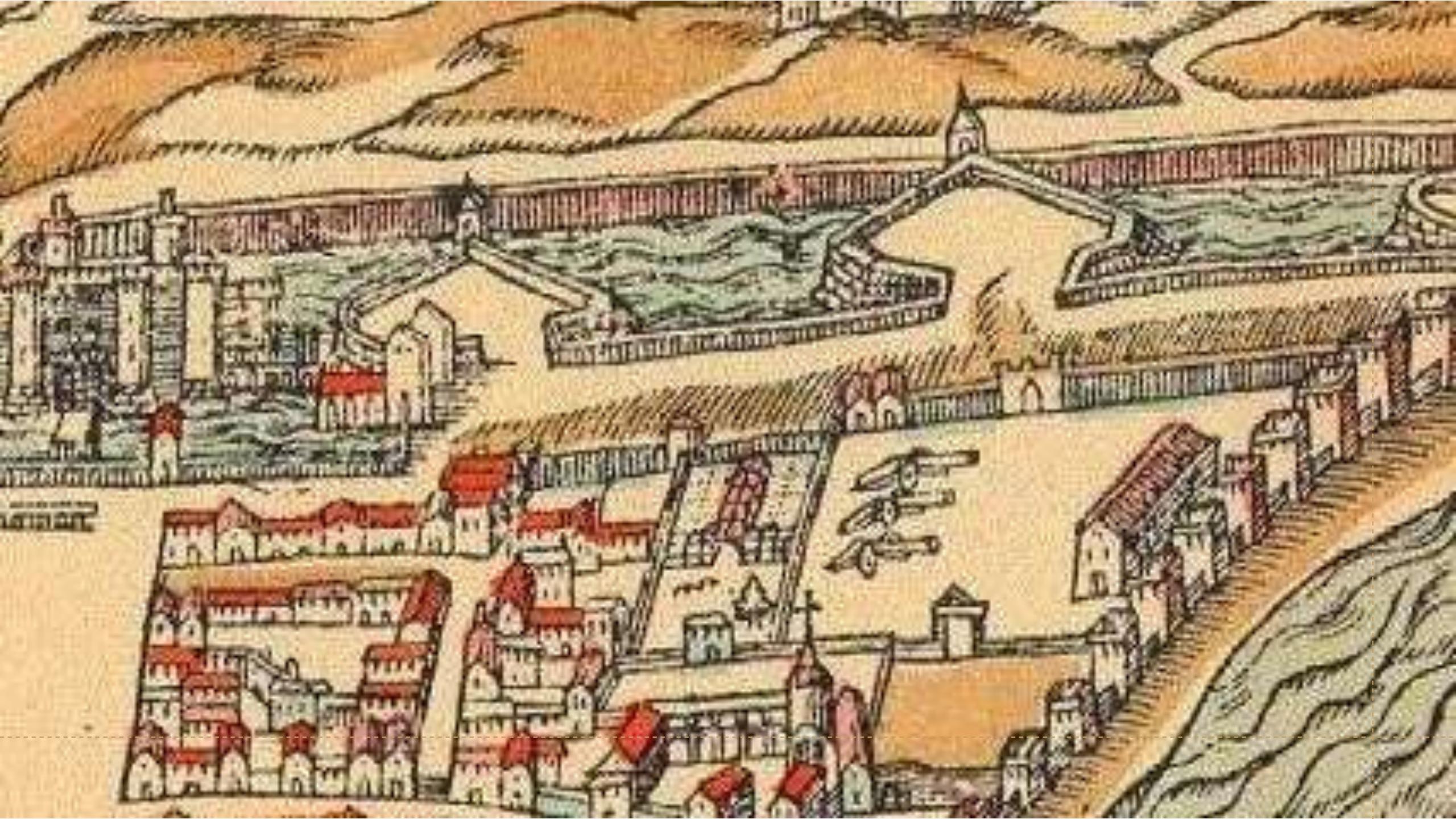
The Bastille recaptured in  
1436 by the troops of  
Charles VII



The end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century: the addition of an **arsenal & arms depot**

The Bastille: a prominent **military centre**





The Bastille at the centre of numerous conflicts during the Wars of Religion (16<sup>th</sup> century)

Numerous assaults

Numerous surrenders



The *Fronde* (1648-1653): a series of civil war



The Bastille: a **strategic position** that kept its tradition of surrendering at the first opportunity



La Grande Mademoiselle

Louis XIV: France secured & the monarchy strengthened

The Bastille solely as a State prison until 1789

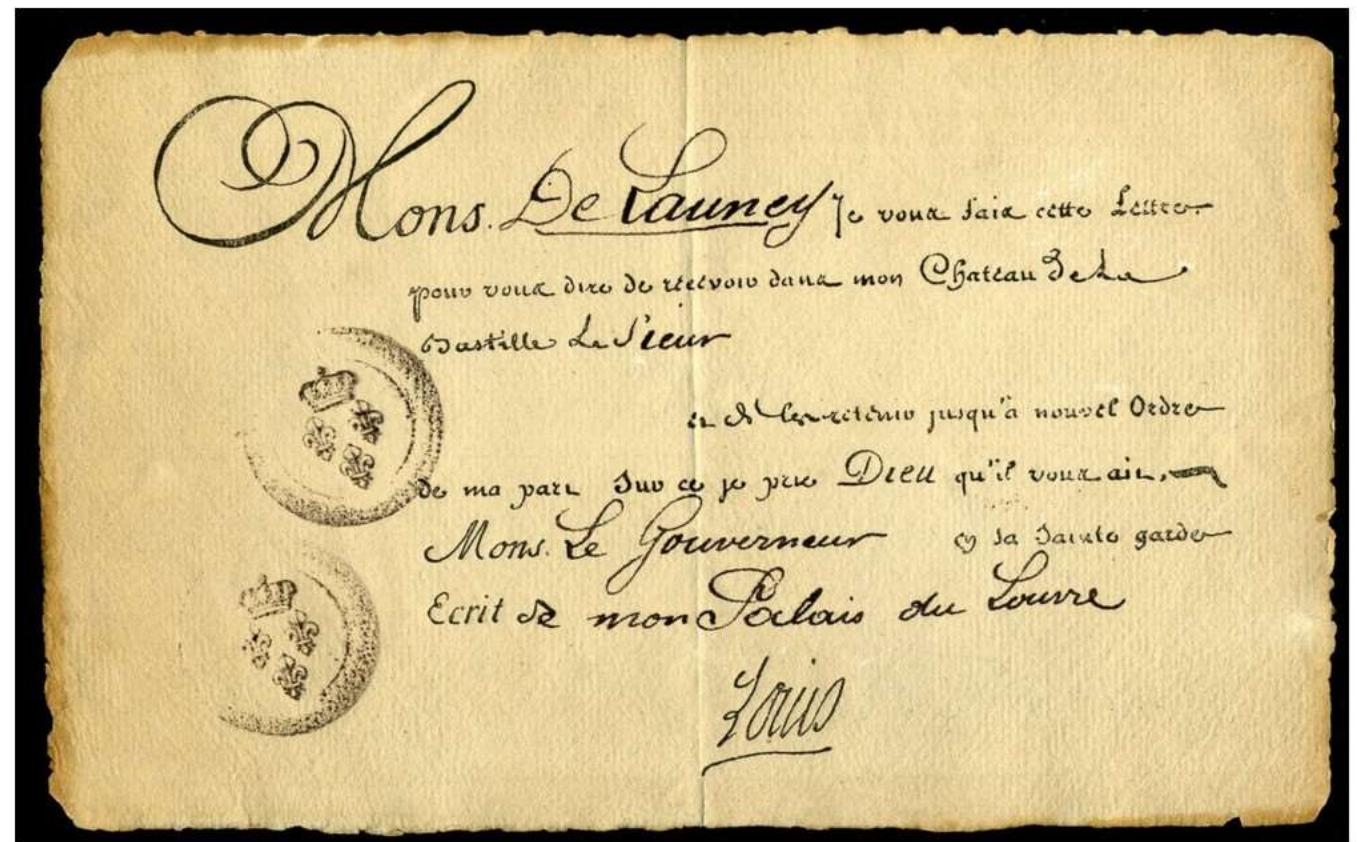


A symbol of despotism & absolutism

The “king’s prison”: the king as **supreme judge**

The *lettre de cachet*: letter signed by the king & countersigned by one of his ministers aimed at enforcing judgments that could not be appealed

"Monsieur de Launey, I am writing you this letter to tell you to receive in my Castle of the Bastille the Sir... and to retain him until new orders from me..."



**Nicolas Fouquet:** Superintendent  
(minister) of Finances (1653-1661)



Fouquet had Vaux-le-Vicomte built in 1656-1659  
in the midst of a war with Spain









Fouquet's goal: to impress the King in order to become prime minister

*Quo non ascendet?* ("What heights he will not ascend")



The most magnificent residence – No royal residence could then match Vaux-le-Vicomte

Louis XIV upset at "*such insolent and audacious luxury*"

Fouquet's lavish entertainment could only be offered by the King



5 September 1661: Fouquet arrested

*“On August 17, at 6pm, Fouquet was the king of France; at 2am, he was nothing” (Voltaire)*

The decision to arrest Fouquet  
was made prior to the King's  
visit to Vaux-le-Vicomte

1659: the end of the Franco-Spanish  
War Huge deficit

Fouquet's poor management of the  
king's finances

A tendency for high ranking officials  
to confuse private & public funds  
(embezzlement)



1674: an aristocratic & “republican” conspiracy against Louis XIV

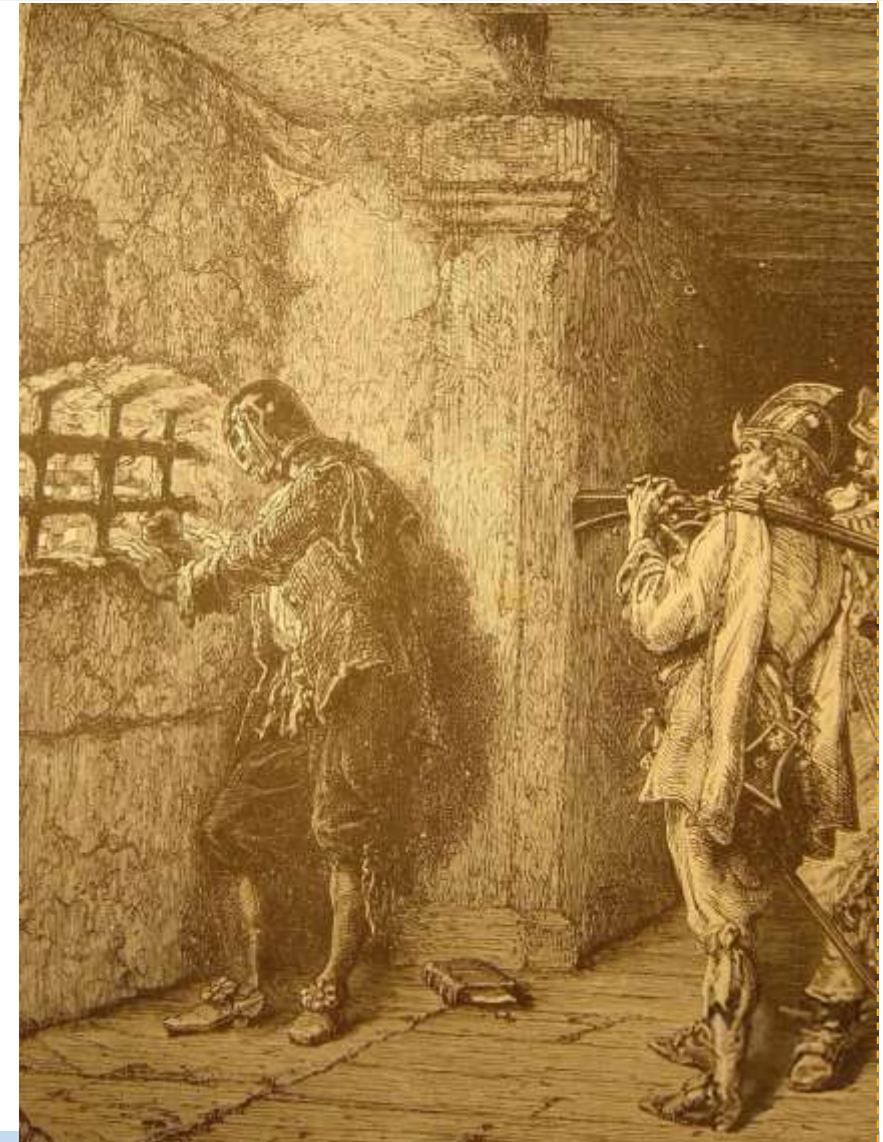


## The Man in the Iron Mask

Unidentified prisoner first arrested in  
1669

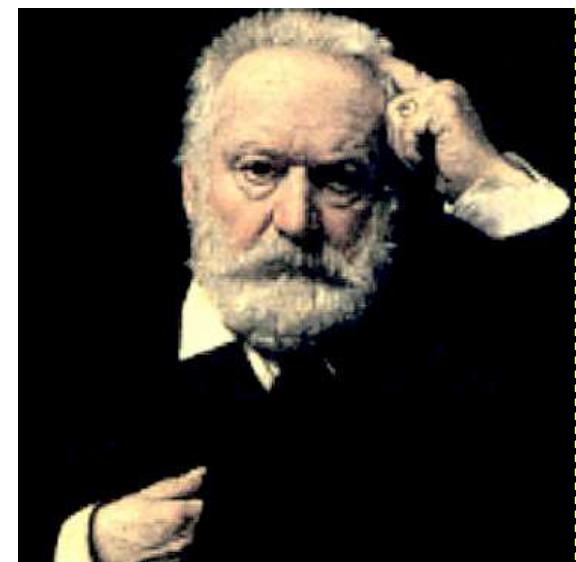
Prisoner at the Bastille (1698-1703)

**58 hypotheses** as to his identity (why  
so many precautions to hide his  
identity?)



30 novels, 22 films

Voltaire, Alexandre Dumas (*The Three Musketeers*) & Victor Hugo made the Man in the Iron Mask famous



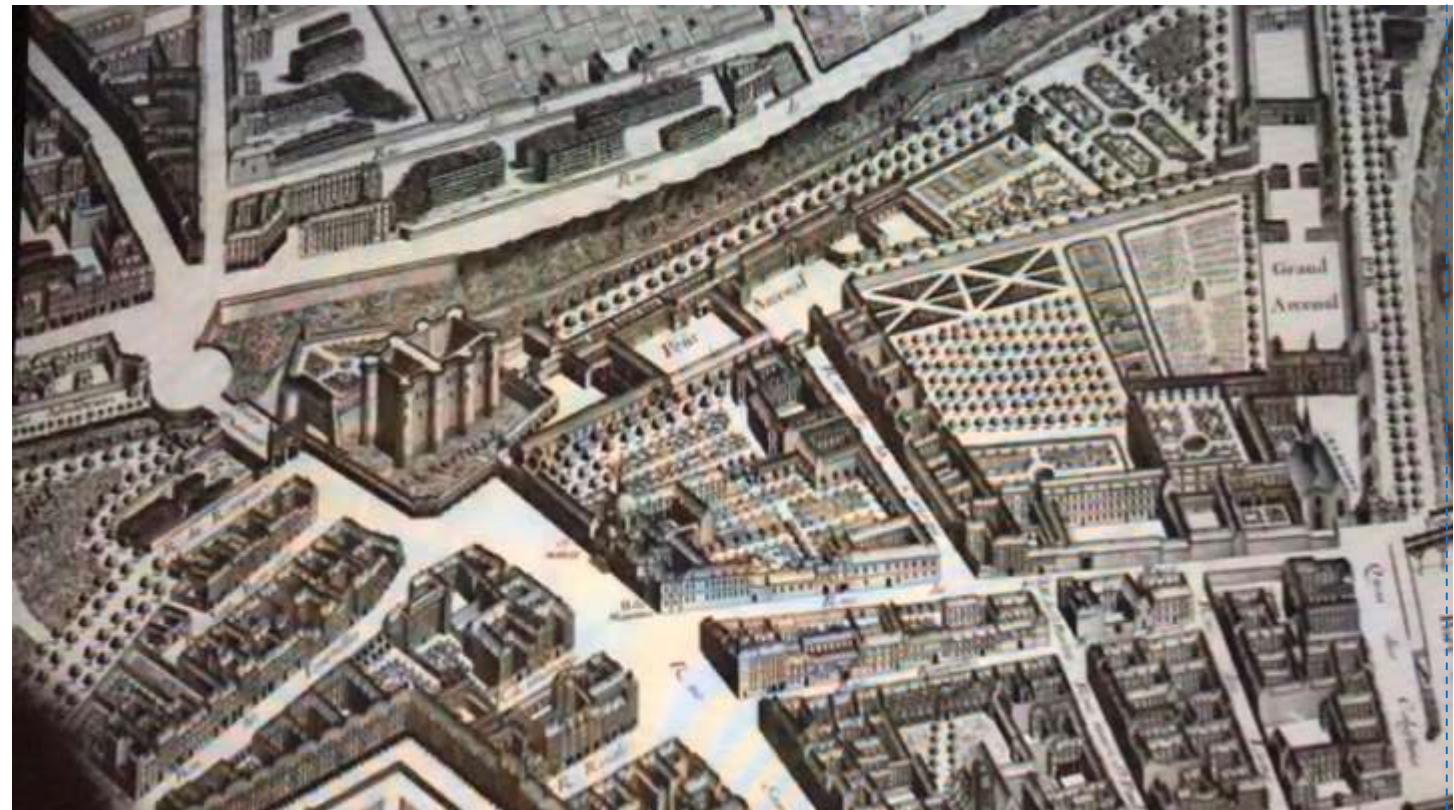


Cette ville est en assez grande  
distance en rivière de Paris.  
En peu de temps et en peu de peine  
Qui de toutes n'ont pas été

## The rapid expansion of Paris in the 17<sup>th</sup> century

The Bastille: a clear divide between  
the wealthy aristocratic *Le Marais*  
& the densely populated working-  
class *Faubourg St-Antoine*

A symbol of growing social  
inequalities







The Bastille as a **symbol of oppression**

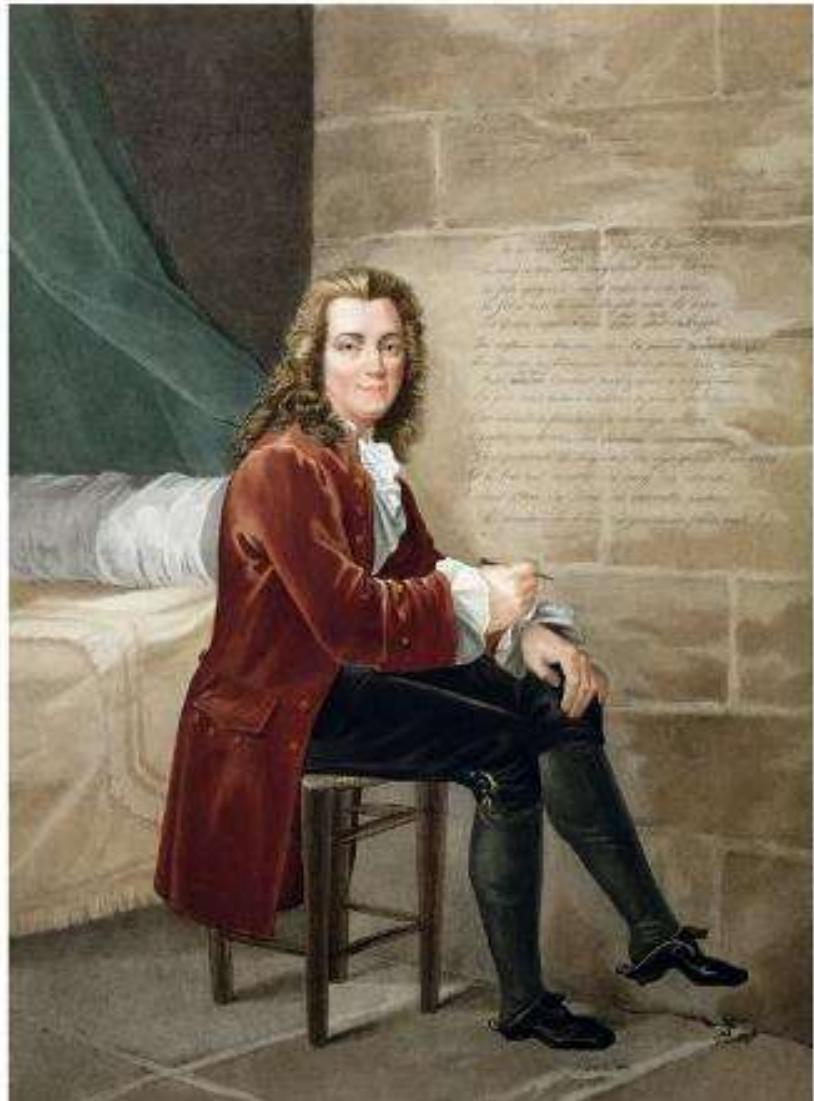
The Bastille: an aristocratic prison as the object of popular hatred

The imposing and threatening aspect of the Bastille

A potential military role to quell popular uprisings

The **Enlightenment**: growing criticism towards royal despotism





Voltaire (22) at the Bastille (1717) for  
his satirical attacks on politics and  
religion

A **dramatized account** of his stay at  
the Bastille

A second stay in 1726

Voltaire offered a pension of 1 200  
livres upon his release (for good  
behavior)



Fewer prisoners (less than 20 yearly)  
under Louis XV

Good living conditions at the Bastille:  
spacious rooms and amenities

Marquis de Sade imprisoned  
at the Bastille in 1789

Arrived with elaborate  
wardrobe & some 130 books

The Bastille mostly used by  
aristocratic families to get rid  
of their “undesirable”  
members



**Louis XVI: a prison reform**

Torture formally abolished in  
1780

*Lettres de cachet* to include a  
timeframe

No one to remain imprisoned  
without a trial





1785: the affair of the diamond necklace

A fake countess, a naïve & deluded cardinal & an innocent queen

15 August 1785: the cardinal sent to the Bastille

Public trial (May 1786): Rohan absolved



The Bastille in the 1780's: no longer any strategic importance

Il-adapted as a prison

1782-1789: a limited number of prisoners (7 in July 1789)

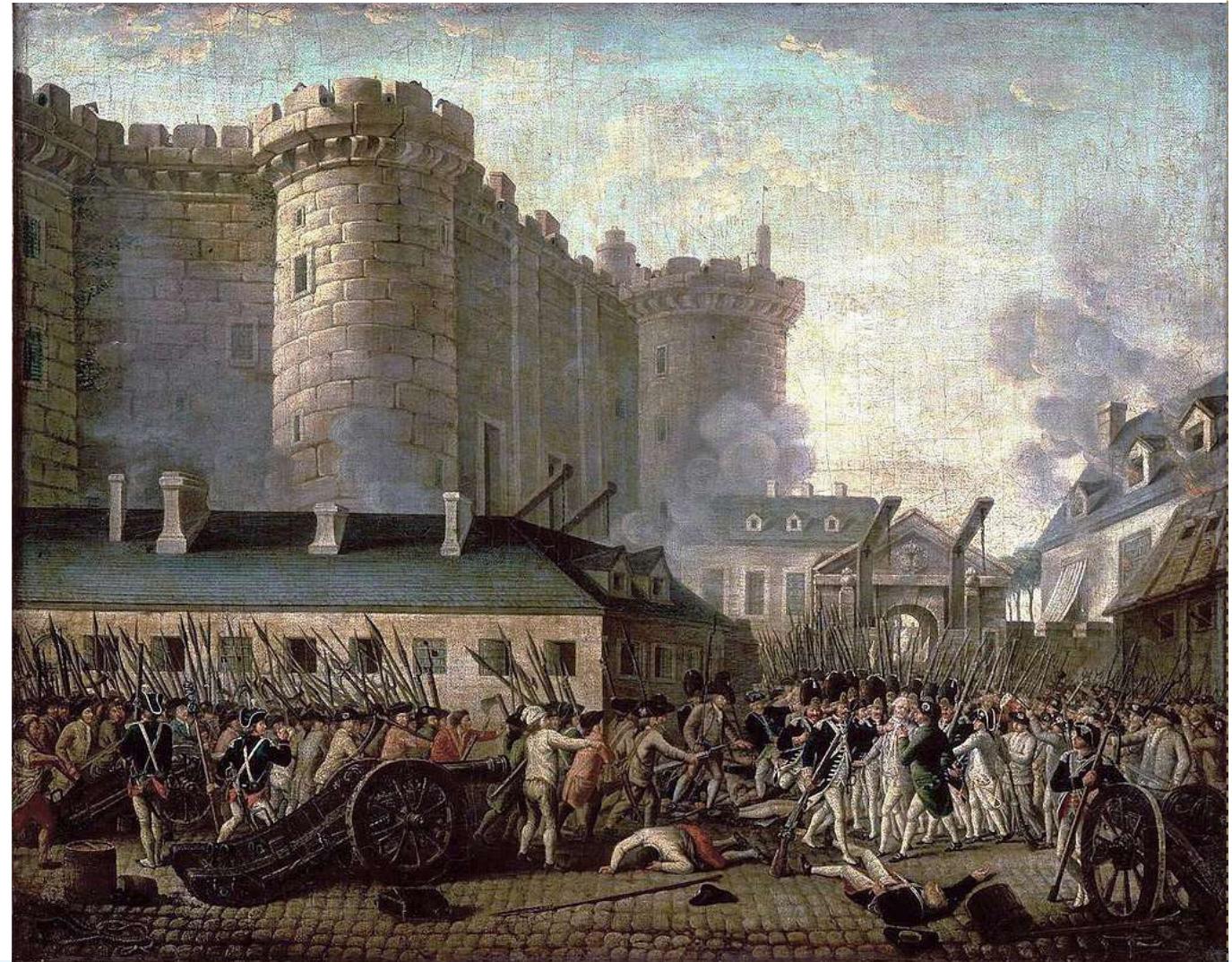




## The crisis of the spring of 1789

The outbreak of the French Revolution: a combination of three major crises:

1. Political crisis
2. Economic crisis
3. Financial crisis



A debt crisis spiralling **out of control** – The King's finances in a **desperate** state

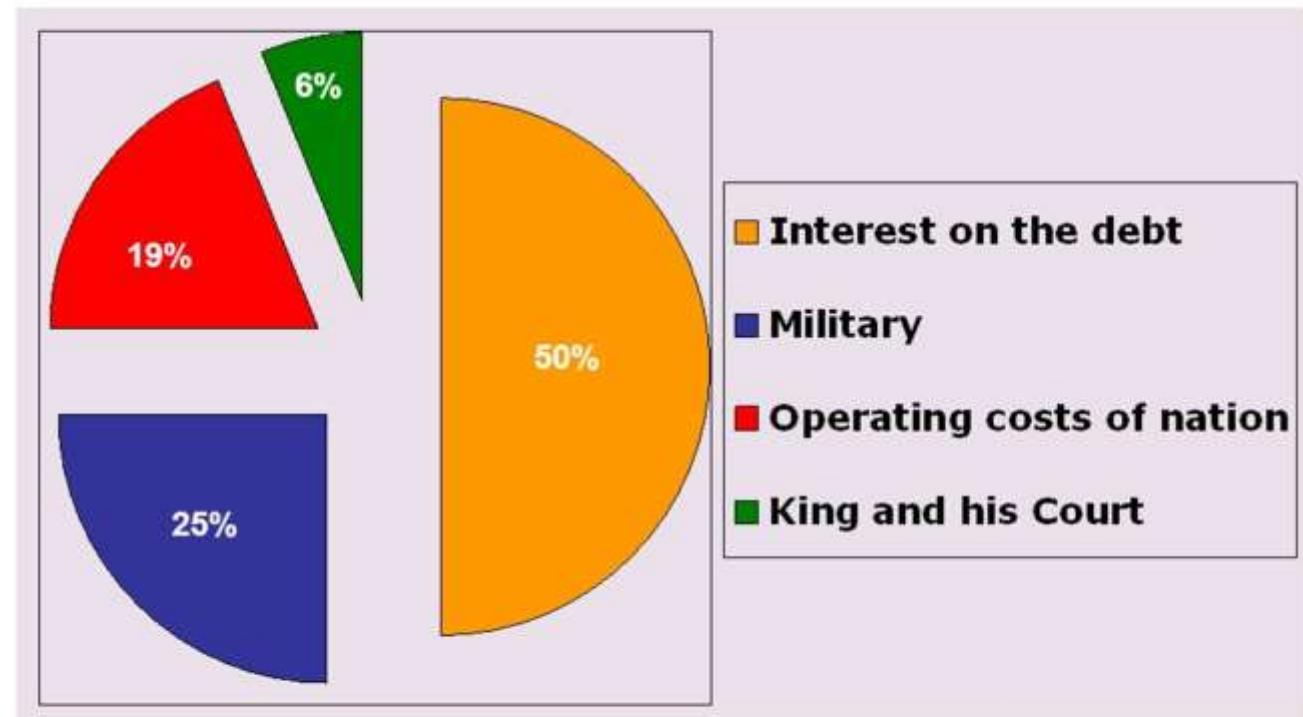
France's involvement in the American War of Independence (1776-1783)

Victory over Great Britain = **renewed prestige**

BUT

A heavy financial burden for France (1.3 billion livres)

**By 1788 the national budget broke down like this**



**Jacques Necker:** A dangerous policy  
of **borrowing** rather than raising  
taxes to finance the war effort in  
America



**Charles Alexandre de Calonne**  
(Controller-General of Finances)  
1783-1787

**SPENDING** (through more borrowing) to  
bring confidence back

The State on the verge of  
bankruptcy by 1786

Fiscal reform urgently needed

Calonne's "*plan d'amélioration des finances*": a revolution

A **new land tax** payable by **ALL**  
landowners: the end of fiscal exemptions  
to the nobility, clergy and crown lands



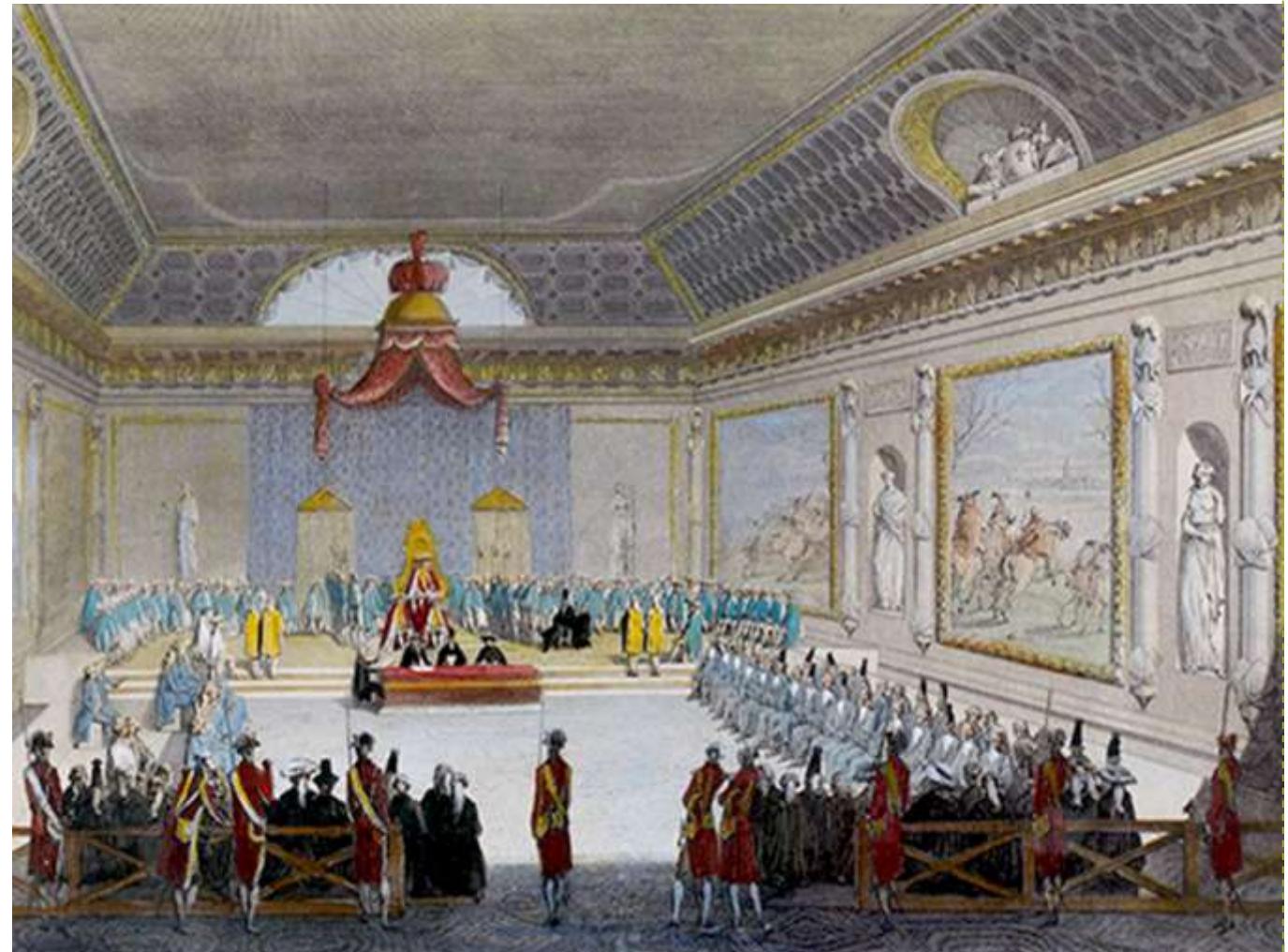


The King fully supported Calonne's plan:  
*"I have not slept all night, but it is of pleasure"*

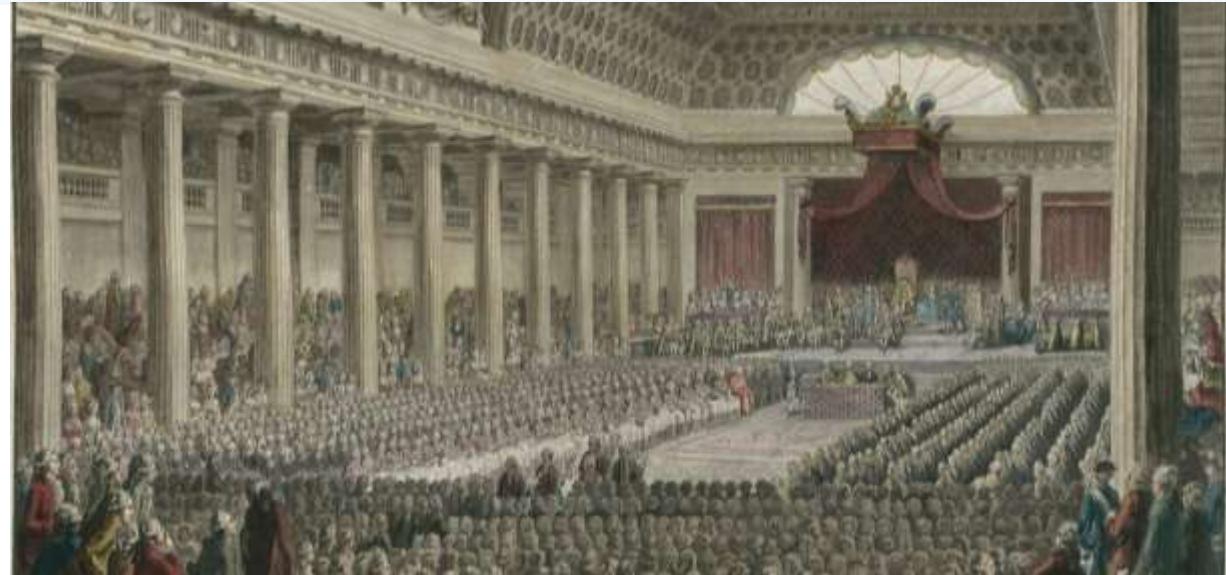
Calonne's plan rejected as  
*"contrary to the rights of the  
nation"* by the aristocracy &  
the clergy

Louis XVI accused of...  
despotism!!!

Riots in Paris: the people  
supported the magistrates... who  
seek to preserve their privileges!



May 1789: the *Estates General*  
(consultative assembly composed of  
deputies representing the **three social**  
categories)



4 June: the death of the Dauphin  
The king irresponsive: vacuum of power

17 June 1789: the Third Estate proclaims itself **National Assembly**

The King's powers severely curtailed

20 June 1789: **the Tennis Court Oath**

Oath “*not to separate, and to reassemble wherever circumstances require, until the constitution of the kingdom is established.*”

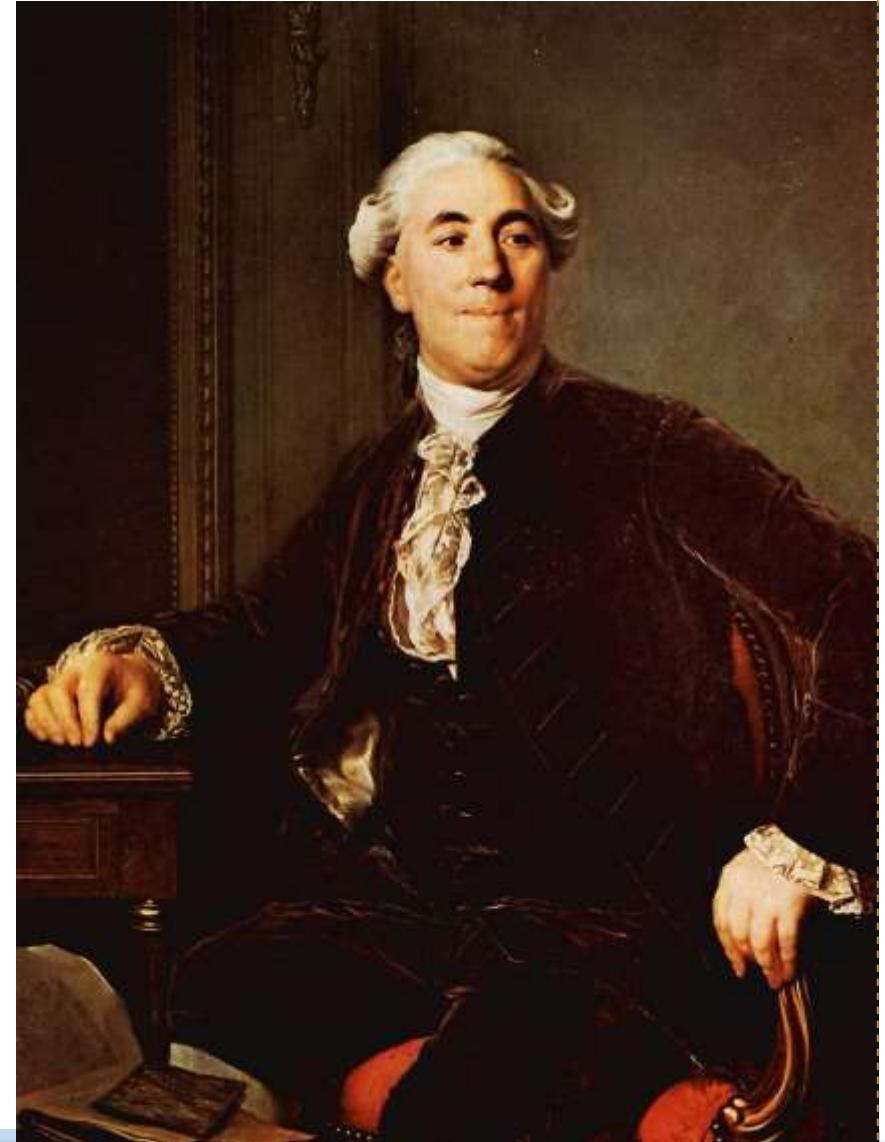




11 July: Necker dismissed

Outrage in the streets of Paris (belief  
he was the only one to save France  
from economic collapse)

Shift towards a more conservative  
government (concentration of  
troops)





14 July: the storming of the  
Invalides (weapons)

Where to find the gunpowder:  
the Bastille

The primary reason behind the  
storming of the Bastille:  
gunpowder NOT to “the  
symbol of despotism”













Pierre-François Palloy





## Revolutionary propaganda

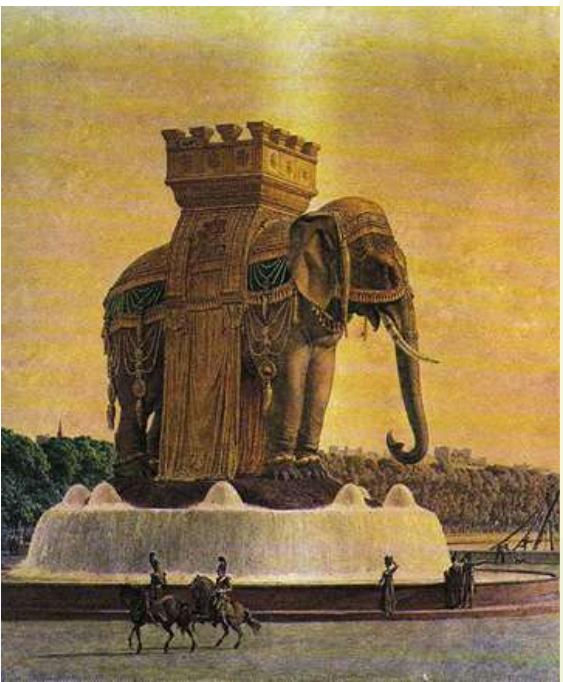
The storming of the Bastille ended up legitimising the revolution

*The heavens blessing the revolution and the constitution*



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

## An elephant for the place de la Bastille



The Bastille remained a strong symbol of the French Revolution



## The Revolution of 1830

A monumental column to  
commemorate the Revolution of  
1830



The fall of Charles X and the  
commencement of the “July  
Monarchy” of cousin Louis-Philippe



