

# La chartreuse de Champmol

## The Charterhouse of Champmol

### PHILIPPE LE HARDI'S INNOVATION

*A Burial Place for the Dukes of Burgundy.* In 1384 Philippe le Hardi (the Bold), Duke of Burgundy since 1363, founded a Carthusian monastery (Charterhouse) at the gates of Dijon on a site called Champmol. In his Will, dated 1386, he asked to be buried there dressed in the Carthusian habit.



JEAN DE MARVILLE,  
CLAUS SLUTER AND THEIR WORKSHOP,  
*the Portal of the Church of Champmol*  
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The new religious institution bears the mark of its founder: sculptures on its portal portray the Duke and Duchess, accompanied by Saint John the Baptist and Saint Catherine with Saint Anthony, the patron saint of the Duke (fig. 1), presented to the Virgin and the Trinity (to whom the Charterhouse is

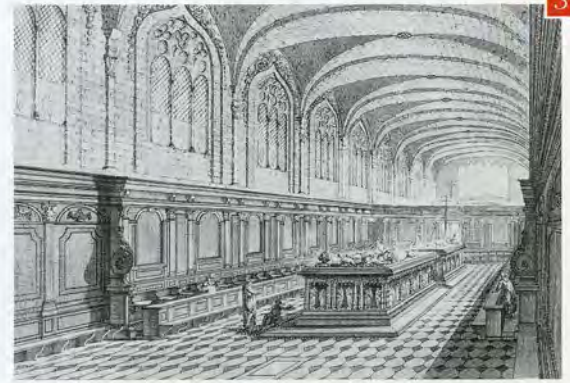
dedicated). The Charterhouse embodies the Duke's piety but also signifies the arrival of the new dynasty in Dijon. The Capetian Dukes were traditionally buried at Cîteaux; establishing the burial place of the Dukes of Burgundy at Champmol signified the advent of a new regime.

*The building site from 1377 to 1410.* For over twenty years the Duke spent a very considerable fortune on the building and decoration of the Charterhouse, donating to it valuable lands which assured its prosperity until the Revolution. In 1388 the church was consecrated and the first monks moved in. The building campaign came to an end only at the end of the century (fig. 2).

The church was a single nave wood-vaulted structure with a pentagonal apse. Two false transepts lodged, on the north the two-



*Map of the Charterhouse of Champmol circa 1760,*  
DIJON, ARCHIVES MUNICIPALES  
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NÉE AFTER LALLEMAND,  
*the Interior of the Church of Champmol before the Revolution, engraving*  
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storied oratories of the Duke and the Duchess, on the south the sacristy and the treasury. The décor of the ducal oratory was especially sumptuous. The funeral monuments of Philippe le Hardi and Jean sans Peur stood in the choir (fig. 3).

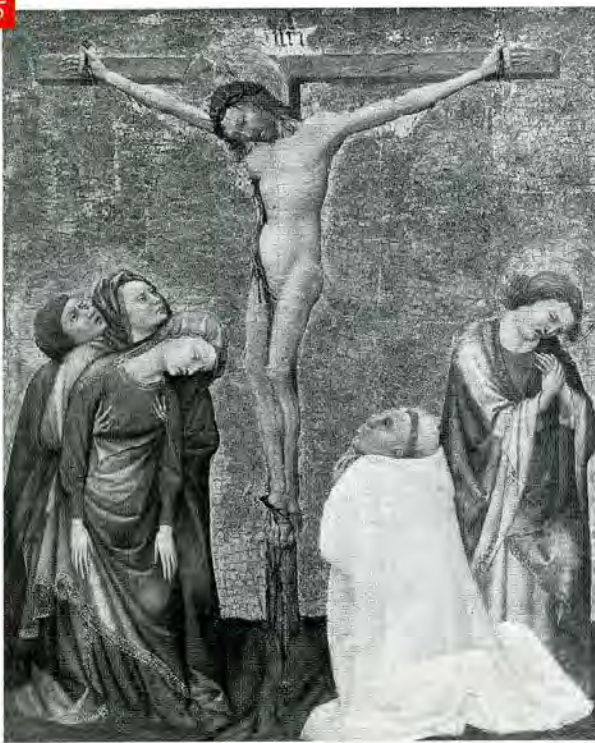
As in every charterhouse, the convent included a small cloister within the communal living quarters and the apartments of the prior, and a large cloister surrounded by the monks' cells. At its centre was placed the Well of Moses, serving both as fountain and as Calvary cross (fig. 4).



CLAUS SLUTER, CLAUS DE WERVE AND THEIR WORKSHOP,  
*The Moses Well*  
© JEAN-LUC DUTHU, GENERAL INVENTORY

*Artistic activity.* Philippe le Hardi, who was born into the royal family of France, brought workmen from Paris to work in Dijon. By his marriage to Marguerite de Flandres he had come into contact with the artistic world of the rich cities of the Lowlands. Architects, sculptors, painters, carpenters, metal workers, stained-glass makers, tile-makers from Burgundy, France, Flanders and even Spain, collaborated in the Charterhouse building and decoration for over a generation. It was one of the main centres of Western art in the years 1380 to 1410.





JEAN DE BEUMETZ,  
*Charterhouse Calvary Cross*  
© PARIS, MUSÉE DU LOUVRE

At the beginning, the work was directed by Drouet de Dammartin, assistant to Raymond du Temple, architect of Charles V's Louvre and brother of Guy de Dammartin, architect of the Duc de Berry.

The sculpture workshop gathered some artists from Paris, but more from the north of France and the Lowlands. After Jean de Marville, its director from 1372 to 1389, the Dutch sculptor



HENRI BELLECHOSE,  
*Saint Denis Altarpiece*  
© PARIS, MUSÉE DU LOUVRE

Claus Sluter put the stamp of his powerful personality on the whole workshop. The statues in the portal of the church as well as those of the Moses Well are his creations. In his team were others from the Lowlands; amongst these, Claus de Werve, his nephew, took over responsibility for the workshop from 1406 to 1439.

The painters who worked on the Charterhouse were also from the Lowlands and the north of France : Melchior Broederlam worked in Flanders on the great altarpieces of the Charterhouse.\* Jean Beumetz (*fig. 5*), Jean Malouel and Henri Bellechose (*fig. 6*), with a group of talented assistants worked in situ on the painted décor, on the altarpieces and on the polychroming of the statues.

The woodcarver, Jean de Liege, sculpted doors, wood panelling, choir stalls and seats of the officiants (*fig. 7*). The metal worker Colart Joseph de Dinan created in gilded copper a lectern in the form of an eagle, chandeliers, and the angels that surround the altar. The tile maker, Perrin de Longchamp, fashioned square varnished tiles in red and yellow representing hunting scenes, and Jehan de Gironne, from Spain, created blue and white ones with the arms of Burgundy and Flanders (*fig. 8*). The stained glass was the work of Robert de Cambrai.



JEAN DE LIÈGE,  
*Chair back with the Coat of Arms of Jean sans Peur*  
MUSÉE DES BEAUX-ARTS DE DIJON

#### THE CHARTERHOUSE IN THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

*The Dynastic Sanctuary.* Philippe le Hardi's successors were loyal to his establishment : Jean sans Peur (the Fearless) was buried there in 1419, Philippe le Bon (the Good) in 1474. In 1433, Philippe le Bon and Isabelle of Portugal founded two extra cells for Carthusian monks in recognition of the birth of the future Charles le Téméraire (the Bold) (*fig. 9*), whose portrait was commissioned by Philippe from Jean de Maisoncelles, to be placed in the church choir next to those of the first two Dukes, thus confirming the Charterhouse in its rôle as dynastic monument.

*Enrichment.* During the reigns of Jean sans Peur and







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BURGUNDY, AFTER 1433,  
*The Calvary Cross at the Charterhouse*  
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Charterhouse grew in artistic importance. The Tomb of Jean sans Peur by Jean de la Huerta, completed by Antoine Le Moiturier from 1443 to 1470, was the work of the team employed at the monastery. As for the rest of the many artworks from Flemish and Burgundian hands (figs. 11 and 12) which came to adorn the Charterhouse during these years, they were no longer the work of a resident workshop.

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JAN VAN EYCK,

FROM THE SIXTEENTH TO THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

*The historic site.* Until the Revolution the Charterhouse kept alive the memory of the Dukes of Burgundy. The Kings of France and their heirs all confirmed the privileges granted the Charterhouse and nearly all made visits there (fig. 13), as did the queens descended from the House of Austria. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, scholars became interested in the tombs. Their history was the focus of attention, but the figures of the mourners also aroused curiosity and the Moses Well was judged a “tasteful” monument considering its Gothic origin.

*The decorative renewal.* The Charterhouse withstood remarkably well the rigours of war in the area : the Swiss siege of 1513 caused only minor damage and the Wars of Religion less. Real peril for the medieval treasures came rather from the desire to modernize the décor between 1770 and the Revolution. A complete reconstruction of the buildings was undertaken and the church remodeled. Many medieval works in poor condition or which seemed outmoded were replaced by others in the latest style: the altarpieces of Saint Denis and of Saint George (figs. 6 and 11) were replaced by works of Van Loo\*.



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BURGUNDY, MIDDLE OF THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY,  
*Saint George Altarpiece*  
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THE REVOLUTION

*The sale of the land.*

As it did to so many religious institutions, the Revolution put an end to the monastery, and its possessions were seized. The monks left the premises on April 20, 1791. On April 30, 1791, those possessions which had not been pre-empted for the Nation were sold. On May 4, 1791, the property was bought by Emmanuel Crétet (1747-1808), later Minister of the Interior under the Empire and Count of Champmol.

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BURGUNDY, MIDDLE OF THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY,  
*The Presentation at the Temple*  
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JACQUES-JOSEPH LÉCURIEUX,  
*François I<sup>er</sup> at the Tomb of Jean sans Peur at the Charterhouse of Dijon*  
© MUSÉE DES BEAUX-ARTS DE DIJON

The new proprietor transformed the former convent into a private country dwelling. In 1792, he had the church torn down as well as most of the buildings with the exception of those he kept for his own use or those which made his garden more attractive (the portal with its statues, the Moses Well, the oratory tower, and a few other structures) (fig. 19).

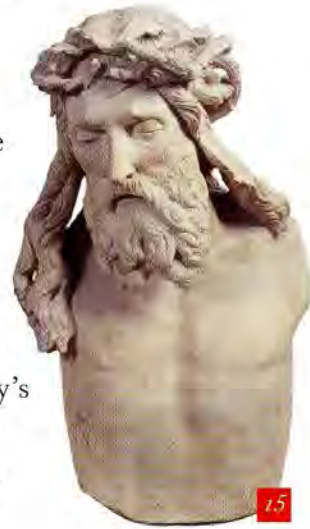
*The works preserved.* In May and June 1792, the tombs\* (and the coffins of the Dukes) were transported to the Cathedral of Saint-Bénigne; the altarpieces\* and part of the panelling were relocated there. Several of the modern paintings, those of Van Loo for example, were installed in the museum.

#### THE NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURIES

*The Tombs and the Altarpieces saved.* The architect Claude Saint-Père began restoration of the tombs in 1819, and they were installed in the Guard Room, part of the new museum, in 1827. The Curator, Févret de Saint-Mémin, had restored and installed the two altarpieces, *The Crucifixion* and the *Saints and Martyrs*.

*Salvaging the remaining vestiges and archaeological work.* In 1833, following the report of Févret de Saint-Mémin to the Commission for Antiquities, which alerted the authorities to the imposing remains of the Charterhouse, the Department of the Côte d'Or bought the property in order to use it as an insane asylum. The architect, Pierre-Paul Petit, built a hospital on the site of the great cloister, and a chapel where the original church once stood.

The portal and the Moses Well were declared National Monuments in 1840 and the Well was restored. In 1842, excavations at the foot of the monument revealed vestiges of the Calvary, lost in the collapse of the roof of the building which had housed it since the seventeenth century. The bust of the Calvary's Christ, found in a niche in a house on the rue Condorcet, entered the Archaeological Museum (fig. 15).



CLAUS SLUTER,  
*Bust of Christ from the Calvary*  
Cross on the Moses Well  
© DIJON, MUSÉE ARCHÉOLOGIQUE

Excavations in 1951–1952 brought to light fragments of varnished tiles and of the statues from the Oratory. Subsequent to another refurbishing of the Well in 1946, the restoration work begun at the very end of the twentieth century should open new perspectives on this unique monument.

*The historians' contribution.* Archival references to the Charterhouse of Champmol are abundant. Since their publication by Cyprien Monget (1898–1905), the careful account books for the construction work have permitted art historians to gauge the precise significance of this artistic centre. These studies, bearing on the nature and chronology of the work, on the names of the artists, on the nature of the remaining works, and on locating a number of works now scattered which originally were there, have brought to life this extraordinary example of princely patronage at the end of the Middle Ages.

\* See the sheet which treats this theme.

