

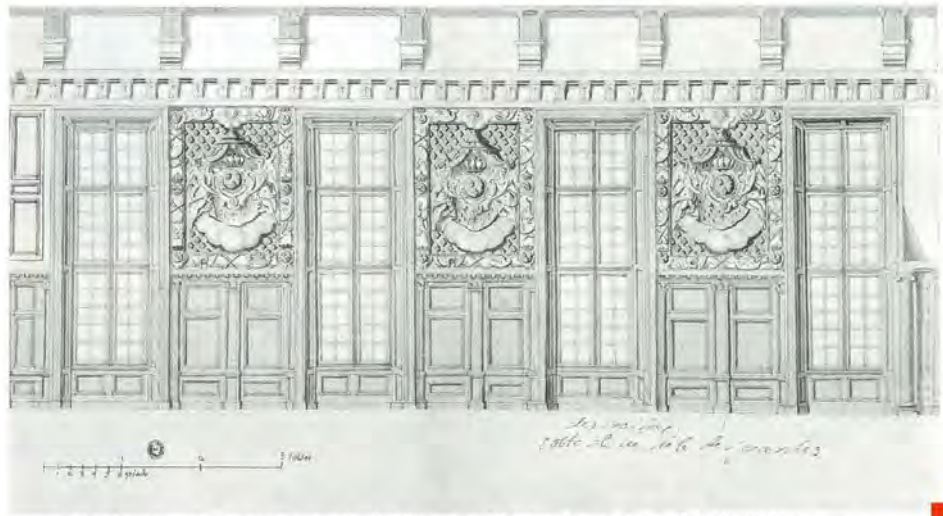
La salle des Gardes

The Guard Room



The Guard Room, 2004

DIJON, MUSÉE DES BEAUX-ARTS © MBA DIJON, PHOTO: F. JAY



JULES HARDOUIN-MANSART, Project for the decoration of the Guard Room as seen from the windows, 1700
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THE GUARD ROOM in Dijon's Musée des Beaux-Arts (fig. 1) is one of the city's most sought-out curiosities for tourists. To cite an extract from the newspaper *Progrès* dated August 11, 1899 at the time the Guard Room was under renovation: "When will our hall housing the ducal tombs reopen for the benefit of an admiring public? Everyone is asking... Dijon's hotel managers will tell you that visitors from London, Paris or Germany en route to Italy have quite a different idea of museums, and what they most want to see in Dijon is the Guard Room."

It's true, it is exceptional – a vast hall (9 m high ceiling, 18 m long, 9 m wide) which served as the Guard Room of the palace erected in the mid 15th century by Philip the Good with an enormous flamboyant gothic fireplace. It is equally exceptional for containing the tombs of the dukes Philip the Bold and John the Fearless, both stunning samples of 14th-15th century Burgundian sculpture. Originally conceived for the Charterhouse of Champmol, the sepulchres of the first two dukes eventually found a suitable resting place in the palace of the third.

Architect Claude Saintpère, who had the tombs restored, intended them to be placed in the church of Saint Bénigne. However Charles-Balthazar Févret de Saint-Mémin, museum curator from 1817 to 1852, wished to have them installed in the Guard Room which, since 1820, had been specifically integrated in the museum to house a monumental funerary sculpture dedicated to native 18th century poet Crébillon. The Guard Room flooring, located directly above the vaulted arches of the lower gothic room which

serves as the Marriage Hall for the Municipality of Dijon, was sturdy enough to bear the tremendous weight of the marble and alabaster slabs of the ducal tombs.

The Great Hall, traditionally named the "Guard Room" has undergone a series of transformations ever since the Governors of Burgundy, or King's representatives in the province, occupied the palace which had become the "King's apartments". After 1503, when a fire destroyed the upper stories of the palace, the great fireplace and ceiling were entirely reconstructed. In 1548 the musicians gallery was rebuilt with King Henri II's emblems sculpted in wood, to celebrate his grand entry into Dijon. In 1711, the Great Hall was redecorated with cornices, wood carvings and tapestries bearing the symbolic fleur de lys (fig. 2) to give a classical tone in harmony with the rest of the renovated palace. The room, and fireplace especially, were restored by Févret de Saint-Mémin in a neo-gothic style.

Only in 1827 were the ducal tombs installed in the Guard Room and soon after complemented by the gilt wood-sculpted altarpieces from the Charterhouse of Champmol. In a France that had just begun to re-appreciate its medieval heritage, long scorned if not largely annihilated during the Revolution, the Hall of the Dukes of Burgundy was on the contrary acclaimed as exemplary piece of architecture. Both Victor Hugo and Stendhal paid their respects to the Great Hall. Since then it has become a reference point for tourists and municipal dignitaries, as testi-



HUBERT CLERGET, *Visit of His Majesty the Emperor to the tombs of the Dukes of Burgundy in Dijon, 1861*, DIJON, MUSÉE DES BEAUX-ARTS © MBA DIJON, PHOTO: F. JAY

fied by the watercolour depicting the visit to the tombs in 1861 by Emperor Napoleon III and Empress Eugénie (fig. 3).

The historical dimension of the Great Hall didn't end with the Middle Ages. A series of busts and statues were installed of "illustrious Burgundians": Crébillon, Bossuet, Rameau, Buffon to name only a few of the most celebrated magistrates, members of Parlement, clergymen, distinguished literary, artistic and scientific figures or political personalities comprising the "Pantheon of Dijon". In 1830, Théodore de Jolimont wrote a "Description of Dijon" in which he mentions "the Hall, whose structure and decoration date from the 15th and 16th centuries, particularly reserved for an assemblage of old and new works of art relating to the history of famous personalities of the city of Dijon or of Burgundy, constitutes a museum in itself, an excellent initiative that should be imitated." In 1847 Auguste Mathieu made a fine rendering in oil of the Hall during the Romantic era in which one recognizes the ducal tombs, the illustrious Burgundian statuary figures, and a selection of important paintings of the museum collection (fig. 4).

Numerous 19th and 20th century photographs in the museum archives attest to a variety of wall arrangements over time. One image from 1894 (fig. 5) clearly depicts the fashionable taste for a densely hung assortment



ANONYMOUS, *The Great Hall of the Museum of Dijon in 1894*



The Guard Room, c. 1894, DIJON, MUSÉE DES BEAUX-ARTS, © MBA DIJON, DOCUMENTATION

ment of works. Between 1895-1900, the ducal palace underwent vast renovations prompted by the Society of Historical Monuments. Stuccoed in red and graced with neo-gothic wood panelling, the Hall reopened in the summer of 1900 totally empty, and the public received it with cold indifference. To further the error, the museum's paintings were densely hung in successive rows as they had been previously.

Only at the end of the Second World War, between 1945-1951, Pierre Quarré, head curator from 1938 to 1979, was able to successfully restructure the museum. As a result, the Great Hall was re-inaugurated in 1945 with an entirely different presentation than in 1939 (fig. 8): light coloured stucco, elimination of neo-gothic wood and iron work and most importantly a coherent selection of works relating to the era of the dukes.



The Guard Room in 1900
DIJON, MUSÉE DES BEAUX-ARTS, © MBA DIJON, DOCUMENTATION



The Guard Room after 1901
DIJON, MUSÉE DES BEAUX-ARTS, © MBA DIJON, DOCUMENTATION

At this time it was also appropriately re-anointed the "Hall of the Dukes of Burgundy". Curiously, however, this name which had originally been proposed by Fèvret de Saint-Mémin, has never stuck, not even after Pierre

Quarré's intervention. The "Hall of the Tombs" is often heard but "The Guard Room" is the most commonly used thus highlighting the ever-prominent role of the Palace in the museum.



The Guard Room in 1945