

Archaeological Study Tour to Northern Burgundy



St-Germain, Auxerre

31 May to 6 June 2012



Itinerary

Thursday, 31 May	Leave Embankment, travel via Channel Tunnel to Reims
Friday, 1 June	Sens, Dijon
Saturday, 2 June	All day in Dijon
Sunday, 3 June	Abbaye de Pontigny, Auxerre, Avallon
Monday, 4 June	Flavigny-sur-Ozerain, Semur-en-Auxois, Voulaines-les-Templiers, Bure-les-Templiers
Tuesday, 5 June	Abbaye de Fontenay, Châtillon-sur-Seine, Reims
Wednesday, 6 June	Béthune, travel via Channel Tunnel to Embankment

Cathédrale Notre-Dame, Reims



The original church on this site was the basilica where Clovis was baptized by Saint Remi, bishop of Reims, in 496 AD. A later cathedral was built on the same site, but it burned down in 1211.

The present Reims Cathedral was completed by the end of the 13th century, with the west front added in the 14th century, but based on 13th-century designs. In the meantime, the nave was lengthened to make room for the crowds that attended the coronations.

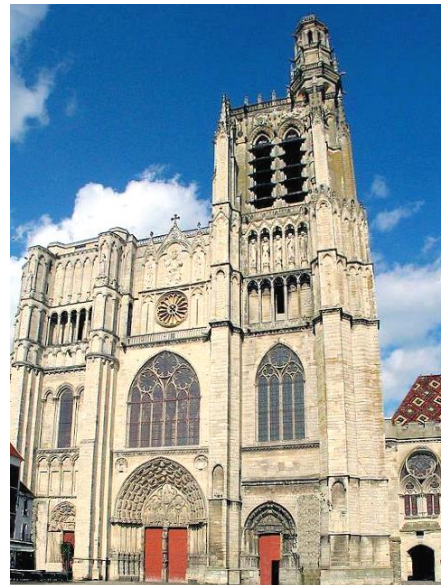
In 1875 the French National Assembly voted to fund extensive repairs of the façade and balustrades. This façade is the finest portion of the building, and one of the most perfect masterpieces of the Middle Ages

Cathédrale Saint-Étienne, Sens

Sens was a place of considerable importance in the 12th century, seat of the "Primate of Gaul" and superior to the bishopric of Paris.

The Cathedral was originally founded in 972 and rebuilt mid-12th century. It is an important example of the early Gothic style, and had a direct influence on the Gothic rebuilding of the east end of Canterbury Cathedral in 1175, as William of Sens was the master mason for the work.

The link between Canterbury and Sens was forged when Thomas Becket spent part of his time in exile at Sens. The treasury in Sens has a remarkable set of Becket's ecclesiastical vestments on display in the treasury.



Sens Cathedral is noted more for its solidity than beauty of proportion or richness of ornamentation. The west front is pierced by three portals; that in the middle has good sculptures, representing the Parable of the Ten Virgins and the story of St Stephen. The right-hand portal contains twenty-two statuettes of the prophets, which have suffered considerable damage. The portal on the north side of the cathedral is one of the finest examples of French 16th-century sculpture; that on the south side is surmounted by magnificent stained-glass windows.

Dijon

The Roman fortress of *Divio*, set on the road from Lyon to Mainz, was sacked, pillaged, burnt and rebuilt a number of times. Even so, it was an area of relatively minor importance until 1015, when Robert I, Duke of Burgundy, chose it as the capital of his Duchy.

Dijon Old Town

The best remaining parts of the old town of Dijon are centred around the Palais des Ducs et des États de Bourgogne. Most of this fine complex of buildings is used as the Hôtel de Ville, although the eastern part houses the Musée des Beaux-Arts.

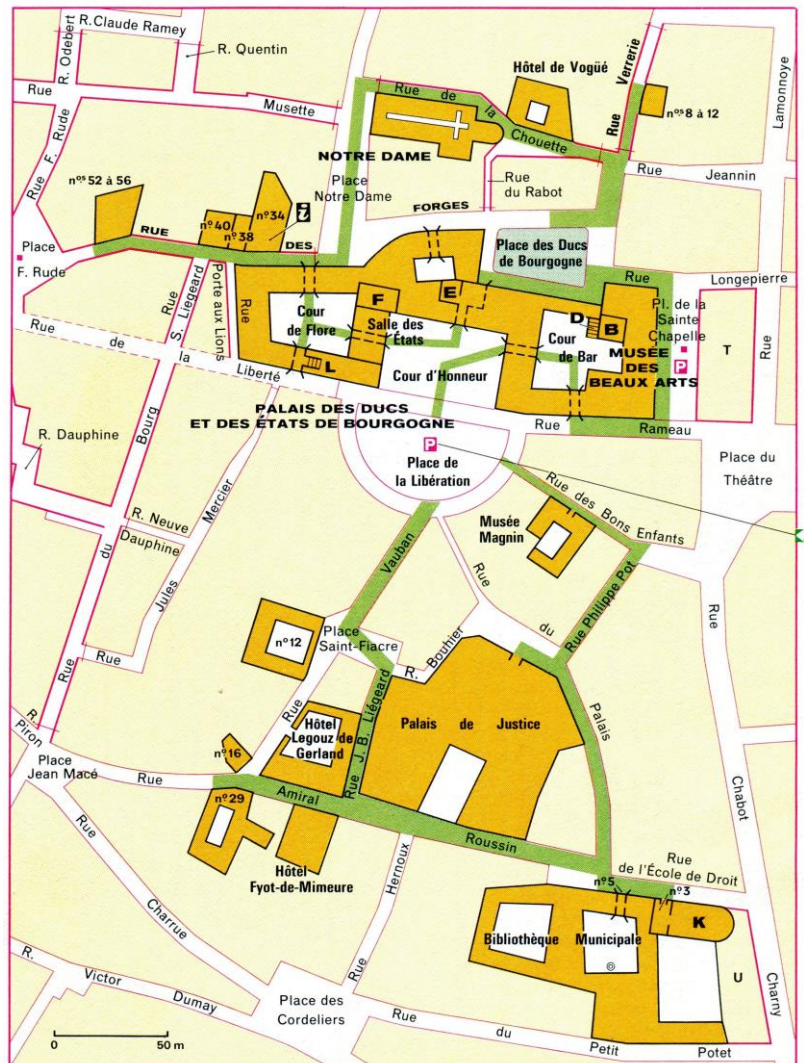
The streets surrounding the Palais contain some fine timber-framed buildings, especially parts of the Rue des Forges and the Rue Verrerie.

The Église Notre-Dame is a very good example of 13th century Burgundian Gothic. The west front has a three bay porch, two arcaded galleries, three tiers of gargoyles and two bell turrets above the towers.

The bell turret on the right houses the famous Jacquemart clock brought from Courtrai by Philip the Bold in 1382.

The overall effect of the interior of the church is harmonious, with a graceful triforium of small tapering columns. The glass in the south transept is 13th century. The chapel to the right of the choir houses the 11th century statue *The Black Virgin*.

The whole of the old town has a considerable charm and contains many interesting buildings of both medieval and post-medieval style.

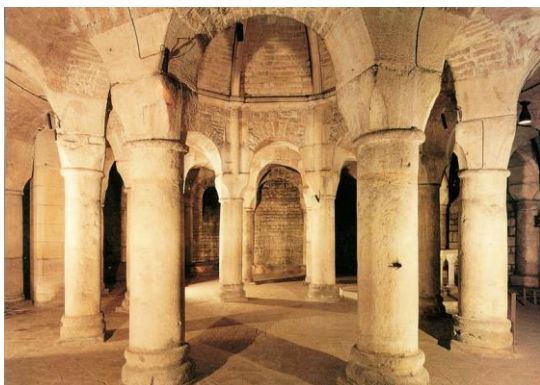


Cathédrale St-Bénigne, Dijon

The first church on this site was built in the early sixth century, over what was believed to be the site of the sarcophagus of Saint Benignus, the crypt being completed by 535. This building became the centre of a monastic community and in 871 it was re-founded as a Benedictine abbey and the church was restored.

In 989 Bruno, Bishop of Langres, requested Mayeul, Abbot of Cluny, to send monks to re-settle the abbey, which had grown decadent, as a Cluniac house. In 990 William of Volpiano was appointed the new abbot. In 1002, construction of a new Romanesque church designed by William, was started. The new church had a circular crypt which had a rotunda at ground level, linking the west and east parts of the church. This church was probably the inspiration for Wulfric's Octagon at St Augustine's Abbey in Canterbury.

In 1137 a fire destroyed most of the town of Dijon and damaged the monastery and its church. The repaired building was consecrated by Pope Eugene III in 1147.



In 1272 the crossing tower collapsed onto the crypt, smashing some of the supporting columns of the rotunda. Construction of a new Gothic church started in 1281 and, although the building was almost complete in 1300, work did not finish until 1325. The rotunda was destroyed during the French Revolution. It was excavated in the 19th century and the lower part was reworked as a crypt.

Abbaye de Pontigny



In 1114 twelve monks together with Abbot Hugues de Mâcon were sent from Cîteaux to found a monastery on the banks of the River Serain. The place chosen was Pontigny, a large clearing situated on the boundaries of three bishoprics (Auxerre, Sens and Langres) and three provinces (Auxerre, Tonnerre and Champagne). Thus from its very beginning, the abbey benefited from the protection of six different masters. A medieval saying claimed that three bishops, three counts and an abbot could dine on the bridge at Pontigny, each remaining in his own territory!

The abbey of Pontigny gave refuge to three important English clerics: Thomas Becket was here from 1164 to 1170 after incurring the anger of Henry II; Stephen Langton was here from 1208 to 1213 after a disagreement with King John, and Edmund Rich (St Edmund of Abingdon) lived here in exile for several years until his death in 1240. Edmund Rich was canonised seven years after his death, and became a popular local saint.

The existing church dates from 1150, when Thibault the Great, Count of Champagne, gave the monastery the means to build a new church, as the original building had become too small for the monks. The church was built in transitional Gothic style and is very large - 117 metres long and 52 metres wide - almost as large as Notre-Dame in Paris.

Cathédrale St-Étienne, Auxerre

The majority of the cathedral was built between 1215 and 1233 above an 11th-century crypt. The east end was constructed in the 13th century, but work continued on the nave and transepts during the 14th and 15th centuries.

Construction continued until the 1540s when the cupola, built in Renaissance style, that takes the place of one pinnacle on the completed tower, was completed.

Abbaye de Saint-Germain d'Auxerre

The Abbey of Saint-Germain d'Auxerre was a Benedictine abbey dedicated to its founder Saint Germain of Auxerre, the bishop of Auxerre, (died 478).

The abbey was very important during the Carolingian period, and the earliest surviving remains date to the 9th century.

During the Revolution, several bays of the nave were demolished and the secularized abbey was used as a hospital. The former nave extended beneath the present forecourt.

In 1927, beneath the 17th-century frescoed plaster walls of the crypt, were discovered ninth-century wall frescoes, the only surviving large-scale paintings of this date in France.

In the late twentieth century the abbey's residential and service buildings were remodeled as a museum.



Avallon

The fortified town of Avallon sits on a granite promontory between two ravines. During the medieval period, Avallon was one of the 'keys' to burgundy, but when its military role ceased to exist, Louis XIV sold the ramparts to the town.

Much of the ramparts, and the principal gates still survive.



Église St-Lazare

The collegiate church of St-Lazare was largely rebuilt in the first half of the 12th century to accommodate the pilgrims who came to visit the relics, supposedly of Lazarus, which were presented to the church in the early 11th century by Henry the Great, Duke of Burgundy.

The west façade of the church has suffered badly as the result of the fall of the north tower in the 17th century. This caused the loss of the central tympanum and the mutilation of the south tympanum, although some idea of the quality of the original sculptures can be seen from the richly carved arches.

Flavigny-sur-Ozerain

Flavigny is built on a rock, surrounded by three streams. It was the site of an abbey from the 8th century, and became a fortified town in the later medieval period. Parts of the ramparts and three of the gateways survive.

Église St-Genest

This church was built in the 13th century and was altered in the 15th and 16th centuries. The church houses two important pieces of medieval sculpture: the early 15th century 'Angel of the Annunciation' in the last chapel on the right in the nave; and a 12th century Virgin and Child in the south transept.

Ancienne Abbaye de St-Pierre

The conventual buildings of the old abbey have been converted into a factory where they produce the Anis de Flavigny - aniseed-flavoured sweets for which the town is famous.



The crypt of the Carolingian church survives, and in 1960 excavations revealed a hexagonal chapel with an ambulatory beyond the crypt.

Semur-en-Auxois

The picturesque fortified town of Semur-en-Auxois is situated on the top of a granite cliff overlooking a deep ravine with the River Armançon running along the bottom. In the 14th century, Semur became the strong point of the Duchy of Burgundy when the citadel was reinforced with ramparts and eighteen towers. The town was divided into three parts, each with a perimeter wall. Sitting on a rock spur, overlooking the town, was the keep, reputedly impregnable. It had a sheer drop to the Armançon



valley to the north and the south, and it was flanked by four enormous round towers: The Golden Orle Tower; The Gehenna Tower; The Prison Tower and the Margot Tower. The keep was destroyed in 1602, but the ramparts survive.

Église Notre-Dame

Although this church has had a lively history (founded in the 11th century, rebuilt in the 13th and 14th, altered in the 15th and 16th and restored in the 19th century by Viollet-le-Duc), it is still an important example of Burgundian Gothic. The narrowness of the nave and the absence of a triforium emphasizes the height of the main arcade and the vaults.

Voulaines-les-Templiers and Bure-les-Templiers

As their names suggest, both of these small villages once belonged to the Knights Templar, however, little remains visible from that period.

The Ource valley was once the only opening in the forest massif of the eastern Châtillonnais region. This valley commanded the route from the Champagne lands of the Bishop of Langres in the north to the domains of the Duke of Burgundy in the south.

This area was, therefore an important route way and, with its huge forests, a source of considerable wealth.

As early as 1130, the Knights Templar established their first Burgundian house at Bure, later extending their possessions in the area to Terrefondrée, Recey, Leuglay and Voulaines.

At Voulaines-les-Templiers a substantial tower is all that remains from the Knights Templar commandery that was here.

Bure-les-Templiers had an important commandery, from which the "square courtyard" still survives. The church has an unusual double nave and a Templar tombstone.



Abbaye de Fontenay

The Abbey of Fontenay, in its isolated valley, is an excellent example of a 12th century Cistercian abbey. After St Bernard had become Abbot of Clairvaux, he founded three monastic settlements within a short



space of time: Trois-Fontaines near St Dizier in 1115; Fontenay in 1118 and Foigny in Thérache in 1121. The original establishment of Fontenay was close to Châtillon-sur-Seine; Bernard arrived in late 1118 with 12 monks and founded a hermitage there. By the time that he had returned to Clairvaux, he found that the monastery had attracted so many new monks that it was now far too small. The monastery was therefore moved to its present site in the valley.

The Abbey continued to prosper until the 16th century, when it still had over 300 monks. However, the religious wars brought about a rapid decline, and the site was sold off during the Revolution and became a paper mill. In 1906 new owners demolished the parts which had been added for the mill, and carefully restored the existing medieval fabric. In addition to the church, chapter house, monks' dormitory and the cloisters, the bakery, prison and forge are also well preserved.

Tonnerre

The Tonnerrois used to be famous for its wine. In 1360 the invading English drank 3,000 butts at Tonnerre towards the end of the Hundred Years' War. At this time, the vineyards stretched to join Chablis and the Auxerrois, but by the beginning of the 20th century these vineyards had largely died out. In the second half of the 20th century, wine production began on an increased scale once again, mostly centred around Épineuil, which is now particularly famous for its red wines.

L'Hôtel Dieu

The medieval hospital at Tonnerre was founded in 1293 by Marguerite de Bourgogne, the widow of Charles d'Anjou, the brother of Louis IX (St Louis). As such it was built 150 years before the more famous Hôtel Dieu in Beaune. The west façade is 18th century, but behind that is the medieval Salle des Malades. This vast hall originally held 40 beds with a connecting gallery at window level above them.



At the east end of the hall is the tomb of Louvois, Louis XIV's minister of war. A 19th century tomb of Marguerite de Bourgogne replaces the medieval one that was destroyed in the French Revolution.

The chapel holds a fine Entombment, dating to 1454, after the school of Claus Sluter, and considered one of the masterpieces of medieval Burgundian sculpture.

Béthune

Béthune has old, Vauban style fortifications and is set in a plain in mining country. It is also a river port, linked to the River Lys and the River Deule by the Aire canal.

The town suffered considerable damage during the First World War but the main square with its gabled Flemish-style houses and 30m-high belfry overlooking the surrounding countryside has now been restored.

