

## Glossaire

**Canting arms:** arms which refer to the name of their owner, in this instance the heart and the seashell which refers to Saint James (Jacques in French) of Compostella.

**Cul-de-lampe:** a conical socle on a wall, shaped like the base an ancient lamp.

**Drip course:** wall moulding to gather and carry away rainwater.

**Galley:** a medieval ship with sails and oars used for trade and warfare.

**Mantelpiece:** a projecting structure above the hearth of a fireplace.

**Steward of the Royal Expenditure:** in the great princely and royal households, the Steward ensured precious objects, furniture, and clothing were correctly supplied and stored. Jacques Cœur extended the scope of this position, opening his store to the military and civilians, and acting as a pawnbroker.

## Practical information

Average length of visit: 1 hour

Guided tours in French.

Tours suitable for disabled visitors.



### Bookshop-Giftshop

The guide to this monument is available in the 'Itinéraires' collection in 3 different languages, in the bookshop-giftshop.

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## Jacques Cœur

### The king's man (1440-1450)

Jacques Cœur was born into a family of wealthy traders in Bourges who worked for the Duke of Berry. He started his career tending to his father's business, then his marriage to Macée de Léodepart in 1418 enabled him to operate in the Bourges mint. After a voyage to the Near East in 1432 he took the initiative of creating a flotilla so that the king would no longer need to call upon Italian intermediaries for trade with the East. This provided the foundations for France's trading presence in the Mediterranean, and brought him widespread fame. In 1438 King Charles VII appointed Jacques Cœur Steward of the Royal Expenditure\*. The crowning moment of his social ascension came in 1441 when he was ennobled. He acquired considerable influence via his numerous missions and positions, such as master of the Paris mint.

### The fall from grace of a royal favourite (1451-1456)

The resentment of those in debt to him and financial problems led to his arrest in 1451, and subsequent sentencing. It was only due to the intervention of his friend, Pope Nicholas V, that he avoided the death penalty. He took refuge in Rome in 1454 where the new pope, Calixtus III, entrusted him with the command of a crusade against the Turks, during which he died on the island of Chios in 1456. But Jacques Cœur had already become a legendary figure, and in 1461 the poet François Villon sang of his destiny in *Le Grand Testament*.

\* *Explanations overleaf.*

## The 'grant'maison'

Jacques Cœur, at the peak of his career, wished to have a house that was worthy of his success. He bought a prime plot, against the Gallo-Roman ramparts, in 1443.

### An ambitious building programme

His dwelling is virtually unrivalled and it marks a turning point in the history of medieval civil architecture. To use the words of Jacques Cœur, it had to be 'big, wide, tall, and magnificent'. It was a matter of building a fortified house modelled on the castle of Jean, Duke of Berry, at Mehun-sur-Yèvre. But behind the fortifications, there for show, it had to meet its owner's requirements for socialising, pomp, private life, and comfort.

### Building works

These started in 1444. The project was a complex one and required constant supervision. Jacques Cœur, who was often away from Bourges on business, delegated this task to his steward and to his wife, who lived there from 1457 onwards. The building work progressed rapidly, for when he was arrested in 1451, the king's commissioners in charge of drawing up an inventory of his goods found the building abundantly furnished and with a large amount of silverware.

# Jacques Cœur palace

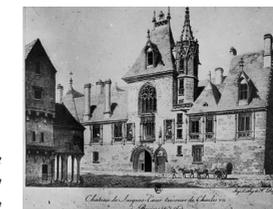
A masterpiece of Flamboyant Gothic civil architecture

### A sumptuous private residence

Jacques Cœur, Steward of the Royal Expenditure\* to King Charles VII (1422-1461)\*\* and a merchant with a huge network of trading counters, had a private residence built in his native town between 1443 and 1451 to reflect his social rank. The building rapidly became famous as one of the finest known examples of private urban architecture. It was confiscated by the king in 1451 after Jacques Cœur was arrested, then returned to the family in 1457. The palace subsequently passed through various hands. Colbert, its last private owner, sold it to the town of Bourges in 1682.

### A public building

The building became the town hall before being used as a tribunal. The interior decor was extensively damaged when the building was transformed into a law court between 1820 and 1830. It was included on the first list of historic monuments in 1840, and underwent several



*The palace in the early 19th century*

restoration campaigns. It was bought in its entirety by the State in 1923 and entrusted to the Monuments historiques, who continued to restore it.

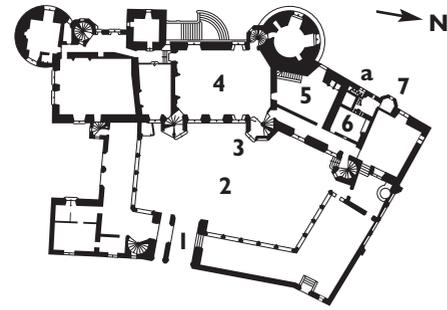
\* *Explanations overleaf.*

\*\* *Dates of beginning and end of reign.*

100 ANS

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ground floor



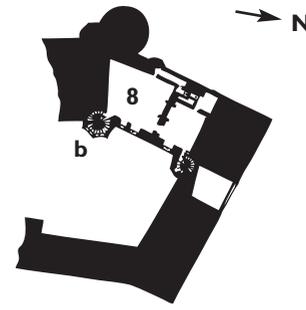
The layout of the rooms keeps the public and private living areas separate and reveals great attention to domestic comfort. The sumptuous decor attests to Jacques Cœur's influence and success. The ornamentation says much about the master's family and domestic circle, combining the Gothic repertoire (plant decoration and miniature architecture), royal symbolism (lilies), elements of Jacques Cœur's canting arms\* (seashells and hearts), and realistic depictions of everyday life.

### The facade giving onto the street

This facade has two wings framing a tall entrance pavilion that houses a chapel.

- 1 The entrance pavilion**, a monumental structure, presents a host of features honouring King Charles VII. The tympanum above the atrium window has a large lily flanked by two hearts. Until 1792 there was an equestrian statue of the king on the stone dais just above. Sculpted portraits of Jacques Cœur and his wife are thought to have graced the two fake windows on either side of the dais. A staircase tower to the left of the entrance pavilion has a balustrade bearing one of the owner's mottos: "À vaillants cœurs rien d'impossible" (For a valiant heart nothing is impossible).

entresol



There are 17 small sculpted individualised heads where the small columns intersect with the drip course\*.

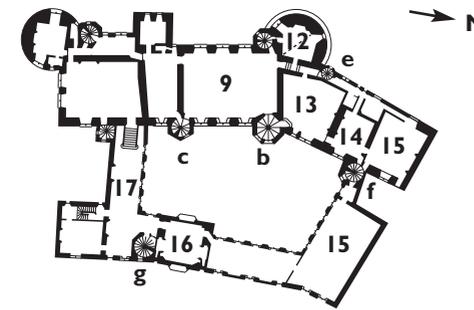
### The inner courtyard

- 2 The facade of the main building** has three polygonal staircase towers. The one on the left leads to the side doors of the staterooms, whilst the one on the right leads to the kitchens, as indicated by the sculpted tympanum, and to the cellars and attics.
- 3 The central tower** houses the main entrance to the building, and is the most ornate. Its sculpted panels depict exotic trees, people going about their daily life, and perhaps Jacques Cœur and his wife at the top.

### The interior

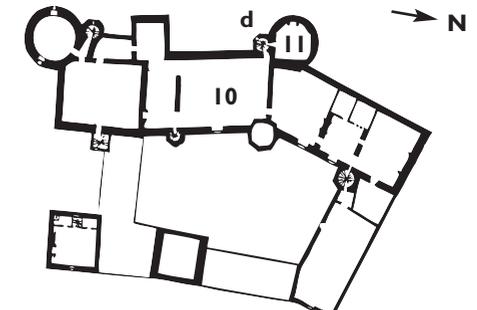
- 4 The banqueting hall**, a large state reception room, has a platform where musicians could play. The decoration presents various emblems of Charles VII: rose bushes, bunches of irises, and polychrome traces (of red, white and green, the king's colours) on the mantelpiece\* of the monumental fireplace.

first floor



- 5 The pantry** is where the dishes were placed before being served in the banqueting hall, and may be seen through the serving hatch in the wall.
- 6 The little kitchen** is in fact a room for washing and heating. A hearth provides underfloor heating for the adjacent room.
- 7 The steam-room** shows the great attention paid to questions of comfort and hygiene. Go up via staircase **a**.
- 8 The entresol** is a small, private room which was probably used in winter, when it was easy to heat due to its low ceiling. Go up via staircase **b**.
- 9 The ceremonial hall** was extensively modified in 1822 when an audience chamber for the Royal Court was installed. The trial of the leaders of the 1848 uprising took place here, including that of Barbès, Blanqui and Raspail. Go up via staircase **c**.
- 10 The attics** of the dwelling have roof timbers in the shape of the upturned hull of a boat.
- 11 In the treasury room**, a cul-de-lampe\* depicts a scene from the medieval legend of Tristan and Iseult. Go back down to the first floor via staircase **d**.
- 12 The councillor's chamber**, in the keep, still has a mantelpiece\* on the fireplace bearing the motto of Jacques Cœur. This room was turned into a meeting room for the town council at the end of the 17th century.

second floor



- The grisaille paintings by Michel Longuet depict the festivities in honour of the birth of Charles, Duke of Berry, the grandson of Louis XIV, in 1687. Cross corridor **e**.
- 13 The 'galley'\* room** is decorated with a sculpted galley on the tympanum above the door and a ship on a stained-glass window, in reference to the voyages around the Mediterranean of Jacques Cœur's armed flotilla.
- 14** From **Jacques Cœur's study**, it is possible to see the service corridor making each room wholly independent of the others. Go down via staircase **f**.
- 15 Two galleries** acted as passageways leading to the chapel. The second was also used for entertainment purposes.
- 16 The chapel** still has painted vaulting, restored in 1869 by Denuelle, who also painted the walls. There is an on oratory on either side of the altar for Jacques Cœur and his wife, Macée de Léodepart.
- 17 The last gallery** has two fireplaces with richly sculpted decoration. Go back down to the courtyard via staircase **g**.

\* Explanations overleaf.