John the Fearless
Duke of Burgundy

The Valois dynasty ruled Burgundy for more than a century. The first duke, Philip the Bold, was the youngest son of John the Good, king of France, who bestowed the duchy on Philip in 1363. Philip's marriage to Marguerite of Flanders in 1369 extended the Burgundian state well into the territories that now comprise Belgium and the Netherlands. Their son, John the Fearless, succeeded Philip in 1404. Each successor added lands to their domain, making the Valois dukes among the most powerful rulers in the Western world. They built numerous palaces and religious foundations, dazzling their contemporaries with displays of their wealth. Beyond satisfying the dukes' personal interest in the arts, this splendor was a way of advertising their power and establishing their prestige. It gave rise to one of the most fascinating artistic and cultural centers of the late Middle Ages.

John the Fearless inherited a position of enormous influence from his father, but his efforts to maintain it brought him into conflict with Louis d'Orléans, the powerful brother of Charles VI, king of France. The rivalry between these two princes dragged Burgundy into a civil war. John the Fearless had Louis d'Orléans assassinated in 1407, and was assassinated in turn in 1419 by the heir to the French throne, the future Charles VII. John was succeeded by his son, Philip the Good, who ruled until 1467. Philip's son, Charles the Bold, also known as Charles the Rash, was the final duke of the Valois dynasty. After his death in 1477, the Burgundian duchy was absorbed into the kingdom of France and the Hapsburg territories of the Holy Roman Empire.

After an original from the end of the 14th century, *Portrait of Philip the Bold*, 16th century, oil on wood, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dijon, on loan from the Musée National du Château de Versailles

Portrait of John the Fearless, c. 1430, oil on wood, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dijon, on loan from the Musée du Louvre, Paris

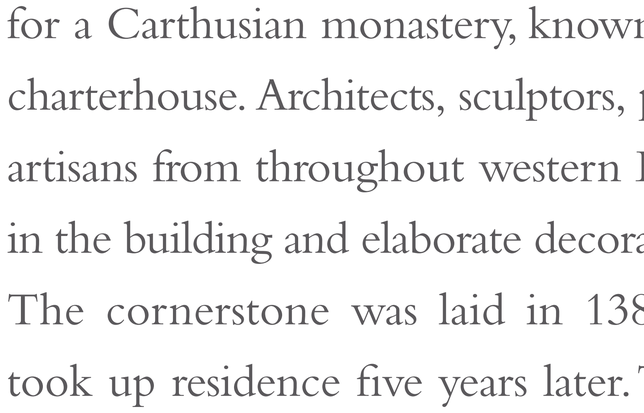
After an original by Rogier van der Weyden, *Portrait of Philip the Good*, 15th century, oil on wood, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dijon, on loan from the Musée d'Art et d'Industrie, Saint-Étienne

After an original from the end of the 15th century, *Portrait of Charles the Bold*, 16th century, oil on wood, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dijon, on loan from the Musée Calvet, Avignon

The Charterhouse *of Champmol*

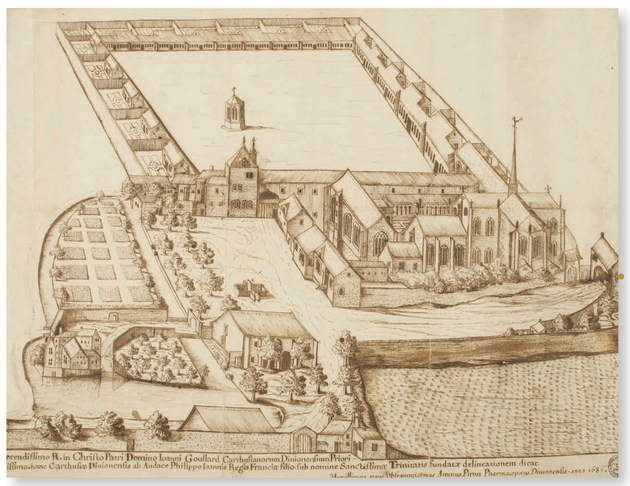
Like any great ruler, Philip the Bold, the first Valois duke of Burgundy, was expected to display his religious devotion and make arrangements for his final resting place. He also wished to proclaim the founding of his new dynasty in Dijon, the capital of his duchy, by creating a grand religious foundation. Philip, like many rich and powerful sovereigns at the end of the 14th century, favored the Carthusian order, founded by Saint Bruno in 1084.

The Carthusians practiced a particularly austere form of monasticism. Each monk lived alone in a separate dwelling, where he prayed, worked, ate, and slept. The monks came together only for daily Mass and for communal activity on Sundays and holidays. The austerity of their reclusive life, and their devotion to silence, contemplation, and penitence, offered the prince the best guarantee of their prayers' effectiveness for himself, his family, and his duchy.



François Denis Née, French, 1732–1817, after Jean-Baptiste Lallemand, *The Interior of the Church of Champmol before the Revolution*, engraving, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dijon

In 1378, Philip the Bold acquired the domain of Champmol, west of Dijon, and began to make plans for a Carthusian monastery, known as a *chartreuse*, or charterhouse. Architects, sculptors, painters, and master artisans from throughout western Europe participated in the building and elaborate decoration of Champmol. The cornerstone was laid in 1383, and the monks took up residence five years later. The final structures were probably completed about 1410, when the tomb of Philip the Bold was installed. It was then that his son, John the Fearless, commissioned his own tomb modeled on that of his father. A number of unfortunate circumstances, including the sculptor's death, postponed the completion of the monument, and it was not placed alongside the first tomb until 1470, fifty-one years after John himself had died.



Aimé Piron, French, 1640–1727, *View of the Charterhouse de Champmol*, 1686, Bibliothèque Municipale, Dijon

Royal Funerals in the *Late Middle Ages*

At the end of the Middle Ages, the ceremonies surrounding the funerals of kings and princes were elaborate events. The funeral might extend for days, even months, if one had to transport the body back to its place of burial, as was the case for John the Fearless who died far from Dijon. The services involved funeral processions, liturgical celebrations, and numerous participants. Even the humblest inhabitants of Dijon had roles to play.

The funerals of the dukes of Burgundy were lavish ceremonies that included the presentation of the symbols of the deceased duke's power—his banners, weapons, and horses—as well as black drapes and canopies installed throughout the church's interior, golden draperies over the coffins, and candles and music in abundance. Hooded black cloaks were distributed to all participating laypersons, from the members of the duke's family to pages and grooms, while the members of the secular and regular clergy wore the garments of their stations. Carthusian monks wore the order's hooded white robe with side straps.

Class distinctions, normally expressed through dress, were temporarily suspended—the black of mourning reminded all present that death and grief are universal. While the tombs' mourning figures represent only the members of the clergy and the Carthusian monks, they are certainly a reflection of the humanity, emotion, and pageantry that the dukes' services must have offered.

Jean de Marville, ?–1389, Claus Sluter, c. 1360–1406, Claus de Werve, 1380–1439 and their studio, *Tomb of Philip the Bold*, 1381–1410, stone, marble, polychromed and gilded alabaster, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dijon

Sculpture at the *Court of Burgundy*

The architects, painters, and sculptors in the service of the dukes of Burgundy lived in Dijon, where they worked on both the charterhouse of Champmol and the dukes' many residences. Their creations were in the ornate style popular with the French court around 1400, sometimes called "International Gothic." The artists from the dukes' northern territories, though, steered the Burgundian school of sculpture in the 15th century toward a more realistic and powerful treatment of figures.

Claus Sluter, c. 1360–1406, Claus de Werve, 1380–1439, and their studio, *The Well of Moses*, 1396–1405, stone, C.H.S de la Chartreuse, Dijon

The sculpture workshop was led by a series of important artists, the most famous being Claus Sluter. His dazzling technical virtuosity allowed him to create sculptures that are both naturalistic and astonishingly precise. It was most likely Sluter who gave the tomb of Philip the Bold its inventive form, and the influence of his vision is apparent in the mourners' lifelike and emotive character, their elegance, and their physical beauty.

After Sluter's death in 1406, the tomb of Philip the Bold was completed by Claus de Werve, Sluter's nephew, who was soon also asked to create a comparable tomb for John the Fearless. Work was barely begun on the second tomb, however, when de Werve passed away in 1439, leaving it to be completed by the next two directors of the sculpture workshop, Jean de La Huerta and Antoine le Moiturier. These men faithfully followed the artistic precedent established by Sluter and de Werve. The emotional resonance of the Burgundian sculptors' style made these tombs, in their time, not only splendid funeral monuments, but also innovative aesthetic works.

From Monastery *to Museum*

After the French Revolution of 1789, the charter-house of Champmol, like many religious establishments throughout France, was dismantled, resulting in the dispersal of many artworks. Because of their historical value, the dukes' tombs were kept for the nation, but the recumbent figures and other parts of the sculptural decoration were destroyed. Some of the fragments were scattered, while others were put in storage.

Auguste Mathieu, French, 1810–1864, *The Salle des Gardes at the Dijon Museum in 1847*, 1847, oil on canvas, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dijon

In 1819, the Dijonais architect Claude Saint-Père took it upon himself to restore the tombs. He gathered up the pieces held in storage and sought out others that had passed into private hands. Missing portions were re-created. The two tombs were finally reassembled in the Salle des Gardes, the former banqueting hall of the palace built by Philip the Good, by then part of the city's museum. The new display opened in 1827, and during the 19th century became one of Dijon's most celebrated tourist attractions. Though the tombs of the first two dukes are no longer housed at the monastery of Champmol, there is no doubt that they found a worthy setting at the Musée des Beaux-Arts, where they are preserved to this day.

In the early 20th century, after it became clear that the order in which the mourners were placed was inaccurate, the correct placement was reestablished from 18th-century drawings. Scholars also located some of the missing mourners in private collections. More recently, the tombs were thoroughly cleaned in a major conservation campaign between 2003 and 2005, and some areas of polychrome (the delicate painted decoration on the alabaster sculptures) were restored.

These photographs show a Mourner figure in natural light (left) and under ultraviolet light (right), revealing the original decorations invisible to the naked eye. (Photo in ultraviolet light by Jean-Pierre Bozellec, LRMH)