

A pictorial story of the Passion and Resurrection of Christ

The rood screen

This work, sculpted in stone, is named after “*Jube domine benedicere*”, “Please bless me Lord”, the words uttered during mass by the deacon as he bows before the officiant before the reading of the Gospel. By extension, the structure separating the nave (which was open to the faithful) and the choir (reserved for divine worship) was called the jube, or rood screen. Erected c. 1250, the rood screen, depicting the Passion and Resurrection of Christ, was used as one would a picture book, to teach the faithful laity who remained outside the choir. It was 18 metres wide and 6.80 metres high. It was originally painted and had inlaid pieces of glass, some of which are still visible. The sculptures were beheaded or destroyed during the siege of the city by the Protestants in 1562. In 1758, the canons* decided to get rid of it to enable the faithful to take part more easily in worship. Between 1850 and 1917, some 480 components from the upper part, the frame support and vaulting were found. They show a very large number of traces of polychrome work.

Glossary

Bay: an opening bordered by two vertical supports.

Canon: a cleric working for the cathedral.

Cenotaph: a monument erected to the glory of the dead which does not contain any remains.

Crypt: a vaulted, underground chapel beneath a church.

Cul-de-lampe: a protruding part of a wall which bears a load.

Deambulatory: a gallery for walking around the choir.

Oculus: a small circular opening.

Rose window: a round flower-patterned window.

Weeping statue: a funereal sculpture depicting a mourner.

Practical information

Guided tour only of crypt: 45 minutes.

Go-as-you-please visits to the tower included with crypt tickets. All-in-one tickets available for the crypt, cathedral tour and Jacques Cœur Palace.

Tours accessible to groups of disabled visitors on request. 🙋🙋

Centre des monuments nationaux
Cathédrale de Bourges
18000 Bourges
tél. 02 48 65 49 44
fax 02 48 24 75 99

www.monuments-nationaux.fr

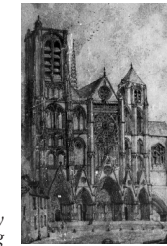
crypt and tower of Bourges cathedral

A Gothic lower church

The cathedral

The construction of Saint Stephen’s cathedral began in 1195 under the impetus of Henry de Sully, archbishop of Bourges. In 1215, the apse, choir and double deambulatory* were finished. The nave and facade were completed between 1225 and 1255 and the cathedral was consecrated in 1324.

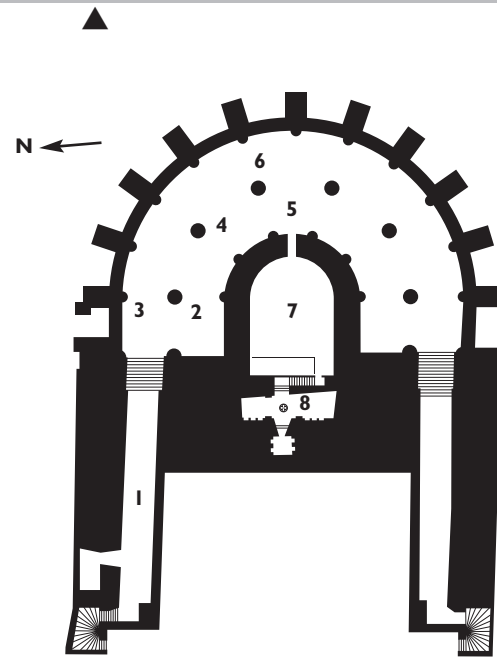
The daring architectural approach by the “Bourges Master” is unique in the history of cathedrals. Bourges cathedral, unlike the one in Chartres, was not taken as a reference by architects in the early thirteenth century. Due to its exceptional size, St. Stephen’s cathedral is considered to be a high point in Gothic architecture: 118 metres long, 41 metres wide and 37 metres high beneath the vaults in the central nave. There is no transept: the five naves - each with its own outer door - and the double deambulatory are features of the innovative work of the “Bourges Master”. These distinctive characteristics led to it being added to the Unesco World Heritage list in 1992.



19th-century engraving

* Explanations overleaf.

* Explanations overleaf.



The Gothic crypt

This place - not strictly speaking a crypt*, since it is not underground - was built from 1195 on the former ditch outside the Gallo-Roman walls. The size of the new building required a much greater area of land than the earlier Romanesque church it was to replace. To solve the problem of a difference of six metres between the level inside the building and that of the ditch, an enormous basement was constructed under the future choir of the cathedral.

1 The northern gallery, one of two leading down to the crypt*, is the only one open to visits. At the bottom of its cross-ribbed vaults there are a series of sculpted culs-de-lampes*. Jobbers' marks can still be seen on the walls.

The runners on the floor are left over from the old heating system, during the installation of which over 450 fragments of the cathedral's old rood screen were found by chance from 1894 onwards.

The Gothic crypt is set around a central room called the "rotunda".

2 The inner deambulatory has a quadripartite vaulted roof.

3 The outer deambulatory, apart from the straight bays*; has sexpartite vaulting. The crypt* is lit by means of two large windows.

4 A life-size drawing of the rose window* adorning the western facade of the cathedral is engraved on the paving stones: the crypt* was used by the stonemasons as a workshop.

5 The tomb of John, Duke of Berry (1340-1416): the brother of King Charles V, John of Berry was also a great benefactor and collector of precious books including the famous *Très Riches Heures* book of hours. This tomb is the work of the sculptor, Jean de Cambrai, and just one part of the cenotaph* which originally stood in the Holy Chapel that the Duke had built in his Bourges palace between 1392 and 1397, in order to be buried there. This chapel was destroyed in 1757. The lower part of the tomb, which was seriously damaged in the Revolution, was decorated with forty weeping statues*. Here the Duke is dressed in his ermine robe, lying on a black marble table, his feet resting on a chained and muzzled bear, the heraldic animal found on his coat-of-arms. There is a copy of the tomb at the Jacques Cœur Palace. The Duke and his first wife, Joanna of Armagnac, are shown kneeling in prayer.

6 The early fifteenth-century stained glass windows are from the Holy Chapel in the former ducal palace. King David and the prophet Isaiah can be recognised, thanks to the texts written on their phylacteries. It has not been possible to identify the other prophets.

7 The rotunda is the site on which one of the towers in the Gallo-Roman wall stood. It holds the tombstones of the Archbishops of Bourges who have died since the Revolution. To the rear there is a polychrome stone Holy Sepulchre.

This was donated c. 1520 by Canon* Jacques Dubreuil who can be seen kneeling (the only statue which is not in colour) next to his patron saint, the apostle James the Great. Under a Renaissance panelled baldachin the Virgin Mary can be seen, supported by Saint John, the three holy women, and Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea at either end of the shroud on which the body of Christ is lying.

8 The Romanesque crypt beneath the choir in the old cathedral used to house the relics of Saint Stephen, displayed for veneration by pilgrims through the oculus* drilled through the vaulting. A small windowless room at the end of the crypt* used to hold the body of the previous archbishop until the death of his successor.

The north tower (not on plan)

The tower was rebuilt and completed in 1542, having collapsed in 1506. It was nicknamed the "butter tower" due to the way it was funded: exemptions from fasting were granted in return for contributions.

The 66-metre-high terrace is accessible via a staircase with 396 steps and offers outstanding views of the cathedral, the city of Bourges and its marshlands. The lush plains of the Berry stretch out in the distance.

* Explanations overleaf.