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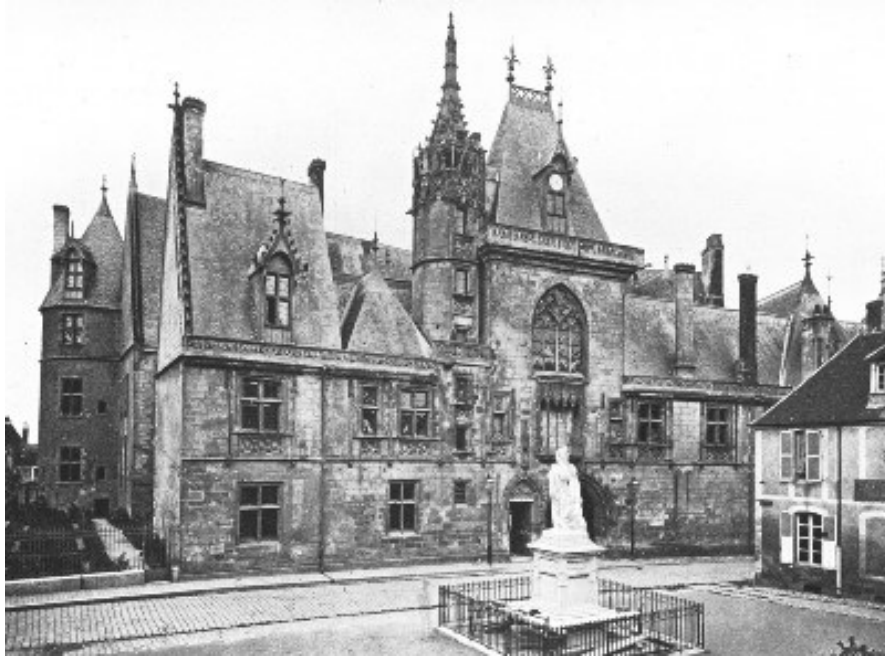
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THE BROCHURE SERIES  
**House of Jacques  
Cœur: Bourges**  
**Gothic Carved Woodwork**  
JULY, 1900

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**PLATE LI**

**HOUSE OF JACQUES CŒUR: FACADE**

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THE  
**Brochure Series**  
OF ARCHITECTURAL  
ILLUSTRATION.

1900.

JULY

No. 7.

**HOUSE OF JACQUES CŒUR: BOURGES.**

The house of Jacques Cœur at Bourges is, to architect and historian alike, one of the most interesting monuments which have survived from the Middle Ages,—interesting to the architect not only for its intrinsic beauty, but from the fact that it is the most complete and important specimen which remains of all the civil buildings in France of the Gothic period, and which, because of the brief time occupied in its construction, exhibits the style of the fifteenth century in unusual purity, and interesting to the historian from its connection with Jacques Cœur, one of the most picturesque and remarkable figures in French history. That Jacques Cœur was the son of a wealthy fur merchant of Bourges, and that he was born in 1395, are the only facts of importance in his eventful career that are known, until he first makes his appearance on the historical stage, under rather disadvantageous circumstances, in 1420. The Dauphin of France, driven across the Loire by the English and their Burgundian allies, had made Bourges the seat of his government, and had appointed a certain Ravant-le-Danois master of the Bourges mint,—a post of some importance. Ravant-le-Danois had taken into partnership (for at this time the coining of public moneys was farmed out to private enterprise) Jacques Cœur, and the two, finding that the profits of the business were not so large as they had expected, presently resorted to illegitimate methods of increasing them; and Cœur appears to have been active in the process of issuing money which was considerably under the standard weight. The fraud was discovered; but the kings of France themselves had been too often guilty of tampering with the coin of the realm for the offence to carry with it any deep disgrace; and, perhaps considering the state of the royal treasury, justice considered itself satisfied with a fine equal to about \$7500. Thereafter, however, Jacques Cœur appears to have cast about for a more honorable channel into which to direct his energy. Enterprising, keen-eyed, determined by some means or other to make his fortune, he naturally turned his face eastward. The trade between Europe and the Levant had never been more active than it was in the early part of the fifteenth century, in spite of the ecclesiastical restrictions laid upon it. For the Church, still dreaming of new crusades and a Christian rule in the Holy Land, censured all peaceful dealings with the infidel. But the demand for Eastern luxuries—silks, gems, perfumes and spices—was immense, and the trade too lucrative to be renounced; and so Rome satisfied her conscience by allowing the traffic to be carried on by certain persons within certain well-defined limits, and was handsomely paid for the concession. The merchants of Montpellier in France had obtained a license from the pope to send one ship yearly to Eastern ports, and to their fraternity Jacques Cœur joined himself in 1432. He had chosen a propitious moment to begin his operations. France was beginning to recover from the prostrate condition in which the civil war had left her, and Cœur's ventures prospered marvellously. Before long he is the recorded owner of seven vessels, and employer of no less than three hundred agents who represented him in all the chief commercial centres in France and abroad. His ships sailed to the furthest harbors of the Levant, and his relations with the sultan assumed political importance. A contemporary chronicler describes him as "a second Jason, with Cairo for his Colchis strand."



**PLATE  
LII**

**HOUSE OF JACQUES CŒUR:  
ENTRANCE**

A merchant of such wealth and importance could hardly be overlooked by Charles VII., who had a talent for putting the right man in the right place; and when in 1436 Paris at last consented to admit the king, he re-established an Hôtel des Monnaies in the capital, and gave the direction of it to the man who had managed his own monetary affairs with such striking results. It was in connection with this office that Cœur rendered his country his most important and permanent service.

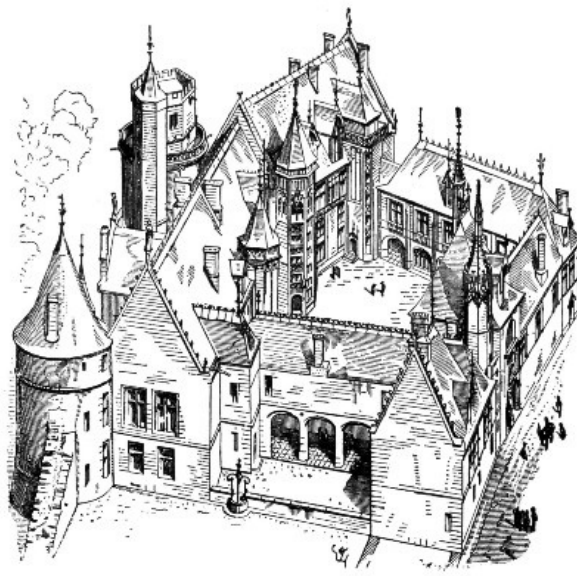
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France was flooded with debased coin, English, Burgundian and French: indeed so little could the merchants depend upon the nominal value of the pieces which passed through their hands that they stipulated with each other for payment by weight instead of in the usual legal tender. Jacques Cœur recognized the disastrous effects of this system; and as soon as he became master of the Paris mint undertook to reform it. Money suspected of being under weight was arbitrarily seized, wherever it was found, and a new gold and silver coinage of full value was struck. "The new treasurer," says a chronicler, "believed that the way for the king to grow rich, as for other people, was to pay his debts."

In 1440 so high did Jacques Cœur stand in royal favor that he was made a member of the King's Council, granted letters of nobility and created keeper of the privy-purse, a post which carried with it many valuable privileges connected with the court, and by which he profited to the fullest extent. He had the right of selling merchandise in the precincts of the royal residence to the nobles and courtiers, and to loan money to the whole court. There exist among the treasurer's papers of the time notes to the effect that the queen borrowed a sum equivalent to \$700 from him and pledged a pearl for its repayment, and that the king's youngest daughter Madame Aragonde borrowed \$650 "*pour avoir une robe*."

His talents found recognition outside of the domain of finance. He served on royal commissions and went on important embassies. On one of these, his entry into Rome was so magnificent that the spectators declared "it was sixty years since they had seen the like, but that the expense of it was outrageous."

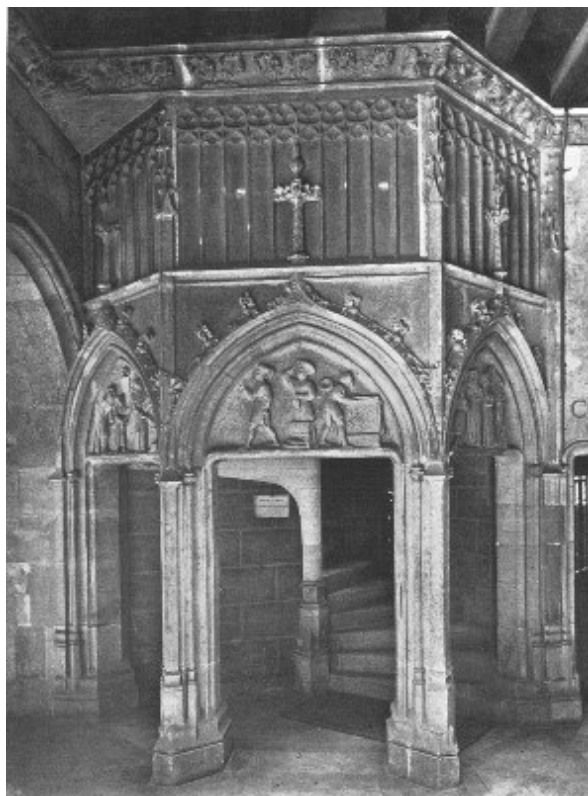
All this time his wealth had continued to increase. Poets celebrated it in their verses; his rivals watched it with bitter envy. Exaggerated stories of his lavish expenditure became current. It was reported that the commonest utensils of his house were of silver, that even his horses were shod with it. From impoverished nobles, who were his debtors, he commenced to buy great estates all over France. It was at this time, in 1443, that he began to build his unrivalled house in Bourges, his native town, although he already possessed mansions at Marseilles, Montpellier, Beaucaire, Lyons, Tours, Béziers and Paris.



**BIRDSEYE VIEW: HOUSE OF JACQUES CŒUR** [After Viollet-le-Duc]

When in 1449 the four years' truce with England was broken, the French threw themselves vigorously anew into the war, and Charles set himself with unusual energy to efface the last traces of his country's long humiliation. The campaign was actively planned, but there was no money in the royal treasury. The king appealed to the only man in France able to meet the urgent necessities of the case, the merchant Jacques Cœur. He was walking alone with the king when Charles broached the subject and asked him to advance the money for the Norman enterprise. "All that I have, sire, is yours," was the answer; and Charles had no further anxiety about the payment of his troops. The nominal loan, but virtual gift, of Jacques Cœur to the crown was an amount equivalent to \$2,500,000 in our money.

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**PLATE HOUSE OF JACQUES CŒUR: CHAPEL LIII STAIRCASE**

After a series of brilliant victories Charles at length triumphed, and the English empire in France ended. The part the treasurer had taken was not forgotten. In the triumphal entry into Rouen he rode, magnificent in crimson velvet and fur, beside Lieutenant-General Dunois, the hero of the day. Apparently he was in the heyday of his prosperity, and outwardly all continued to go well with him; but his downfall was pending. The whole court owed him money, and each debtor was a foe in ambush; the king, who invariably grew weary of those who were for long about him, was secretly not unwilling to sacrifice this man who had held so chief a part in his affairs for fifteen years, and Cœur had made two bitter enemies, high in court favor,—the Comte de Dammartin and Otto Castellani, an Italian, the latter of whom coveted the treasurer's office for himself. The blow fell at last, and with dramatic abruptness. In 1451 Jacques Cœur was arrested on the

[Pg 107]

trumped-up charge of having poisoned the king's mistress, Agnes Sorel, who had died eighteen months before, and one of whose executors he had been.

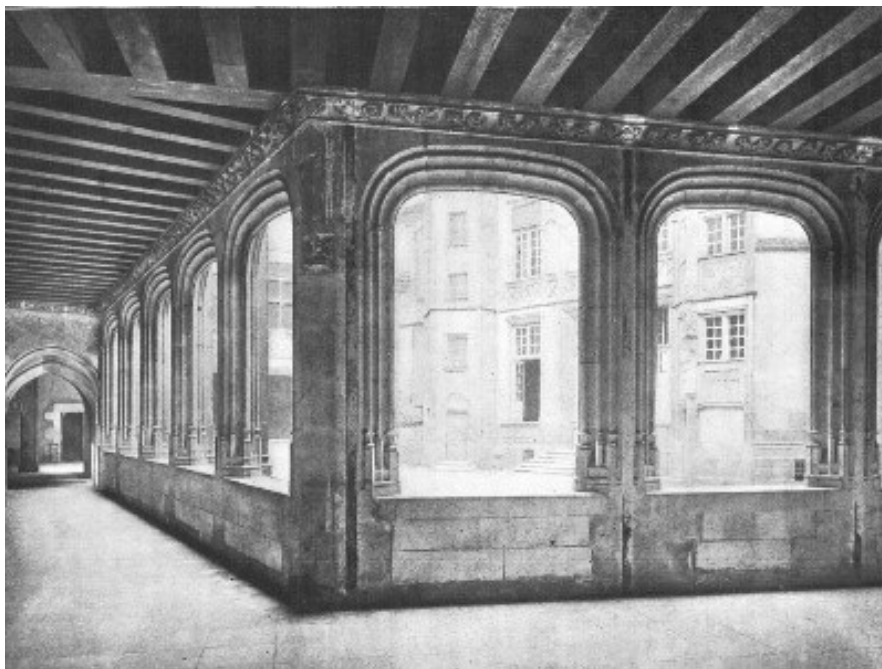
A special commission was appointed to try the case, and the first two names on the list of his judges were those of the Comte de Dammartin, president, and Otto Castellani! Before the trial began the prisoner's property was declared forfeit to the crown, and a first charge of \$1,250,000 was levied upon it for the expenses of the war in Guienne. Jacques Cœur's generosity had redeemed one province; a second was to be recovered by his ruin.

The accusation of poisoning was so obviously groundless that it was at once abandoned; but half a dozen other charges were quickly formulated against him, amongst them those of having exported French money to the East; of having sold arms to the infidel; of having administered the king's affairs fraudulently and tyrannically in Languedoc, and of having issued light money from the mint.

Cœur defended himself bravely, but he might have spared himself the trouble. His judges had already agreed upon a verdict. He was dragged from one prison to another, continually protesting his innocence, continually appealing to the Church for protection; till at last in 1453 he was brought into the torture chamber of the Castle of Tours and threatened with the rack. Weary and weak from twenty months of suspense and confinement, his heart failed him, and he agreed to admit all the charges against him except that of having poisoned Agnes Sorel.

In consideration of the pope's intercession and of Cœur's former services his life was spared; but he was condemned to pay the king \$1,250,000 as restitution money, and \$2,500,000 as a fine, and to be banished forever from the kingdom. On being notified of the decree, Jacques replied that he could not possibly raise the sums demanded. He himself owed money which he had borrowed for the king's affairs, and his goods were not worth so much. He was accordingly thrown again into prison, and the procurer-general proceeded to sell, by public auction, all the property of the prisoner which, after diligent search, he could find throughout the kingdom, including the house at Bourges.

Two years passed, and the sentence of banishment was not yet executed, perhaps because the fines were not yet paid. At the end of that time Cœur, by the help of one of his former clerks, contrived to escape from prison, and fled to Rome.



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**PLATE  
LIV**

**HOUSE OF JACQUES CŒUR: CLOISTERS AND  
COURTYARD**

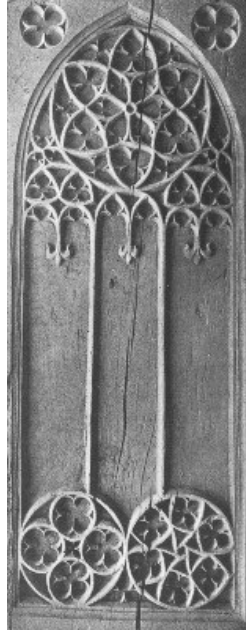
The end of his life is almost as obscure as the beginning. It is clear however, that, though now a man of over sixty, whose last five years had been years of intense suffering, Cœur was recognized by the pope, Calixtus III., as a man of ability and spirit. Constantinople had fallen, and the pope was anxious to undertake a new crusade. But the days of crusades were over; and his envoys pleaded and reasoned with the sovereigns of Christendom in vain. At length, in despair, the pope fitted out sixteen galleys himself, and in 1456 sent them to succor the Christian colonies in the Archipelago. The patriarch of Aquileia was the nominal leader, but an actual leader was required, and Calixtus offered the secondary command to none other than the French exile, Jacques Cœur. Cœur accepted the post; but his new career was a very short one.

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The expedition sailed first to Rhodes and thence to Chios, and here Cœur fell ill as the result of a wound received in some skirmish on the way. He died on the 25th of November and was buried in the Franciscan church on the island, forgiving his enemies and his king with his last breath.

As has been said, Jacques Cœur's most princely residence, that at Bourges, was begun in 1443, when he was at the height of his prosperity, and was nearly completed when in 1451 his downfall came. In spite of changes in the arrangement of the interior, in spite of a clumsy addition in the

Renaissance style on the right of the courtyard, and in spite of some blunders in the restoration, which was undertaken by the government in 1858, the building has escaped any grave mutilation, and may be taken as a type of the princely residence of its century.



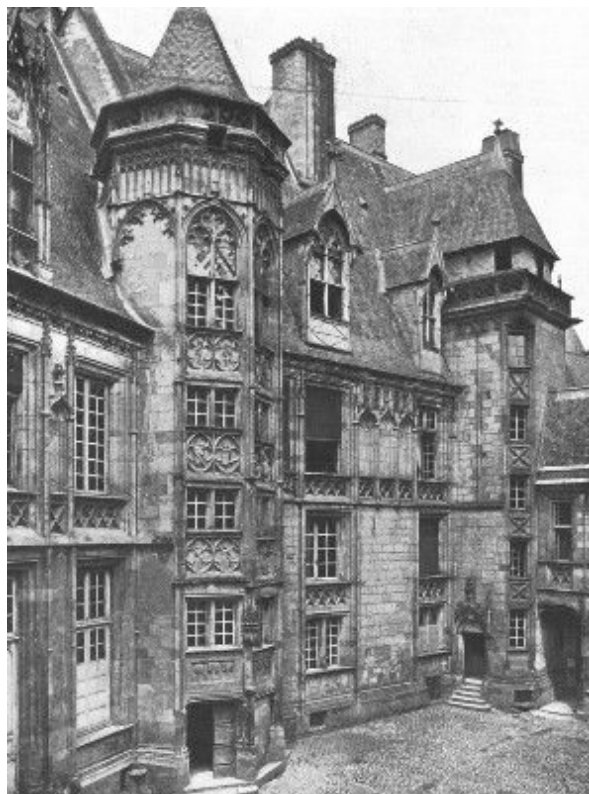
**GOTHIC CARVED  
WOODWORK**

**FIFTEENTH-SIXTEENTH  
CENTURY**

***Germanic Museum:  
Nuremberg***

Owing to the loss of Cœur's personal papers in the confusion incident to his trial, the name of his architect is unknown. From the general style and especially on account of certain details of ornamentation it is possible that he was Jean Gausse, the architect who built the façade of Saint Germain l'Auxerrois at Paris; but this is merely a surmise.

As a site for this house Cœur had bought a domain, known as the *Fief de la Chaussée*, which bordered upon the ancient rampart of Bourges, and included two of the original towers of that rampart. These two towers he restored and heightened, and they served as a beginning for the new construction and were incorporated with it. The general plan of the whole is an irregular pentagon—a central court surrounded by unsymmetrical groups of buildings, according to the disposition of almost all mediæval civil and military buildings. It is clear that the architect sacrificed every consideration of symmetry to the exigencies of usefulness and convenience; but the resulting irregularity is quite in harmony with the Gothic style, and conduces not a little to the picturesqueness of the whole.





The façade of the house ([Plate LI](#)) faces a small square in which stands a modern statue of Jacques Cœur. The main feature of this façade is a central pavilion ([Plate LII](#)) which contains the main portal of the house comprising two entrances, the larger for horsemen and guests, the smaller for tradesmen and servants. Above the portal is a niche sheltered by a carved canopy, wherein an equestrian statue of Charles VII. originally stood. The niche is flanked by two false windows, and out of each leans a stone figure, one representing a man-servant, the other a maid-servant, both dressed in the costumes of the time, who peer out into the street as if to watch for the return of their lord. On the left of the pavilion rises a beautifully elaborated prism-shaped tower, within which winds a spiral staircase leading to a chapel. This chapel occupies nearly the whole of the first story of the front, and a great window that lights it opens above the entrance.

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**GOTHIC CARVED WOODWORK**

FIFTEENTH CENTURY

*Bavarian National Museum: Munich*



**GOTHIC CARVED WOODWORK**

FIFTEENTH CENTURY

*Bavarian National Museum: Munich*

The coat of arms of Jacques Cœur—three black cockle-shells and three crimson hearts, the latter in punning allusion to his name, with his motto "*A vaillans cœurs rien impossible*," the word "*cœurs*" being represented by two hearts—is frequently repeated in the carvings of the façade. Indeed everywhere throughout the building we find these emblems,—in the windows, in all the carvings, above the mantelpieces, even on the tiles of the roof, and the bell of the chapel; and the nail-heads of the door-fastenings are shaped like hearts.

The main entrance leads directly into the great courtyard, around which the various constructions which make up the whole are irregularly grouped. The design of the pavilion of the façade is repeated on the inner side, but in place of the statue of the king the niche was originally occupied by a statue of Jacques Cœur. To the left of the portal, under an arcade, is the entrance to the spiral stairway ([Plate LIII](#)) which winds within the tower to the chapel. The tympana above the three openings to this stairway are carved in relief with rude but vigorous figures, the designs being appropriate to their situation. On the tympanum most plainly shown in our illustration, for example, the carving depicts three acolytes preparing an altar for service. Throughout the house the carvings are, after the same fashion, made characteristic of the rooms or entrances which they adorn: the carvings over the kitchen staircase represent culinary operations,—a roast hanging above the fire, a boy turning the spit, a woman washing plates, a cook grinding spices,—that leading to the dining-room is ornamented with fruit-trees, and so forth.

The principal side of the court, architecturally considered, is opposite the main entrance ([Plate LV](#)). The chief feature of this side is a great octagonal tower which contains the stairway leading to a dining-hall situated on the first floor and corresponding in position to the chapel in the front wing. The north and west sides of the courtyard are surrounded, on the ground floor, by cloisters ([Plate LIV](#)) above which were the living-rooms and household offices.

[Pg 112]





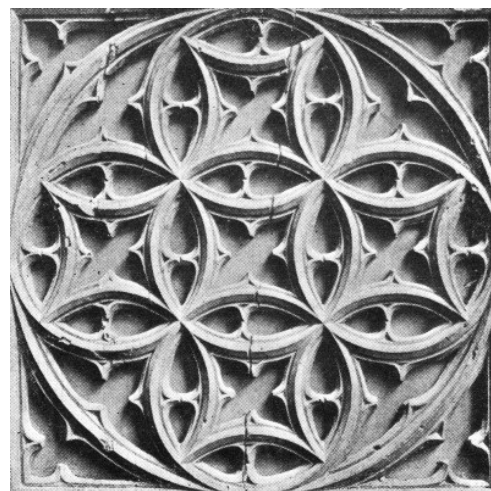
**PLATE LVI HOUSE OF JACQUES CŒUR: THE CHAPEL**

The rear view of the building ([Plate LVIII.](#)) shows that part of the construction which was based upon the ancient rampart of the city. The two large towers are those before referred to, which were still standing as part of the rampart when the building of the house was begun. One was entirely reconstructed by Cœur, with the exception of the first story, which is of old Roman work as the layers of brick and masonry indicate; the other received only its crown and a new interior construction, and like the first, was flanked by a tower destined to serve as a cage for the stairway. [Pg 113]

The only room of architectural interest in the interior, which has been largely remodelled to serve the various public uses to which the building has since been put, is the chapel ([Plates LVI.](#) and [LVII.](#)). Here the side walls have suffered from too ardent restoration; but the splendid painted ceiling is intact. It is divided by ribs, the bosses of which are decorated with the arms of Jacques Cœur and those of his wife, into twelve triangles, four large and eight small ones; and within these triangles, relieved against a background of gold-starred blue, angels bearing ribbons inscribed with scriptural texts are painted. The breadth and beauty of the design, the sobriety and harmony of the color-scheme and the excellence of execution gives this ceiling first importance as a document in the history of French decorative painting.



**GOTHIC CARVED WOODWORK**  
**FIFTEENTH CENTURY**  
*Bavarian National Museum: Munich*



**GOTHIC CARVED WOODWORK**  
**FIFTEENTH CENTURY**  
*Bavarian National Museum: Munich*

Taken as a whole this house, though rivalled by the Hôtel de Cluny at Paris and the Palais de l'Échiquier at Rouen, ranks as the most splendid civil construction antedating the Renaissance which remains in France. Its history is known without interruption from the beginning. Five years after its confiscation it was restored to Cœur's descendants. In 1501 it was sold by them, passing through several hands, until in 1682 it became the property of the city of Bourges and was made to serve as the Hôtel de Ville. In 1858 it was ceded to the State, and is now used as a Palais de Justice.



**PLATE  
LVII**

**HOUSE OF JACQUES CŒUR:  
CHAPEL CEILING**

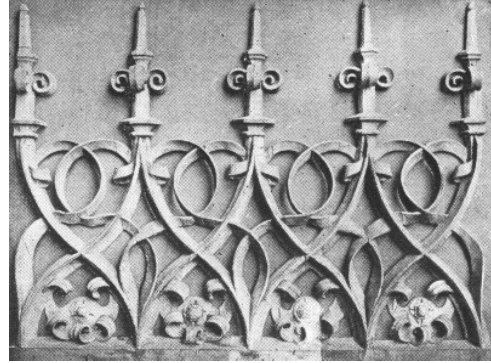
## Specimens of Gothic Wood Carving

Examples of decorative carving in wood dating prior to the Middle Ages are extremely rare. Some sculptured figures of saints, and other fragments of a more solid sort, have survived, but the more delicate ornamental work has disappeared. Indeed most of the ornamental wood-carvings which have come down to us even from the Middle Ages belong almost exclusively to the end of that period, when, especially in Germany, the art attained unrivalled productiveness and excellence.



**GOTHIC CARVED WOODWORK**  
FIFTEENTH CENTURY

*Bavarian National Museum: Munich*



**GOTHIC CARVED WOODWORK**  
FIFTEENTH CENTURY

*Bavarian National Museum: Munich*

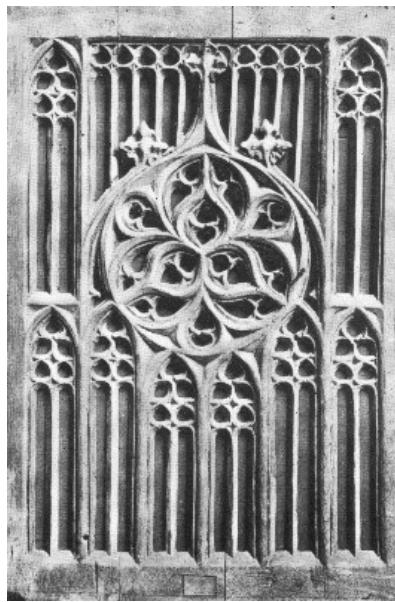
During the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, the skill in technical workmanship was unsurpassed. By this time, too, the carvers had learned to adapt their designs most perfectly to the nature of their material; to avoid attempting to cut large curves, braces and other structural members out of wood,—which besides being wasteful of the material, since enormous balks were required when large curves were cut out of the solid wood, were constructionally weak,—and to design their larger pieces with straight lines for the main frame-work, using curves only on a smaller scale and in positions where they were not subjected to much strain.

In design, the work of this period evinces great vigor and originality. The best workmen did not repeat predetermined patterns, but allowed the motives to grow under their hands, thus endowing even the smallest pieces with an individuality which makes the decorative effect as spirited and varied as it is graceful. The perfection of architectonic designs in the wood-carving of this time, was probably due rather to emulation of the lace-like and elaborate carving in stone which was being executed contemporaneously, than the imitation of it.

The modern notion that carved wood should be left unpainted was quite foreign to Gothic designers. They preferred even a simple coating of white or red to the natural tone of the material, and commonly the chief members of all the mouldings were adorned with delicately painted patterns. Our "restorers" have in most cases, however, scraped off all that remained of this brilliant decoration.

The excellent preservation of specimens of even the most fragile wood-carvings of this century is due doubtless to the extreme care with which the workmen selected and prepared their material. Oak was almost invariably employed; and it is evident that not only was it critically selected but that it was subjected to an elaborate process of preparation. It was probably left for long in damp places, sometimes even soaked in water, after which it was thoroughly dried in the open air and thereafter occasionally smoked, for the purpose of hardening the surface.

S. F. N.



**GOTHIC CARVED WOODWORK**  
**FIFTEENTH-SIXTEENTH CENTURY**  
*Germanic Museum: Munich*

[Pg 116]



**PLATE LVIII**                      **HOUSE OF JACQUES CŒUR: REAR**

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