

# Dijon, the town's history

2000 years  
of history,  
from  
antiquity to  
21th century



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## Dijon-the town's history

Dijon was born more than two thousand years ago. In the beginning, nothing predisposed this city to take the lead over its prestigious neighbouring towns such as Autun, Beaune, Langres or many others that were as famous in their time and have long since disappeared.

Dijon like most ancient cities, has expanded over the remains of previous buildings, constructing and reconstructing continuously, but also extending to rebuild new districts which in turn are constantly changing.

Of course the centuries have blotted out and eroded some of the prestigious testimonies.

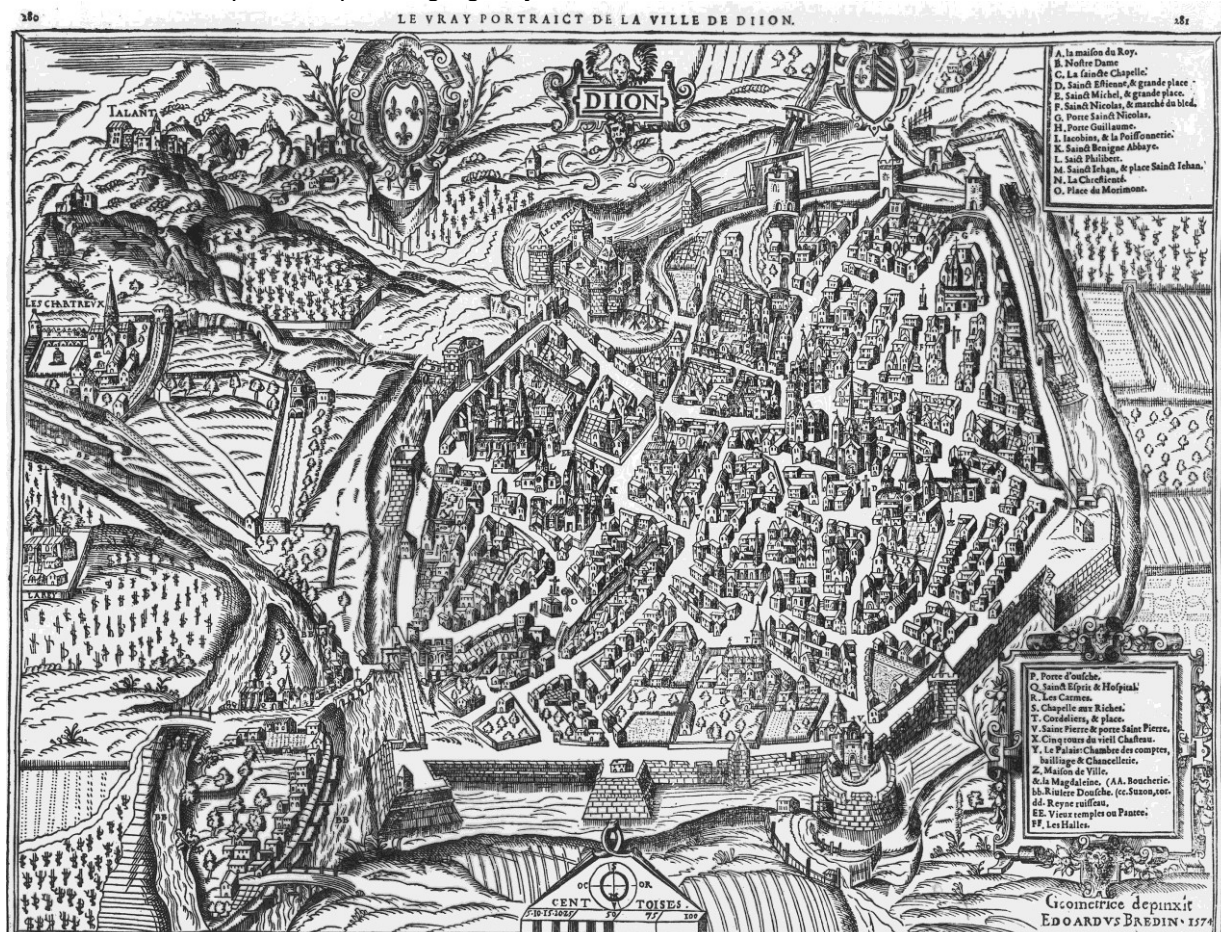
However the numerous buildings which remain are outstanding landmarks illustrating this surprising epic of change. From a modest Celtic village Dijon became a regional capital of 250,000 inhabitants.

This tremendous transformation which took more than 20 centuries is presented in 10 “sequences” or “periods” - those judged as most noteworthy.

This exhibition has been organized by AGIUD (The Town planning Agency for Dijon and its conurbation) with the help from ICOVIL (Institute for a better knowledge of Town History) the city of Dijon and Le Grand Dijon.

*Illustration sources :*

- *City Library*
- *City Archives*
- *Intermunicipal Townplanning Agency*





## 0. The area and it's crossroad for exchanges

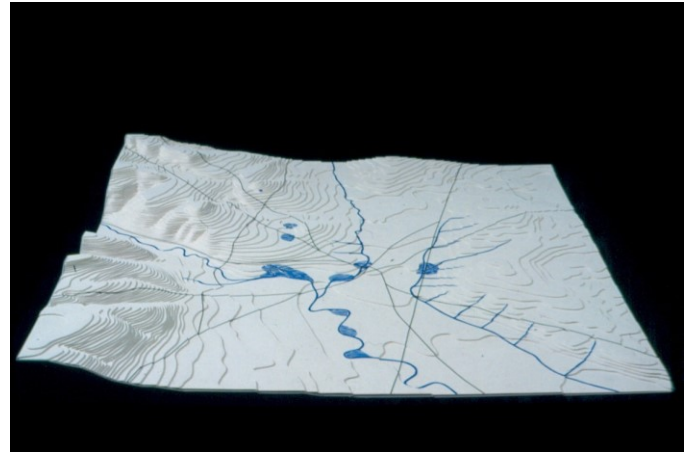
Originally there was a large clearing among swamps and Dijon was situated at the heart of a plain drained by two small converging rivers : the Ouche and the Suzon.

It was an exceptional geographical situation between plains and plateaus, between the Seine and the Saône-Rhône, between the Mediterranean countries and the British Isles, and at the crossroads of two main axes of communication used at the Bronze Age to transport amber and tin.

Several centuries before the beginning of our era, during the glory days for Vix, Alesia and Bibracte, a Celtic population was probably settled on high ground as we can see from the oppidum on Mont-Afrique. These Celts or Gauls, located in Lingon territory between Eduens and Sequanes obviously took advantage of the trade movements that used these tracks or paths (oppidum : celtic village

situated on the mountain. Gauls: historical celtic tribes, like the Eduens and the Sequanes,)

Having a wealth of water, fertile land, dense forest, an area with a topography which gave a feeling of security, and a crossroad people passed through, all contributed in the factors of establishing a human settlement.



## 1. A blossoming town

Down the hill, and at the crossing of two important Celtic tracks where soldiers and tradesmen stop to rest, a village consisting of scattered elements began to develop.

Later, towards the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C, the creation, on the East side, in the plain, of a Roman road between Chalon-sur-Saône and Langres and a little farther on, from Lyon to Trier, added to the ancient Celtic crossroads, brought a new lease of activity to this nascent town.

Under the Roman empire, especially during the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, the little town seemed to have been blooming. Judging from the remains

found (pieces from large decorated buildings, sumptuous funeral monuments...) diverse and prosperous arts and crafts were apparently in existence.

This small town sprawling out along the lanes was apparently relatively extensive. Its way of life was deeply influenced by the Art imported from Rome.

As is often the case, the most precious information about the local life of that age is given to us by the necropolises (ancient cemeteries) situated in conformity with Roman law, outside the town, i.e on the East side along the "Agrippa" Roman road and on the west side near the ancient Celtic crossroads.



## 2. The Gallo-roman town

Around the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, when Christianity was developing, the town was hit by the first barbarian invasions. To protect themselves, the inhabitants built over the swampy areas to the East of the Celtic crossroads, a narrow fortified enclosure, mainly made of stones taken from the monuments in the surroundings and steles (tombstones) coming from the nearest necropolises

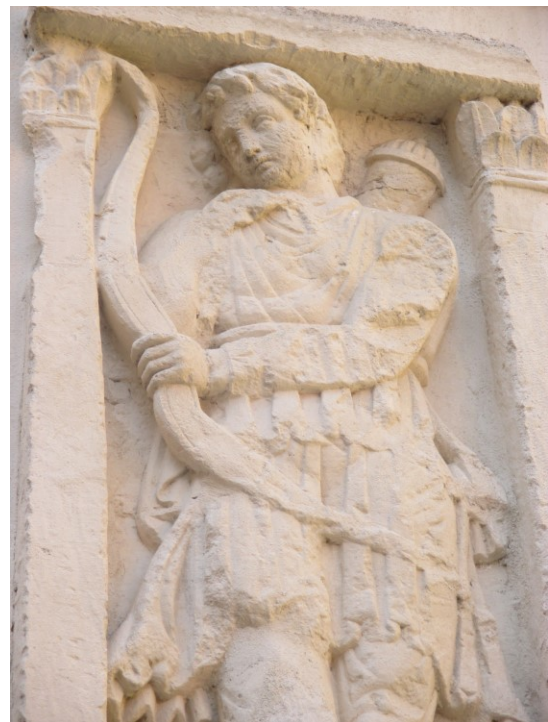
Enclosure walls : height : 9m : width 4.5m  
Composition : 33 towers, 2 gates and 4 doors  
Surface : 11ha

This Gallo-roman fortress “castrum”, later surrounded by a ditch fed with water from the Suzon, contained some public buildings, the

residences of the authorities and was used as a refuge in case of danger by the people whose houses were outside the walls.

The fortified town was strong enough to resist all of the following invasions. This is probably why, at the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, the bishops of Langres chose to take up their residence in the North-East area of the castrum, where according to tradition they had three religious edifices built: two churches and a baptistery. Their presence incited the development of holy places and especially the construction of a basilica over the grave of St Bénigne, their martyr.

Dijon is an animated, prosperous and strong city that is described by Gregoire de Tours in his famous 6<sup>th</sup> century work “The History of the Franks”.



### 3. Dijon at the beginning of the Middle-Ages

The high Middle-Age begins in the seventh century by the Burgondes' occupation which gave its name to our region. During this long period, insecurity, diseases, famines and relentless invasions provoked the fall of many cities.

Dijon, safe behind its walls several times reinforced, maintains its position thanks to the presence of two great religious communities which actively participated in the growth of the city :

- The cathedral Saint-Etienne located North-East inside the castrum
- The benedictine abbey Saint-Bénigne built on the west side outside the walls further than the antique crossroad

In the 9<sup>th</sup> century, public officials named vicomtes, put in place by the Carolingiens, settled at the North-East angle of the castrum, where the duke's palace will stand later on.

After the year 1000 past, the abbey leader Guillaume de Volpiano built the rotunda of the Saint-Benigne abbey, a place of pilgrimage more important than Cluny at this time. Saint-

Bernard from Fontaine gave momentum to Cîteaux and carried throughout Europe the influence of the Christians from Burgundy.

The city expanded then largely outside the gallo-roman walls, around the Saint-Benigne abbey and further than the Saint-Etienne chapter. The mills developed, the town expanded...and the retreat into the castrum is only done in case of jeopardy.



In 1031, Robert the First, first duke of the Capetians dynasty of Burgundy, chooses Dijon as his capital city.



## 4. The medieval town

The medieval town developed, for the most part, during the long reign of the Capetian Dukes of Burgundy (1031-1336). Throughout the 11<sup>th</sup> century the town continued to expand beyond the original walls. Rivers were bypassed and reaches created. However, on June 28<sup>th</sup>, 1137 the town was completely destroyed by the great fire.

In a period when Europe was experiencing an exceptional demographic and economic renewal, the Dukes started building new, good-sized, outer walls which took in all the suburbs including the abbey of St Bénigne. The essential part of the city's life was to remain within these monumental walls until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.:

City walls : height 10m, width 5-6m

Composition : 18 towers, 11 gateways and doors.

Surface : 97 ha

Under pressure from the enterprising middle-class, in 1183 the Dukes granted a "Town Chart" to the city which developed considerably from the economic point of view with its fairs, markets, its cloth manufacture and trade...

The town which was composed of 7 parishes accomplished significant building projects such as the Sainte-Chapelle, The Hospital of the Saint Esprit, the Ducal Palace, the churches of Saint-Philibert, Notre Dame and Saint-Bénigne...

Along the narrow irregularly drawn streets, churches, public buildings, residences, slums, shops and workshops existed side by side.

Furthermore at the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century the Dukes of Burgundy built, on the Talant hillside, a magnificent fortress to which they added a new fortified town with a duty free area.

The end of the reign of the Capetian Dukes of Burgundy was marked by many dramatic events such as the Black Plague in 1348 and 1349.



## 5. The city of the Great Dukes of the Occident

The town created under the reign of the Capetians experienced a blaze of glory with the dynasty of the Valois Dukes of Burgundy (1363-1477). The so-called Grand Dukes of the Occident (Philip the Bold, John the fearless, Philip the Good and Charles the Bold) took a special interest in Dijon.

- They built the Carthusian Chartreuse de Champmol to put their tombs in the monastery
- They transformed the ducal house into a luxurious princely palace
- They created the Chambers of Council and Revenue
- Philippe the Bold created the knights of the "Toison d'Or" (Golden Fleece).
- With Slutter, Van Eyck, Claus de Werve... they created one of the most active places transitioning from European Gothic style to the great Renaissance.



For more than a century through a clever policy of marriages, conquests and treaties,

they gained control of a country extending as far as the North Sea.

Magnificent houses, still with a medieval appearance, were built as a result of the artistic emulation and the development of crafts and trade.

The Castrum was gradually demolished and the 12<sup>th</sup> century walls were built, then modified.



In 1477 at the death of Charles the Bold, Burgundy was taken under the French crown, thanks to the skilfull manoeuvres of Louis XI. Dijon, which became a frontier town of the kingdom was given a strong fortress.

After the siege by the Swiss in 1513 the city walls were again reinforced. The walls themselves were cleared of all obstacles and given battlements, the medieval towers were lowered, bastions were built (St Pierre, Guise, St Nicolas).

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century in the heart of the town some houses belonging to the nobility or the richer members of the bourgeoisie were built in the Italian Renaissance style, as interpreted mainly by Hugues Sambin, a local artist of great talent.

The suburbs were gradually being built once more.



## 6. The classical town

In 1636 the arrival of the imperial army led to the system of defense being further improved: it looked like the military fortress "à la Vauban"

With the influence of the Catholic revival, the number of religious institutions increased: Jesuits, Minims, Capuchins, Carmelites, Bernadines, Ursulines, Jacobines...

The construction of belltowers and pinnacles also emerged during this time.

In 1678 Franche-Comté was added to the kingdom making the fortifications in Dijon useless. The capital of Burgundy whose governors were the Princes de Condé; witnessed a golden age with an intense architectural activity. The city became more lively and the beginnings of town-planning started evolving:

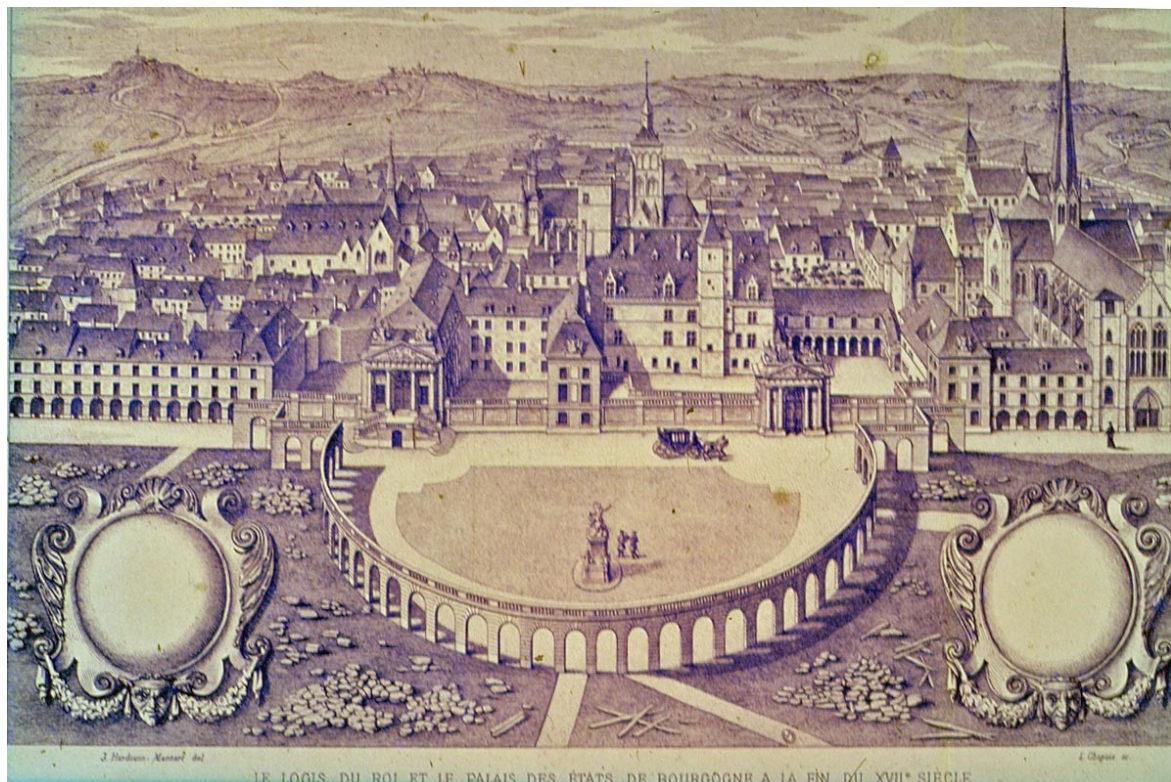
- The Place Royale with its semi-circle - the work of Jules-Hardouin-Mansart,
- The Palais des Etats, Rue des Princes de Condé,
- The Park and avenue la Colombière, the design of which is attributed to Le Nôtre,
- The Park and Castle of Montmuzard, etc...

The streets were straightened. What was already built was transformed or demolished in order to integrate the new classical style. Thus the town mixed the prestigious buildings of Parliament with the lovely bourgeois residences and the modest houses of the workers.

The idea of creating a new town near the old one was abandoned. Only a few castles and large mansions were built in the countryside by the Parliamentary members.

The Ouche, St Pierre and St Nicolas suburbs were converted. They extended much further than the strongholds in order to accommodate new activities. This brilliant age was that of people such as the writer Bossuet, the musician Rameau, the naturalist Buffon, the mathematician Monge... It was also marked by the creation of the University, of the Academy which honoured the philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, of the Arts School, and of the Museum...

As the meeting place of seven royal roads Dijon asserted its influence.

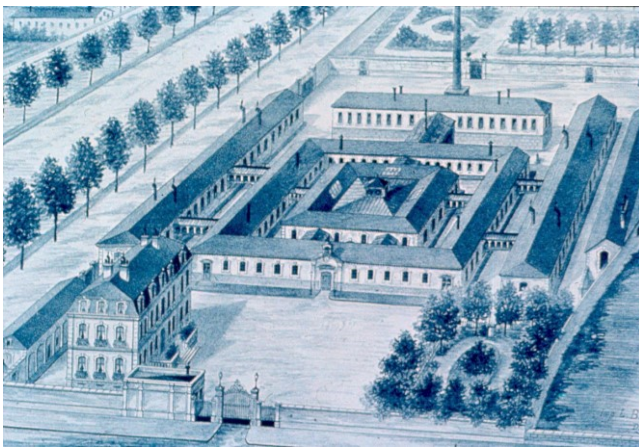


## 7. The industrial town

After the Revolution Dijon regressed from its provincial capital status to that of a county town. Part of its monumental heritage was destroyed and for some decades the town lost its influence and was far too big to maintain.

It began to develop again in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1833 the Canal de Bourgogne, which started 50 years earlier, was finally completed. The theater was inaugurated in 1828. The district of the Place St Bernard was laid out from 1839 to 1847: the first town planning operation outside the walls. In 1840 the first water-supply network, which had been proposed by engineer Henry Darcy in order to fight against insalubrity, was finished.

However it was the inauguration of the Paris-Dijon-Lyon-Marseille railway line that really marked the beginning of the industrial and urban development of the city. The areas surrounding the station became populated. The deeply transformed city began to suffocate in its "corset" of walls.



The 1870 war put a brutal stop to the first democratic debate on the planning of the town. After the war, barracks were installed in the

town which had once more become a fortified town. New populations were attracted by the economic expansion and encouraged by the rural migration or they were driven out of the lost Alsace and Lorraine Provinces. In half a century (1850-1900) the town grew from 30,000 to 70,000 inhabitants.



At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the ramparts and castle were demolished for good. In the context of economic liberalism the town tried to adapt to the new urban rationality with :

- The creation of squares and Haussmann-type boulevards
- The construction of important public and private facilities
- The setting-up of the first public transport
- The establishing of industrial and trade activities

The outbreak of the first world war put a stop to this first phase of expansion in the industrialization/urbanization cycle.



## 8. The modern city

In 1919 the State obliged all the cities to establish a plan for the layout, development and embellishment of their towns. Because of the economic and social concerns, the decrease in the population, and the restrictive view people had of the future, this did not encourage them to make drastic changes. The converting of the different neighborhoods was carried out anyway without much planning.



Nevertheless in the second half of the twenties, several large projects started based on new urban trends which were mainly inspired by the recent knowledge about hygiene.

- The Maladière district is a good example of a new concept to working-class accommodation
- The Montmuzard public park underlines the importance given to sports
- The “garden city” housing estate in the Bourroches area again stresses the importance given to social housing

- The pumping of water from the Saône enabled the upper parts of the town to be supplied
- Road widening began for the old roads in the center of Dijon
- A tramway station for the local trams and was built

In 1930 the first planning project for the layout, development and embellishment of the town was proposed.

The new building techniques and outside influence led to very eclectic styles from the Neo-classical to Art Nouveau, even Modern. The residences of the local public figures were built on the edge of the old town in more spacious quarters or along the boulevards and avenues.

In this period between the two wars, the food-processing and mechanical engineering industries; created at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, carried on with their activities. New ones were set up in the suburbs.



The 1929 crisis and the Second World War marked the end to this era.



## 9. The expanding city

As early as 1945 the town undertook some rehousing and building operations: estates partly composed of private houses and small buildings. The reflection on town-planning, which started well before the war, continued. In 1949 the plan that had been elaborated with the help of G Sebillé, the town planner, was at last taken into consideration.

But the world was changing. The needs were enormous. France had fallen so far behind in matters of industrialization and town-planning that the State took things into their own hands in an effort to make up for lost time. To try and react quickly to the housing crisis, the theories of the "Modern Movement" whose advocate in France was Le Corbusier were simplified to an extreme, and even completely altered... Functional town-planning was required: There was one place for residential districts, another for industrial areas and yet another for the main amenities.



It was the age of ZUP (areas to be urbanised in priority) and of industrialization of building

trade. It was a period when following in particular were built :

- The Grésilles quarters, and then the Fontaine d'Ouche
- The industrial areas in Dijon-Longvic and the North-East of the city where new activities were set up which took over from the weakening mechanical engineering and food-processing industries
- The University Campus in Montmuzard, the Regional Hospital Complex, the new larger community amenities such as high schools, comprehensive schools, the wholesale market, the Exhibition Hall, the Abattoirs...
- The renovation in the Clemenceau quarter, the programme for which was luckily reduced...
- etc...

As everywhere else it was a time when the use of superlatives was at its height : always higher, larger, wider... in the exponential euphoria of the period named "the thirty glorious years" (1945-75). In this context of unlimited growth, the creation of a new town in the Tilles valley was planned together with an urban motorway from one side of the city to the other.

In hardly 25 years the town doubled its urbanized surface area. Fortunately, the city authorities put an end to these "Pharaonic" plans and gradually invest in projects more in accordance with the desires of the population.

## 10. The city recomposed

At the beginning of the seventies, Dijon rejected all excessive ideas and opted for an ancient city center shown off to advantage and living in harmony with the rest of its urban area. This new policy, just opposite to former principles and practices, soon became the normal thing. It led to a radical change in concepts, methods and land scales.

The city relied on its employees and on the Intermunicipal Town-planning Agency to start elaborating new town-planning documents : a land occupation programme made public in 1975, the finalizing of the plan to protect and show off to advantage the conservation areas, the elaboration of diverse orientation documents such as the "green" programme, the reference programme, the local housing programme, the transfer programme, etc.

This new urban strategy materialized in numerous actions and operations especially concerning the setting-out of the town; for example :

- Renovating the ancient centre and making it more dynamic in order for it to exist in harmony with the rest of the conurbation
- The constitution of the green belt in the form of large parks on the outskirts
- The laying-out of new housing district and the creation of activities integration notions of urban amenities and ecology
- The restauration, adapting and equipping of existing quarters
- The integration of council flats into the town itself

- The setting-up of vast town-planning project composed of an up-to-date shopping centre, a leisure park, a technological estate and two housing district, know under the generic name of the Toison d'Or (Golden Fleece)
- The constitution, beside the greatly modernized Congress and Exhibition Hall, of an Auditorium integrating the latest techniques.



All at the same time Dijon is expanding, transforming, being equipped and adapted in order to find a balance, a dynamism as a city and maintain its role as regional capital of Burgundy.

## The Hotel Bouchu.

This vast hotel, was built in 1641 for Jean Bouchu. He was the president of parliament in Burgundy and wished for a home which permitted him to greet, welcome and entertain guests.

At this time, the nobility had a great influence on the social life and the intellectual life. The members of parliament built a hotel between courtyards and gardens which showed their importance. The parliament provided the town a prestigious architectural heritage. More than 100 hotels were built between 1480 (the settlement of the parliament in Burgundy) and 1789 (the French Revolution).

The hotel Bouchu was passed down to the oldest son of the president, and then was sold many times. The family d'Esterno was the last one to inhabit the building from 1803 until 1884, when the town purchased it. Then it became a high school, an academy of music, before the settlement for the General Headquarters of the army in 1928. From 2000 the town has used the hotel for cultural activities and associations like ICOVIL. The main entrance is from the XVIII th century.



### Classical architecture outside



Pierre Le Muet, a dijonese architect, has influenced this architecture. Settled on the remains of the ancient hotel de Molesme (XV th century), which basement and cellar are already visible, the new hotel was completed in 1643. Its composition includes, a large central main building, surrounded by two wings and put on ground level foundations.

The plain simple decoration uses horizontal (smooth) rustication from ground floor to cornice, framing the windows on two levels. A horse-shoe shaped stairway gives access to the central entrance.

### Exceptional decoration inside



The central hall leads to two main rooms. The biggest one (80 m<sup>2</sup>) has kept its woodwork. There, the ceilings from the XVII th century, give an idea of the original decoration.

The beautiful chimney in black molded marble, is just an architrave put on two jambs; this innovation is a Le Muet's idea, for chimney blocks to be included in the wall.

The decoration in the ancient dining room is inspired from classical antiquity and more specifically from Pompei paintings and murals.

Head of the house hold private quarters were probably on the first floor in one of the wings while those of his wife were on the second floor.

The rooms of the kitchen are on the basement and a small spiral service staircase led to the first floor.

The two wings, on each side of the courtyard, house two independent entrances that serve, from the door steps, two twin hall entrances.

The Hotel Bouchu was one of the most famous built in the middle of the XVII th century in Dijon. The prestigious architecture expresses the desire of the owner to show his richness and wealth.