

# The old palace of Coudenberg

RÉGION DE BRUXELLES-CAPITALE

42



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#### Acknowledgements

We wish to thank Frédérique Honoré: coordination Palais de Charles Quint non profit association, André Vanrie, Anne Vandembulcke: scientific committee of the Palais de Charles Quint non-profit association, Thérèse Symons, Archives of the City of Brussels, and the Royal society of Archaeology of Brussels for their valuable help.

#### Illustrations

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Pierre Anagnostopoulos and Jean Houssiau



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## The search for the lost palace

The royal district of Brussels perpetuates an image of power and prestige dating back to its 12<sup>th</sup> century origins. In the Middle Ages a fort was built overlooking the city on Coudenberg hill. It was gradually transformed into a grand palace to become the residence of the reigning princes and the seat of the central administration for the Low Countries. Nowadays, the district still continues this historical tradition: the Royal Palace, several Government institutions and some major museums are still located there. The district has been completely changed, however. It owes its present layout to the redevelopment projects that followed the fire in the old palace in 1731.

In one night this disaster destroyed one of the greatest royal residences in Europe and it took several decades to repair the damage. Beneath the realigned square and the new buildings of the place Royale and its neighbourhood lie archaeological remains that are now studied and protected. The archives and iconographic documents enable historians to retrace the development of this ancient district, its importance in the history of the city of Brussels and everyday life at the time.

The chapel. Detail of "The Infanta Isabelle in the palace gardens", attributed to D. and J.-B. Van Heil (17<sup>th</sup> century).

Previous page:  
Drawing of the palace's inner courtyard in flames, 18<sup>th</sup> century.



During the night of 3-4 February 1731, a huge fire raged through the royal palace on Coudenberg hill. Fire broke out probably around midnight. The fire protection equipment was inadequate to control and put out the blaze. According to the official version, the accident was due to the "carelessness of the kitchen chefs who were boiling sugar to make jam" in preparation for a ball due to take place two days later.

In reality, the fire broke out in the apartments of the Governess-General. The fire very quickly got out of hand, probably due to the protocol surrounding the princess' bedchamber. It was aggravated by a lack of coordination between the military guard, the bourgeois militia and the City authorities. The emergency services were also disorganised because of the freezing temperatures at that time of year. Some people lost their lives. The Governess-General, Marie-Elisabeth, Brussels representative of the Hapsburgs of Austria, owed her life to the prompt action of a grenadier who broke down her bedroom door.

At dawn on 4 February, the Coudenberg palace, after being "engulfed in fire", offered the spectacle of a "charred court"... The flames had consumed the most commonly used areas: the apartments or main

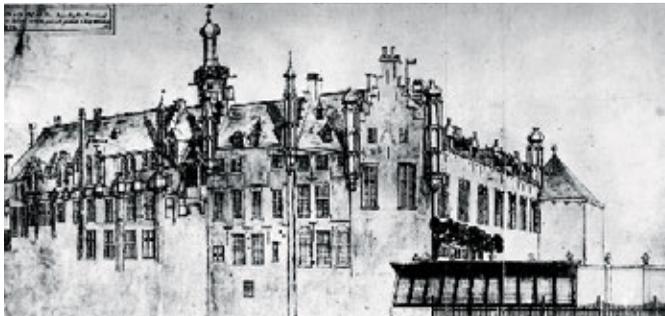
A ruined monument provides the backdrop for the park. Mary of Hungary's gallery is still partially preserved, with a few statues of emperors.

**The main building and kitchens were almost totally destroyed. To the left, valuables are being removed from the *Aula Magna*; to the left and in the centre, water pumps and fire ladders are being brought in.**



building and the main reception hall, the *Aula Magna*, of which only the walls remained. The chapel, stables, library, pages' house and hunting lodge were spared, however, and remained occupied. The court was moved until the end of the "Ancien Régime" into the former Nassau House (or Palace of Orange), modernised for the purpose by the Governor-General, Charles of Lorraine. This house was later to become the Royal Library. In 1815, the court moved back into the transformed royal district: King William I of the Netherlands had a great palace built that was altered by Leopold II in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

More than forty years after the fire, the royal district was renovated under the impetus of the Prince of Starhemberg, Plenipotentiary Minister of Empress Maria Theresa in Brussels, and Ange-Charles



Nassau House, 1759.

de Limpens, Councillor of Finances. This renovation resulted in one of the major urban transformations of Brussels, well before those of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The hilly contours of the Coudenberg were to give way to a square surrounded by neoclassical buildings – the present place Royale – and a park that replaced the *Warande*. In order to create a rectangular square, Empress Maria Theresa of Austria granted permission to knock down the ruins of the burnt-out palace to the level of the former place des Bailles, from which one entered the main courtyard of the residence. In the middle of the square, the statue dedicated by the States of Brabant to Charles of Lorraine was erected in early 1775. Further work was then commissioned: the buildings around the place Royale and the new layout of the park were completed in 1783.

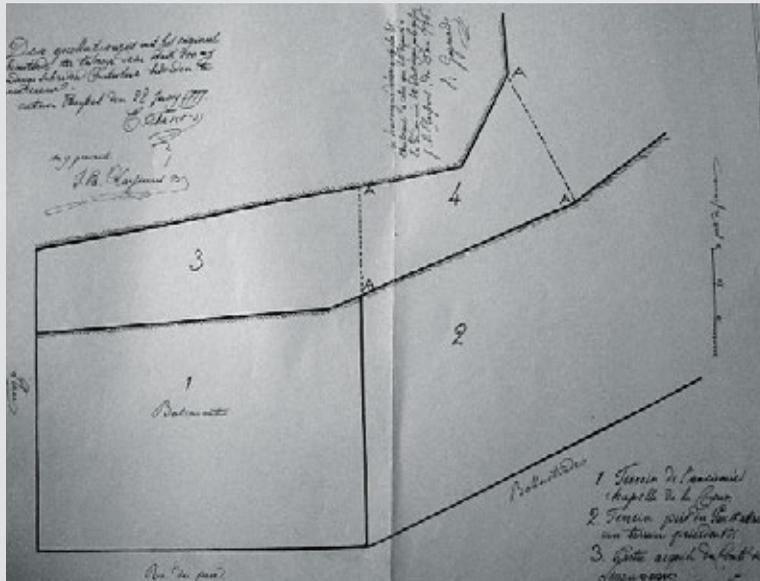
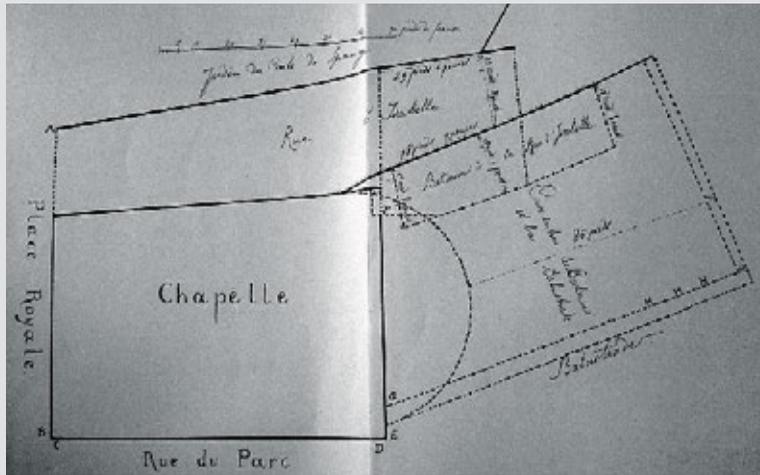
The Government sold the building land to private buyers and religious communities. These had to contribute by paying subsidies or erecting buildings in the imposed style.

The works were the result of cooperation between several players. The Government drove a hard bargain with the City, obliging it to share the costs. Designs were commissioned from the Parisian architect Barré. In the end, Barnabé Guimard, former pupil of the Royal Academy of Architecture of Paris, was selected as principal supervisor for the royal district project. He played a decisive role – long under-estimated – both in the creation of the square and in the design of the surrounding facades. He was also the brain behind the new park of Brussels. Joachim Zinner assisted him in choosing what to plant. Guimard directed much of the site. His style, appreciated by the Count of Cobenzl, Plenipotentiary Minister of Empress Maria Theresa, was of a return to classicism.

In order to create the new district, major earthworks were undertaken to flatten the area between the square and the grounds. This preserved some of the lower parts of the previous building, buried underground, filled in or converted into cellars.

In this way, the Coudenberg palace did not entirely disappear: the remains buried under the place Royale and its surroundings bear witness to its illustrious past.

We can learn a lot about the building by studying the remains along with the written and iconographic records.



These drawings illustrate the new use of the remains of the old chapel and its surroundings a little before the work on the place Royale began. The two land-register maps complement one another. They inventorise the land occupied by the chapel and its immediate surroundings. The first map shows how the chapel and the rue Isabelle had to be altered to make way for

Grimbergen House. This was confirmed during the dig of summer 2003. The second drawing, signed by Barnabé Guimard on 25 May 1776, shows the final layout of the parcels numbered 1 to 4. Note that these old boundaries can still be seen in the present structure, between the place Royale and the Palais des Beaux-Arts.



Bellevue Hôtel, porcelain card.

### THE PLACE ROYALE

The church of St. Jacques sur Coudenberg, which was made a parish church in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, is evidence that a convent of the order of St. Augustin stood on the high ground of Brussels in the 12<sup>th</sup> century; it was promoted to abbey in 1731. The original church faced the rue de Namur. The abbey undertook to comply with the plans imposed for the new place Royale. To pay for the works, Coudenberg Abbey had to sell off a triptych of St. Ildephonse, a work of Rubens now kept in Vienna.

The buildings of the place Royale were erected by abbeys and private individuals. Coudenberg Abbey had houses built adjacent to the church and quickly sold them off. The Abbey of Grimbergen in Brabant

commissioned a building to the north-east of the square. Bellevue Hotel, designed for travellers, was a private initiative. The Royal and Imperial Lottery, introduced in the Low Countries under Maria Theresa of Austria, had two buildings built adjacent to the corner of the square and the Montagne de la Cour.

The statue of Godfrey of Bouillon, depicted on horseback as he was leaving on the first Crusade, has graced the centre of the place Royale since 1848. It replaced a statue of Charles of Lorraine, cast from coins by French revolutionaries; a new statue of the Austrian Governor-General was erected in the 19<sup>th</sup> century on the place du Musée.



The excavations of the porch building at the palace entrance. Ruins of a door jamb and clearance of rooms beneath the equestrian statue of the victorious Godfrey of Bouillon.

## DISCOVERING THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE

As long ago as 1894, the Commune surveyed the basements of Grimbergen House. Paul Saintenoy made the drawings at the request of Mayor Charles Buls who was considering a restoration of the *Aula Magna* of the old palace. In 1910, the Comité du Vieux Bruxelles looked into the archaeological and historical potential of the site of the old palace under the place Royale and its surroundings. The large site created by the demolition of the block of the former Hospice Terarken and the Jardin des Arbalétriers revealed remains of the first city wall and the Ducal palace, along with the cellars of the *Domus Isabellae*. It was proposed to prolong the investigations, to

carry out excavations and show the remains of the old palace to the public, including the chapel and the rue Isabelle. But the project was not to be. Over the following decades, research by Paul Saintenoy and Guillaume Des Marez, historians of Brussels, led to the first scientific accounts of the old palace and the place Royale.

The long-standing aim of the Comité du Vieux Bruxelles was to preserve the city's heritage, if necessary by dismantling and reconstructing the old facades. Idealised, picturesque and festive reconstructions of the city at the end of the Middle Ages were made. In 1935, a reconstruction of the old

palace was made at the entrance to the site of the Universal Exhibition in Brussels, organised around modernist-style pavilions.

In 1954, works in the rue de Namur revealed the remains of the old Abbey of St. Jacques. It was not until the 1980s that enthusiasm for the subject was revived. The City of Brussels Architecture Department exposed an outer wall of the *Aula Magna*. The research on the site directed by the National Excavations Department and the Administration of Monuments and Sites continued in 1984 and 1985 in the form of trenches revealing the foundations of the *Aula Magna*'s north tower. The first excavations

and the first description of the remains of the palace chapel date from the same period. This work led to the reconstruction of the old abbey chapel and an initial exhibition of the remains.

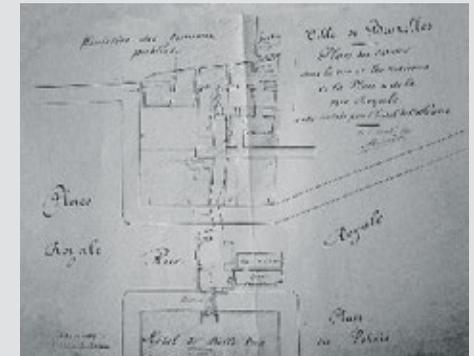
The Royal Archaeological Society of Brussels (SRAB) began some preliminary excavation work in the place Royale. Archive research led to an important publication in 1991 on the history of the palace of the Dukes of Brabant in Brussels. Having established the historical context, the archaeological observations and trenches confirmed that tangible remains of the palace were buried beneath the place Royale and its immediate surroundings. In 1994, renovation work



Remains of the cellars of the main building.



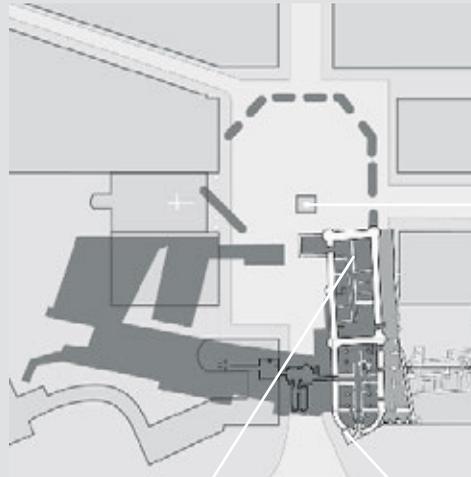
Photographs of the 1935 Universal Exhibition. Ancient Belgium, Old Brussels: place des Bailles and *Aula Magna*.



Plan of cellars under the roadway, houses of the place Royale and rue Royale.

on the Court of Arbitration brought to light evidence of the old wells in the palace's inner courtyard. The initial phase of the archaeological work began the following year. The renewal of the road from the Palais de Laeken to the Palais de Justice, including the place Royale, marked the start of major archaeological investigations. The Federal Government, the Brussels-Capital Region and the City of Brussels all contributed to the archaeology project, under the direction of the Excavations Department of the Free University of Brussels and the SRAB. Remains of the palace's reception room were first excavated in 1995, and many trenches were made in the pavement of the rue Royale around Bellevue Hotel and, from 1999, in the nearby cellars of the old main building. The following year, works by the Ministry of the Brussels-Capital Region enabled the archeologists to investigate the apse of the chapel. Further investigations in 2003 led to the discovery of a window with moulding concealed by the 18<sup>th</sup> century masonry.

Plan of the present quartier Royal and, in dark grey, the location of the old palace. According to a topographic survey of 1966 and the State Archives in Belgium, handwritten maps and plans.



In 2001, other boreholes laid bare the remains of the outbuildings in the Impasse du Borgendael. In 2002, these archaeological remains were classified as a monument. During the winter of the following year, work concentrated on uncovering the remains of the main porch of the palace under the place Royale, which also enabled the archaeological site to be provided with an emergency exit.

The plan of page 9, drawn up in October 1894 by Brussels City officials, is the earliest representation of the cellars linking Grimbergen House to Bellevue Hotel. The entrance was from Bellevue Hotel, giving access to an area of cellars of the main building of the old palace. These cellars ended in the lower level of the chapel, only half of whose rooms were known at the time. In 2000 these areas were linked up and form part of today's visit of the archaeological site.

Another view of the remains.



Aerial view of the excavating of the *Aula Magna* and rue Isabelle.



Suggestion of the chapel wall in the *cour aux lions* during the 2003 dig, with a view on the place des Palais.

# The Coudenberg from the 11<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries

## COUDENBERG'S POSITION IN THE CITY

The nobility, like the Counts of Hoogstraeten, aristocrats and court officials had their residences built in the immediate vicinity of the Coudenberg, alongside the palace or in the area of the church of the Sablon.

The rue Isabelle was laid in the 17<sup>th</sup> century to facilitate movements between the palace and the collegiate church of St. Gudula, whose history is intimately bound up with that of Brussels. The route ran alongside the palace gardens and park.

Near the markets, the Town Hall where the City Magistrate sat, rivalled the royal palace in beauty. The City authorities commissioned the tower in 1449 from Jan van Ruysbroeck who built a master-

piece of elegance and technical skill. The lower district of Brussels, crossed by the Senne – covered in the 19<sup>th</sup> century – was where most production activities took place, often polluting and unhealthy. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the port of Brussels moved from the banks of the Senne to develop in the north west, after the Willebroeck canal was opened, around the docks and quaysides of the St. Catherine district. The canal offered a much more direct route to the Scheldt and the sea, opening up the city to international trade and encouraging travel, indispensable factors for economic development and the power of the city in relation to the central Government.



Map of the City of Brussels after the fire at the palace.

The building is shown damaged.

1. Palace; 2. Impasse du Borgendael; 3. Hoogstraeten House; 4. Rue Isabelle;  
5. Church of the Sablon; 6. Domus Isabellae.

## The *Frigidus Mons* in Brussels

Brussels came to the fore as the capital city after a struggle for influence with Leuven and later Mechelen. The story of the installation of the Duke in Brussels is the subject of a debate between mediaeval historians. There is evidence that the Duke or his feudal lord resided in the fort of *Frigidus Mons* or Coudenberg in the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

In the days when royal courts tended to be itinerant, the Duke of Burgundy, Philip the Good, paid much attention to his palace in Brussels, which he equipped with a splendid reception room. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Emperor Charles V installed his sister Mary of Hungary as Governess of his territories and designated Brussels as the headquarters of the institutions of the central government of the Low Countries.

Coudenberg hill, to the east of Brussels, sits 40 metres above the city. The palace overlooked a depression, used as gardens after the second city wall was built in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. This depression was formed by the Coperbeek, a stream that had its source near the first Coudenberg gate, close to the Ducal park, and flowed into the Senne near the church of St. Nicholas.

The castle, later to become the palace of Coudenberg, was built into the first wall around Brussels in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. This wall had a perimeter of four kilometres.

There were seven entrance gates. The wall was important for defending the city but also served as a propaganda device to display the local authorities' wealth and power. In the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century, an incursion by the Count of Flanders, Louis of Male, prompted Duke Wenceslas and Duchess Jeanne of Brabant to take new measures to protect their city.

A second wall was built, enclosing a farming area and the built-up districts that were spreading beyond the first wall. The new wall gave Brussels the pentagonal shape that corresponds to the capital's outer boulevards. At that time the Coudenberg castle lost its strategic function and gradually became one of the finest royal residences in Europe, complete with magnificent gardens and a great park: the *Warande*.



Model (detail) of the city in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Artist's impression of the original castle.

CURIA BRABANTIAE, IN CELEBRI ET POPULOSA URBE BRUXELLIS.



R. Vanden Hoeye of Amsterdam, after  
B. de Momper, *Le koert de Bruxelles*,  
17<sup>th</sup> century.

1. Aula Magna
2. Chapel
3. Main building
4. Gallery
5. Courtyard
6. Bailles
7. Porch
8. St. Jacques
9. Borgendael
10. Gardens
11. First city wall

### The first buildings

In the absence of archaeological remains or iconographic representation, little is known of the original Ducal castle on the Coudenberg before the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

From the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the residence of the Dukes of Brabant was located on the route of the first city wall, following a north-west/south-east direction on the side of the Coudenberg and alongside the Coperbeek valley. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, especially from 1362 to 1368, the residence was enlarged under the impetus of Duchess Jeanne.

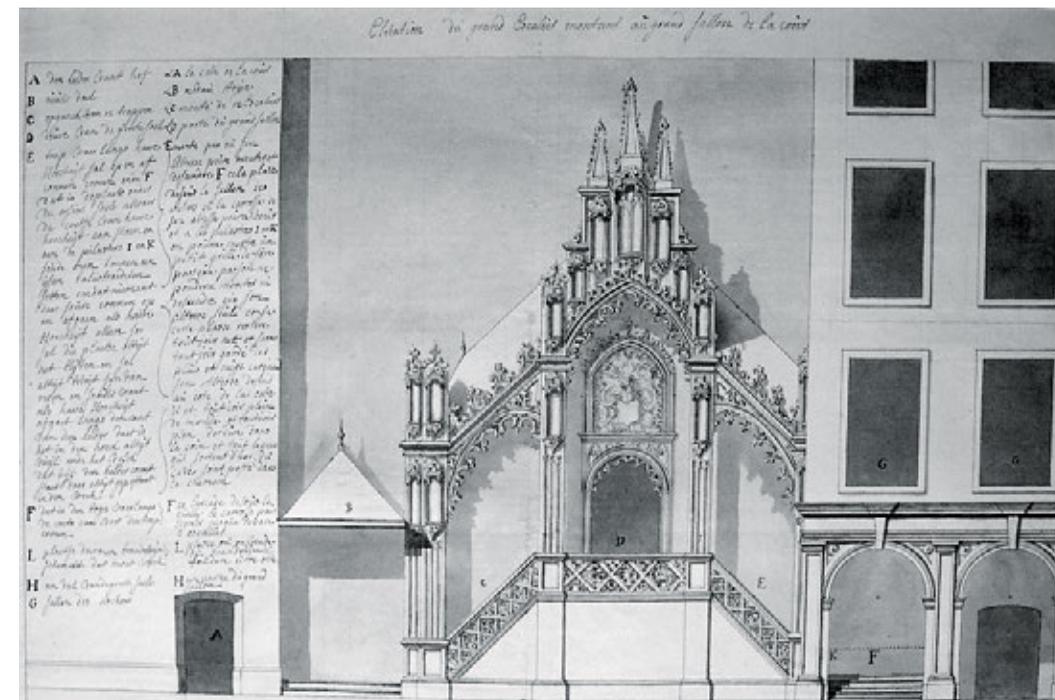
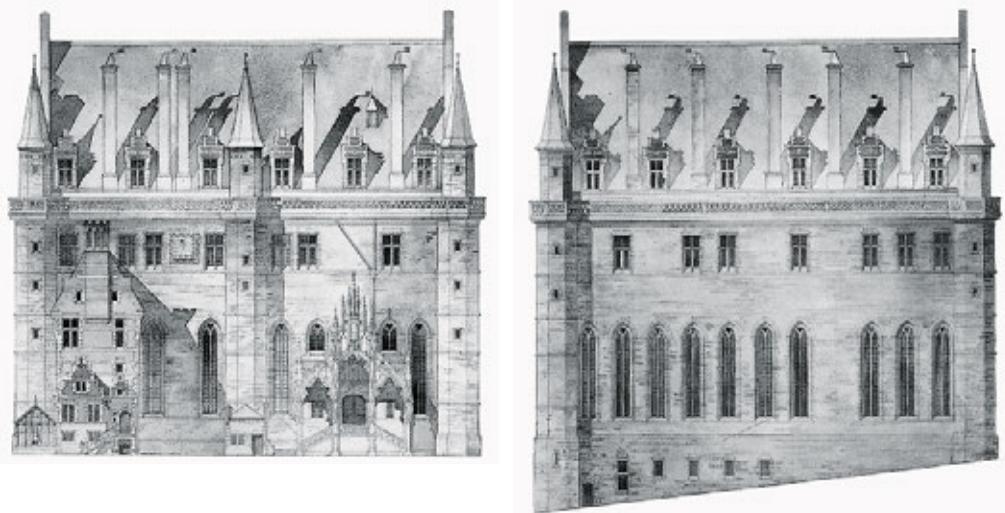
By then, the Ducal residence was already organised in the same way as in the following century: four buildings around a central courtyard: on the south side was an entrance from a courtyard of the Bailles, a banqueting hall and a chapel facing the lower city; the apartments faced towards the grounds and the outbuildings towards the Borgendael.

### The Aula Magna

Major works were begun in 1431 that transformed the palace apartments, porch and gardens. A first hall was built between 1431 and 1436 under the direction of master mason Gilles Joes who at the time was working at the collegiate churches of St. Gudula and St. Guido of Anderlecht. This first hall was on the park side, above the city wall, on the slopes of the Coperbeek.

P. Saintenoy: Great Hall, artist's impression of the façade on the courtyard side, with staircase.

P. Saintenoy, Artist's impression of the Great Hall around 1930. On the side of Rue Isabelle.



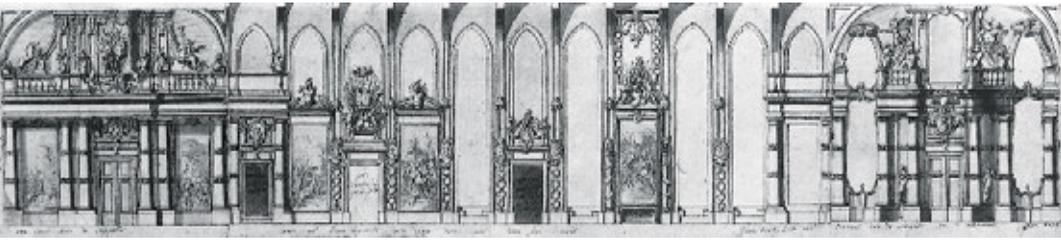
Recently acquired by the Archives of the City of Brussels, signed by Bauerscheit the court architect, this elevation drawing is one of the rare representations of the architecture of the entrance to the Aula Magna. It is accompanied by a detailed plan with comments in Dutch and French. The legend of the drawing indicates that there were plans to fit a grille to prevent dumping of rubbish and to keep away curious passers-by leaving the cellars. The intermediate landing of the staircase could also receive wine merchants.

The second hall had to satisfy a specification that prescribed the types of external walls, lintels and window jambs. The walls were built of brick and local limestone.

When the Ducal palace was being restored and enlarged, special attention was paid to the banqueting hall, also known as the *Aula Magna* or Great Hall. In 1452, work began on building a great banqueting hall on the site of the old feast hall. The building contract bound the City's master of works, Guillaume de Vogel, to complete the project over eight years.

The hall, a large rectangular parallelepiped flanked by polygonal towers at the corners and a turret on the façade facing the inner courtyard, had a tiled roof and was built of brick and stone. There was a second storey in the wood-framed loft.

The hall communicated with the chapel on the first level through an opening in the adjoining wall on the side of the inner courtyard. Sixteen metres wide, the ceiling was built of oak beams and panelling. For important ceremonies, the hall was divided up using light

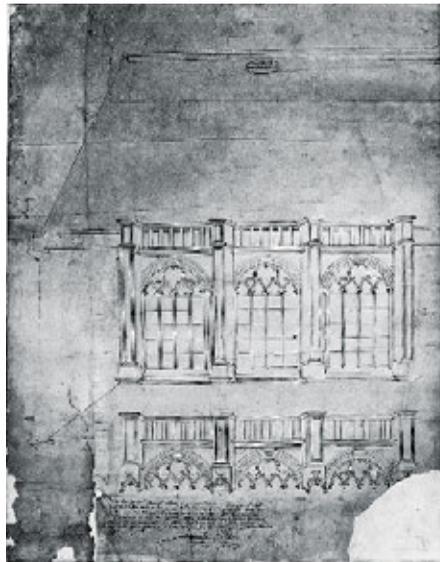


J. P. Van Bauerscheit, view inside the Great Hall of the palace, 1720.

partitions; three successive spaces progressively limited the extent to which those present could take part in the ceremony.

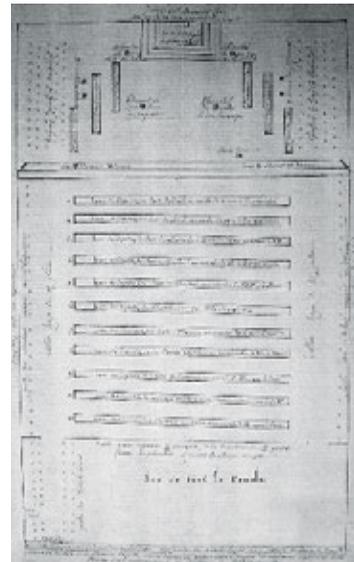
The monumental entrance porch contained a staircase with two flights leading to a landing on a level with the Great Hall. This porch may have dated back to the third quarter of the 15<sup>th</sup> century and remained barely altered from its original state until the palace burned down in 1731. The design of the balustrades and pillars – dating from the early 18<sup>th</sup> century – was preserved.

Substantial ruins of the *Aula Magna* remained after the fire had wrecked the palace; they were knocked down during work on the new place Royale.



Illuminations of the hall in 1725.

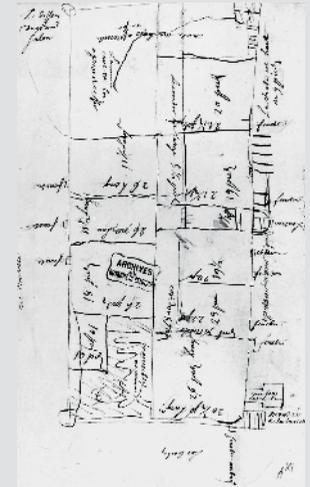
Plan of the rebuilding.



## THE REMAINS OF THE AULA MAGNA

The lower levels of the Aula, housing kitchens and services, still exist. They feature four impressive fireplaces arranged in a right angle. These remains are the tangible signs of the successive stages of the building's life. The bottom of the spiral staircase in the north tower can also be seen. The chequered paving

slabs were found crumbling away on the debris. On the façade on the rue Isabelle side, the remains survive up to the height of the window sills. The waste-disposal conduits can be seen passing through the masonry of the side wall, ending up at the openings onto the rue Isabelle.

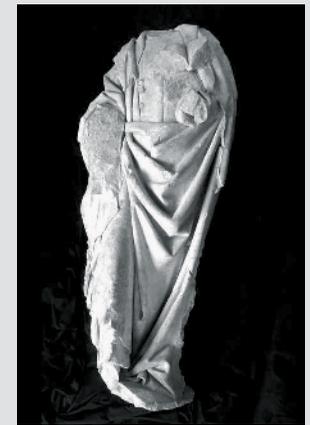


Dimensioned sketch of the areas under the *Aula Magna*, around 1725. The positions of the staircases and passageways are indicated.

## A MONUMENTAL STATUE OF THE 15<sup>th</sup> CENTURY ON THE SITE

In 1998, archaeologists made a remarkable discovery amongst the remains of the *Aula Magna*. They found a large statue of an apostle in soft Avesne stone lying in the area that would have been the kitchens. The apostle is holding part of a book at his chest, but neither the arms nor head were ever found. The robe on the statue unfurls into full, deep folds. The surface would have been brightly coloured, a few traces of which are still on the robe, under the book and on the bare feet. The depth of the folds and the

twisted position of the body are evidence of great technical skill and a desire to give life to the volumes of material, in the manner of the Burgundian works of the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century.



Standing statue, 15<sup>th</sup> century.

## A CHINA MANUFACTURER... AND DEMOLITION MAN

When the new royal district was designed in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the china manufacturer François-Joseph Peterinck demolished the *Aula Magna* using gunpowder. He was the director of the soft porcelain factory in Tournai. This former French army officer, who went on to a career in china manufacture, was also an expert in demolition works.

He offered his services to speed up the creation of the new place Royale, hoping to be relieved of a debt.

Traces of the explosion in the archaeological site. Photo of the collapsed tiled floor from the *Aula Magna*.





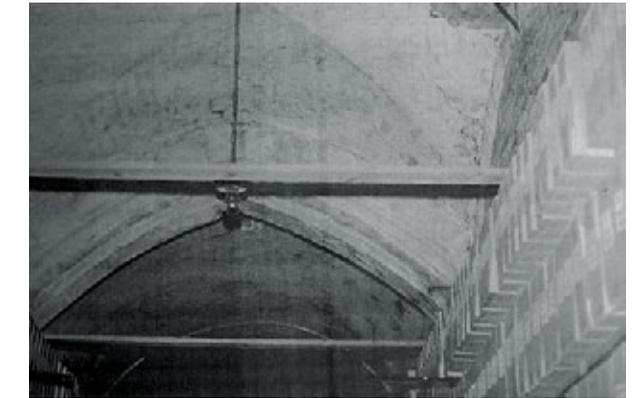
The chapel. Detail of "The Infanta Isabelle in the palace gardens", attributed to D. and J.-B. Van Heil (17<sup>th</sup> century).

### The chapel

A first chapel occupied the site at intersection of the banqueting hall with the main building, at the north corner of the palace. In 1384 the painter Jan van Woluwe was commissioned to decorate it. The design for a new chapel emerged in the first third of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and the contract was signed in 1522.

The chapel made up the difference in level between the inner courtyard of the palace, Ingelandstraat, later to become rue Isabelle, and the Coperbeek valley. It was designed by Henri van Pede, master mason of the City of Brussels.

The chapel was on three levels: one level for religious services and the two lower levels for the service, etc. The central nave ended in a choir surrounded by an ambulatory extended by the aisles. The building was lit by wide, tall windows.



Photograph from the 1950s showing the remains of the old chapel in use as an archive storage space.

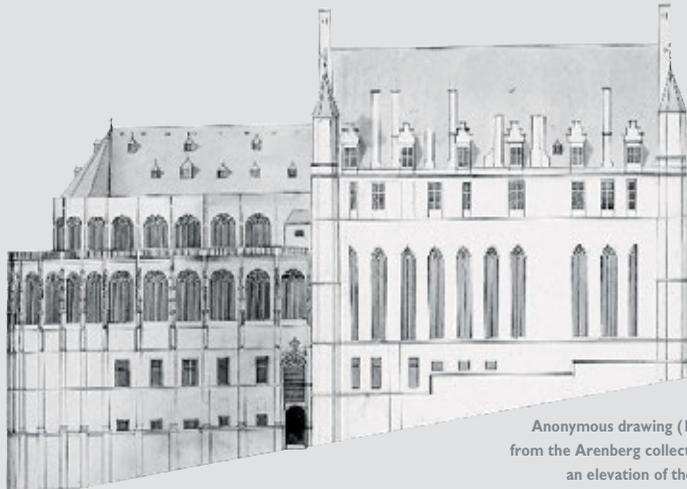
J. P. van Bauerscheit, interior view of the palace chapel, 1720.



Tombstone of Adam van Gerijs, 1394, master mason who built the chapel under Jeanne and Wenceslas. He was buried in the parish church of Vilvoorde.

The works were completed under the direction of Pierre van Wyenhoven and Jan vanden Gheere, master masons of the chapel of the Blessed Sacrament at the collegiate church of St. Gudula. It was richly hung with tapestries, gilded ornaments and painted canopies above the imperial thrones. The sacristy, in the shape of a tower of square plan, was linked to the chapel apse by an overhead passageway. Very early on and throughout the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, much restoration and maintenance work was necessary.

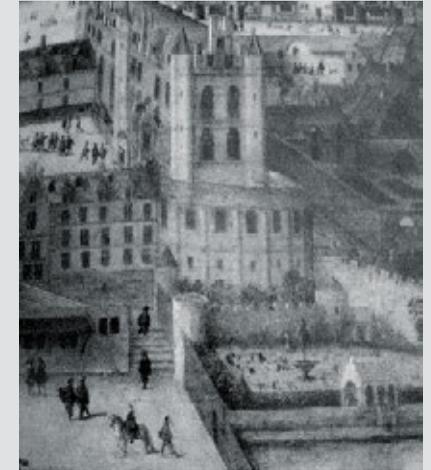
In 1731, the chapel escaped the fire in the palace. The initial projects to redesign the square kept the chapel in situ. In the end, the chapel was demolished, except for its lower level which was consolidated and became the basement of the new Grimbergen House. These remains form the core of the archaeological site.



Anonymous drawing (18<sup>th</sup> century) from the Arenberg collection showing an elevation of the chapel and *Aula Magna* from the rue Isabelle.

## THE STORM OF 1536

In November 1536 a storm blew off the chapel's temporary roof. The accounts show expenditure for remaking the thatched roof blown off "by the strong raging winds" in Brussels. But thatch was no match for the weather conditions. Three years later, the palace fabric office decided to replace the thatched roof that was already "quite rotten" and "to avoid destruction by fire and damage by rain" by a new temporary wooden roof.



Detail of the chapel's thatched roof around 1548.

## THE REMAINS OF THE CHAPEL

Archaeological research carried out in the chapel has shown that level -1 was supported by columns; the circular foundations confirm these observations. The flooring of level -2 was made of sandy limestone slabs. The lower level is preserved up to the vaulting. The use of massive octagonal pillars, linked by load-bearing arches, made for a highly stable building. The old doors, access corridors and

flooring are divided up by 18<sup>th</sup> century partitions installed during the works on the place Royale. A window of moulded stone in the chapel apse was recently uncovered. It is a rare example of the special care given to architectural decor and the finishing of the facings by the Brabant masons of the early 16<sup>th</sup> century.



The basement of the chapel. The octagonal pillars supported the vaulting over these storage areas.



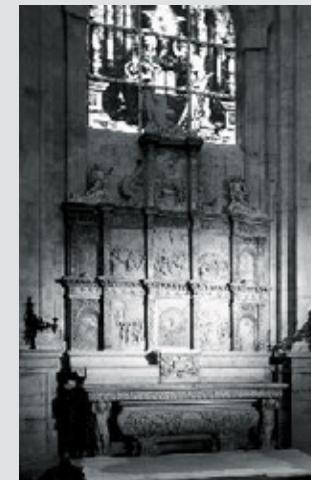
One of the chapel's gothic windows.

## AN OLD ALTAR FROM THE CHAPEL IS RESTORED

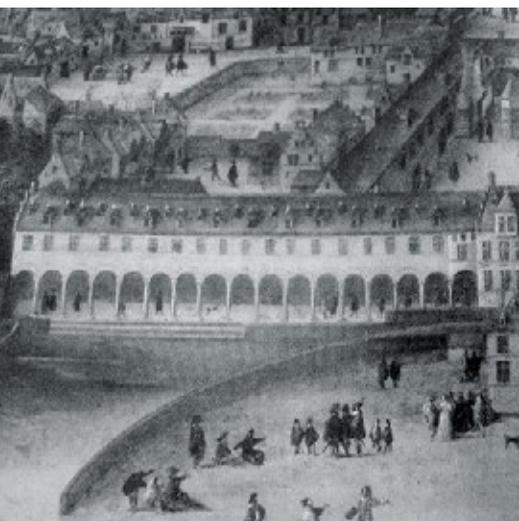
The chapel was furnished with magnificent altars and retables commissioned from artists of Brussels or Mechelen. The princes and governors changed the furnishings in line with the prevailing fashion or their financial means. In 1601 the Archdukes bought from the Abbey of St. Adrien in Grammont a panel by Jean Gossart - now kept in the National Gallery in London - representing the "Adoration of the Magi", intended for the chapel's main altar. This work replaced a old altar table created in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century by the Brussels master stone mason Jean vanden Gheere. It is interesting to follow its movements. This altar was donated by Albert and Isabelle to the Abbaye de la Cambre in 1610. In the early days of Belgian independence, it was

transferred to the collegiate church of St. Gudula. Kept in the chapel of St Mary Magdalene, also known as the Maes chapel, behind the choir, it is the only extant decorative element of any importance from the old palace to be kept in Brussels, though it was fully restored and extended in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The archives of the fabric of St. Michael and St. Gudula record that the retable was restored under the direction of Van der Straeten in 1832. At that time,

the church fabric paid the bills of sculptors Simon for the architectural sculptures, of Bocqué for the alabaster material and of Grootaers for the "bas-relief statuary". These accounting documents date the removal of the retable and its probable transport to St. Michael and St. Gudula at 1832-1833.



The retable in position.



The gallery as it was until 1610 (detail). Anonymous, 1548.



The gallery after 1610 (detail). "The Infanta Isabelle in the palace gardens", attributed to D. and J.-B. Van Heil.

### The gallery

At the eastern end of the main building, the first city wall was used as the foundation for the new gallery designed in 1533 as an extension of the apartments building.

The works lasted four years during which Louis van Boghem, returning from Brou where he had just completed the work on the convent of Saint-Nicolas-en-Tolentin for Margaret of Austria, was consulted on the foundations of the gallery. The upper storey enabled the court to meet for private festivities.

Between 1608 and 1610, a further storey was added. The work spread over some ten years during which the apartments were also enlarged by the court architect Coberger.

The gallery communicated with the grounds by means of a ramp and a staircase. The many arcades gave rhythm to the architecture and provided a route from the palace's inner courtyard to the grounds without passing through the apartments. Decorated with statues of Germanic emperors, it was also known as the "gallery of the emperors".

### The apartments

The main building was sited on the city's defensive wall, orientated east-west. The apartments comprised a bedroom, dressing room,

bathroom for the latrines and a private oratory. There was a gradual transition between the public spaces and the areas strictly reserved for royalty. The bathrooms occupied the lower levels of the main building on the side of the *Warande*. The bedrooms were heated by many imposing stoves, often made of glazed relief tiles.

The apartments were continually being enlarged and altered. A large section of the cellars under the main building still exists today under rue Royale. These cellars were perhaps situated under the baths and indicate the width of the main building in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century. In 1431, the main building was doubled in size towards the *Warande*, replacing the first defensive wall at that point. There was a passage directly linking the apartments to the chapel. A spiral staircase in the turret on the façade facing the inner courtyard connected the various levels of the apartments.

The Duke's apartment was on the first floor while the Duchess had her apartments on the second floor. Two private oratories gave directly onto the chapel.

In the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, there was an attempt to unify the facades and structures. The *Maison d'Isabelle* (House of Isabelle) was built (on the site of the present-day Errera House) and a storey was added to the main building. A gallery built in front of the façade unified the main building in the inner courtyard.

## THE REMAINS OF THE RESIDENCE BUILDING

Part of the cellars of the main building are still intact under rue Royale, at the entrance to the place Royale. Straddling the first city wall, they consist of a vaulted space. They are built of local limestone and the original entrance communicated directly with the palace's inner courtyard. A few metres higher, the first level of the apartments and a window sill have been exposed in preparation for road works. A painting of the "Virgin with Child in an interior" attributed to Jean Gossart may be a representation of a bedroom in the main building in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. The interior is wood panelled.

In the background, the neighbouring area can be seen through an open window: the church of St. Gudula, the first city wall and the ponds of the *Warande*.



Bernard Van Orley, *Virgin with Child*, circa 1516-1518.



The place des Bailles in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century (detail).

The same square in the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. N. Van der Horst and A. Paulus, "Entrance of Maria de Medici to the court of Brussels".



### The place des Bailles

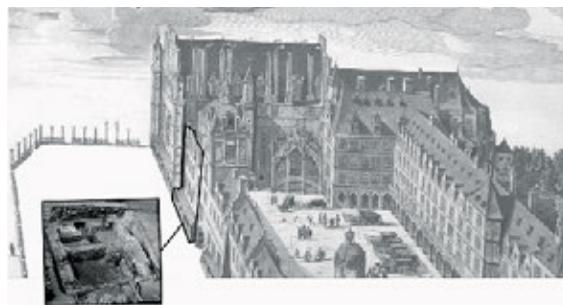
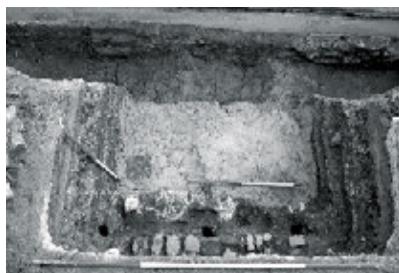
The entrance to the palace courtyard was closed off by a balustrade flanking a public square: the place des Bailles. In mediaeval times, the word "baille" meant barrier or fence, and by extension the space enclosed. These barriers were rebuilt several times. They were first mentioned at a tournament in 1340.

In 1431, Philip the Good began a major programme of renovations and enlargements to the palace; from 1434 the Bailles was the main place where the Ducal power was displayed: three gilded statues representing a lion held the Duke's arms.

On the death of Charles the Bold, riots broke out in the city: the Bailles and the palace entrance were burnt down. In 1480, the City rebuilt the Bailles at its expense for the arrival of Maximilian. The square was a free-trade area. Many shops were set up there.

The excavations of the place des Bailles. Paving slabs and situation of the shops bordering the square near the palace entrance porch.

Engraving (detail) of 1649. *Curia Brabantiae in celebri et populo urbe Bruxellis*, J. Van de Velde. Lay-out by P. Anagnostopoulos.



In 1510, the sculptor Pasquier Borreman produced a model of the Bailles to be built. The levelling of the square began in 1515 and lasted five years. The masonry work was directed by Antoine II and III Keldermans and completed under the direction of Rombaut Keldermans. The statues on the columns were to be of brass. In 1521, all the masonry was painted bright blue by Gaspard van Coninxloo. Composed of a set of ten balustrades with alternating high and low columns, the Bailles had a fairly rounded plan with eleven entrances.

The fences were restored many times up to 1675. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Bailles acquired a four-sided plan; three main sides from the *Aula Magna* and towards the church of St. Jacques, and a short side returning to the church.

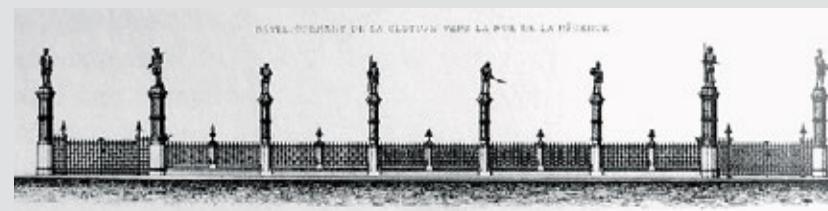
From that time on, some shops looking onto the palace side of the square were rebuilt in stone and brick. Finally, in 1772, the square was levelled to facilitate military parades. This marked the final disappearance of the "court barriers".

In spring 2003, the archaeological dig revealed the paved surfaces of the old square; traces of a shop site were also found.

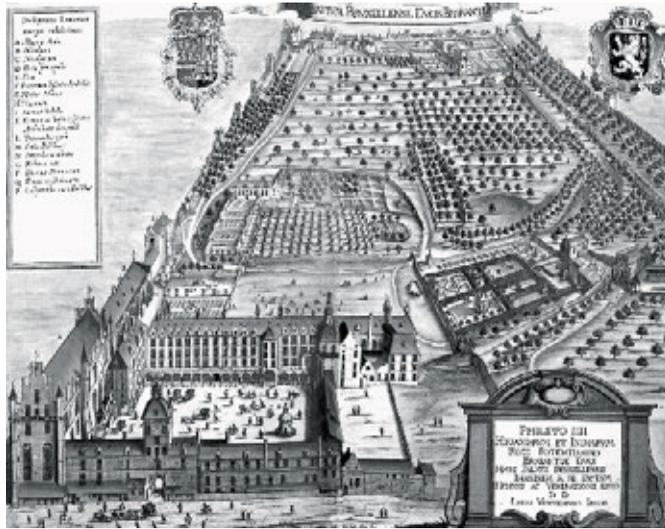
### THE CREATION OF THE PETIT SABLON SQUARE AND THE FORMER PLACE DES BAILLES

The old palace was a source of inspiration for the design of 19<sup>th</sup> century Brussels. With the support of mayor Charles Buls, the Petit Sablon square was laid out in 1890 on the basis of the plans of architect Henri Beyaert. In this park dedicated to the great historical figures of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the fence imitated the

Bailles of the old Ducal palace. The wrought iron fence is broken up by columns bearing statues in honour of the ancient trades of Brussels. This was the first attempt at urban architecture that took inspiration from the old palace. It was evidence of a desire to recall an illustrious architectural history.



Balustrade of the Petit Sablon square (detail), design by H. Beyaert.



Palatium Bruxellense Ducis Brabantiae, 1659, L. Vosterman Jr.

### The gardens and park

The gardens and park made the reputation of the Coudenberg palace. The 35 hectare estate that extended between the two city walls, from the palace to the rue de Louvain, was gradually pieced together and developed.

The *Warande* formed the Great Park that covered three quarters of this estate. It was originally a game reserve, converted to a leisure wood with semi-public paths, where animals, especially deer, roamed freely.

The small park in the Coperbeek valley, between the rear façade of the Coudenberg palace and the *Warande* was accessible via a carriage way and a staircase.

The space between the two was reserved for real tennis. Further off, in a meadow used as a paddock, chivalrous feasts were held up until the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Later, these areas were transformed into regular flowerbeds, with balustrades and fountains.

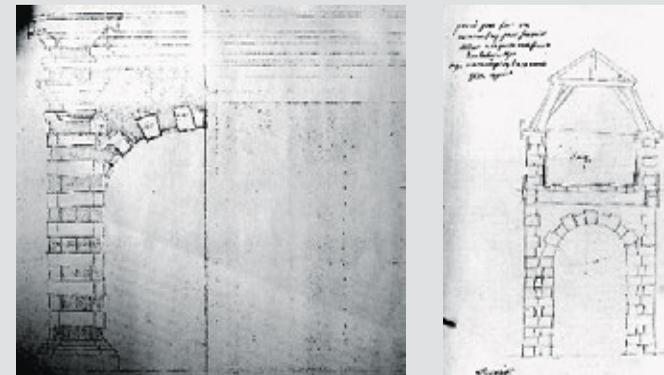
Charles V transformed the court's secret garden – *la feuillée*, originally an orchard – into a lush “maze” of plants and ponds where one could also bathe. This area covered the whole slope of the valley.

The Archdukes restored the magnificence it had lost during the latter half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Salomon de Caus applied his engineering skills there, piping in quantities of water from the pumping station



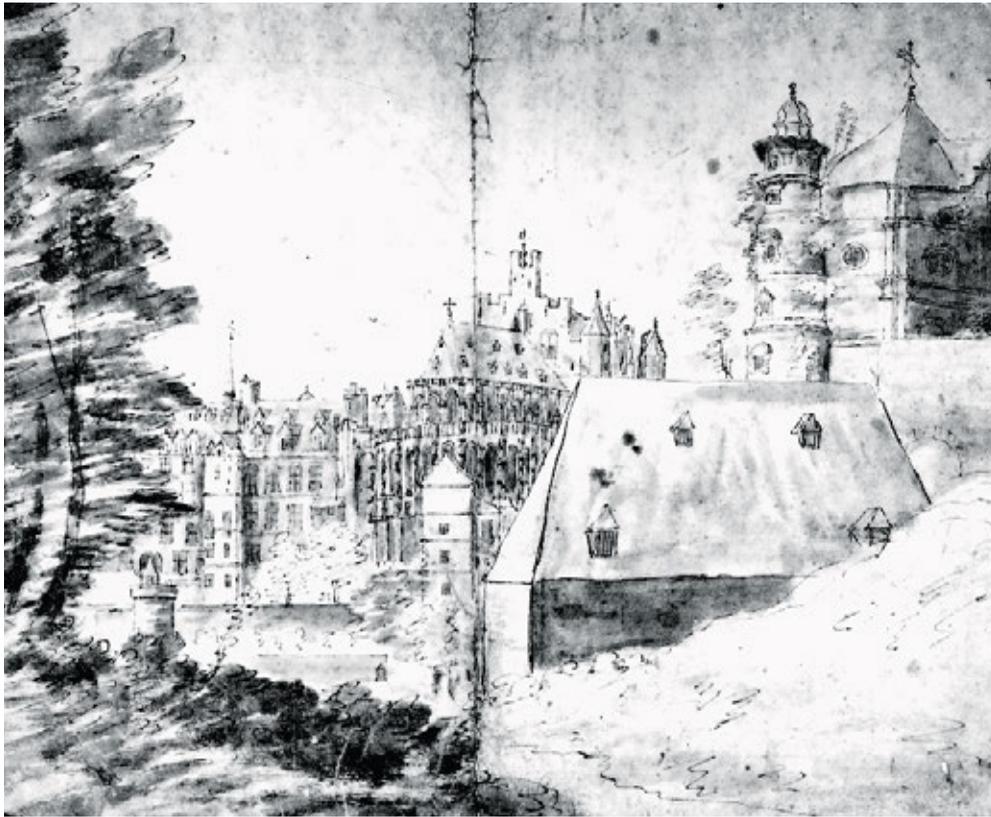
“The gardens of the palace of Brussels” latter half of 18<sup>th</sup> century, attributed to I. Van der Stock.

at St. Josse-ten-Noode. Italian-style rockeries were also added, along with grottoes for religious devotion and relaxation, decorated with mechanical and musical figures. A number of cottages were also spread along the route of the maze.



Two drawings of the architecture of the maze, 1730.

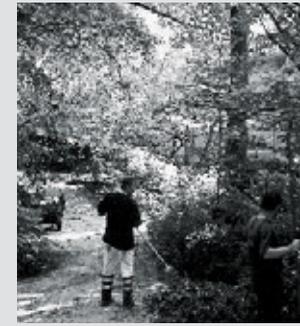
**The first drawing merely shows the elevation of the entrance gate to the maze using the common elements of a 17<sup>th</sup> century building: an engaged column, an arch and an entablature. The second drawing shows the arrangement for a tank to supply the water to the artificial grotto in the maze. The architect responsible for the work proposes two solutions: either to build the tank in masonry above the entrance gate of the maze so as to reduce the cost of the works, or to have a tank made of lead.**



Washdrawing of the gardens and the palace looking south, from a position close to the *Domus Isabellae*, 17<sup>th</sup> century. The main building, chapel and *Domus Isabellae* are clearly identifiable.

Below the chapel, a small flower garden was decorated with statues of Hercules and the four seasons. It housed a fishpond with swans. Between the fishpond and the first city walls, Archduchess Isabelle built a false gateway and, further off, a staircase tower and the *Domus Isabellae*.

The palace gardens also held other surprises in store, such as the vineyard planted on the side of the valley exposed to the sun. In peacetime, the Governors-General were keen to improve the palace grounds, with the building of a pavilion, under Leopold William, to house part of his huge collection of pictures, the plan to create a garden of medicinal plants, the building of a new orangery, or aviaries to keep rare and exotic species of birds in captivity.



**THE PARK OF BRUSSELS**, as laid out in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and shortened under Leopold II by the extension of the place des Palais, has preserved an area of the old *Warande* of the Ducal palace. From the place des Palais, a large depression is divided by a central alley. This depression covered in bushes, shrubs and trees is what remains of the *Warande* and is still regularly maintained by the commune's staff; it features a reproduction of Dusquesnoy's reclining Venus.

This view shows the ground sloping down into the Coperbeek valley. In the foreground is a pond at the intersection of the walkways. In the background, a fountain and the roofs of the Maximilian-Emmanuel country house can be seen. In the background on the left one can make out the front towers of the collegiate church of St. Michael and St. Gudula.



View of the park with staff of the commune at work. In the background, the balustrade of the place des Palais.

"The valley in the royal park in Brussels", anonymous drawing, 17<sup>th</sup> century.

### THE VIRGIN OF THE ROSARY

On this panel, attributed to Goswyn van der Weyden, one of the earliest views of the Brussels palace gardens is shown in the background of a Marian scene.

The balustrade at the end of the terrace closes off the space representing the devotion. Beyond, to the left, the outline of the towers of the collegiate church of St. Michael and St. Gudula stands facing the first city wall. At the bottom of the valley is

the Clutinck pond; further off, a country house stands on a wooded hillock. A vineyard spreads out beneath it. The Leuven gate is visible at the top right. The orientation of the landscape is identical to that sketched by Albrecht Dürer when he stayed in Brussels in 1520. The New York picture nevertheless gives a clearer view of the variations in relief; the viewpoint is from the terrace in front of the façade of the main building.



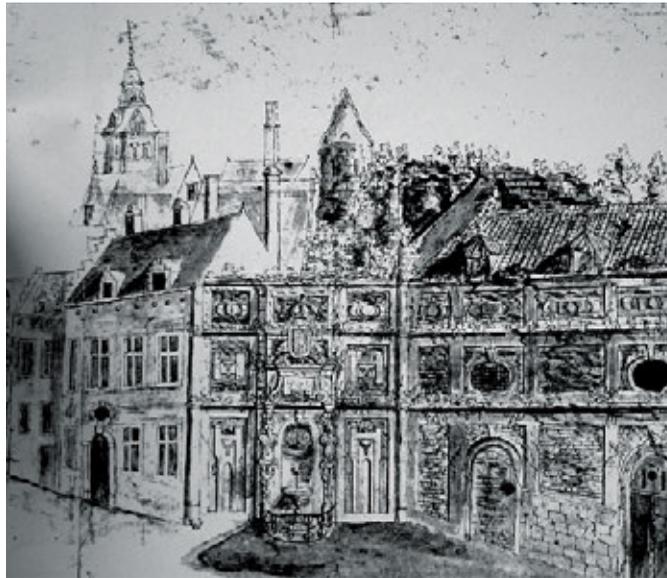


Rue Isabelle today. The street is covered in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and passes under the place Royale.

## Rue Isabelle

Rue Isabelle is of mediaeval origin. It took over part of the route of the old *Ingelantstraat*, perhaps named after the nearby inn *Den Ingel*. In the early 17<sup>th</sup> century it was named after the Infanta of Spain, widow of Archduke Albert. The street was enlarged under his reign. It was extended towards the collegiate church of St. Gudula. When redesigning the royal district, the architect Barnabé Guimard roofed it over for use as cellars. The Coudenberg archaeological site today features a section of the street that should be imagined in its original open-air state.

It sloped very steeply down the natural relief of the Coudenberg hill, from its highest point at place des Bailles (by the palace's main entrance) to its lowest point in the gardens. It ran along the facade of the palace on the side of the *Aula Magna* and the chapel. At the intersection of the banqueting hall and the place of worship, there was an access to the palace's inner courtyard via a large staircase starting in rue Isabelle. The house built by Antoine de Lalaing, Count of Hoogstraeten and influential counsellor and diplomat under Charles V, on the other side of the street stood. It then went on to pass in front of the guardsmen's houses, which separated the palace gardens from the street.



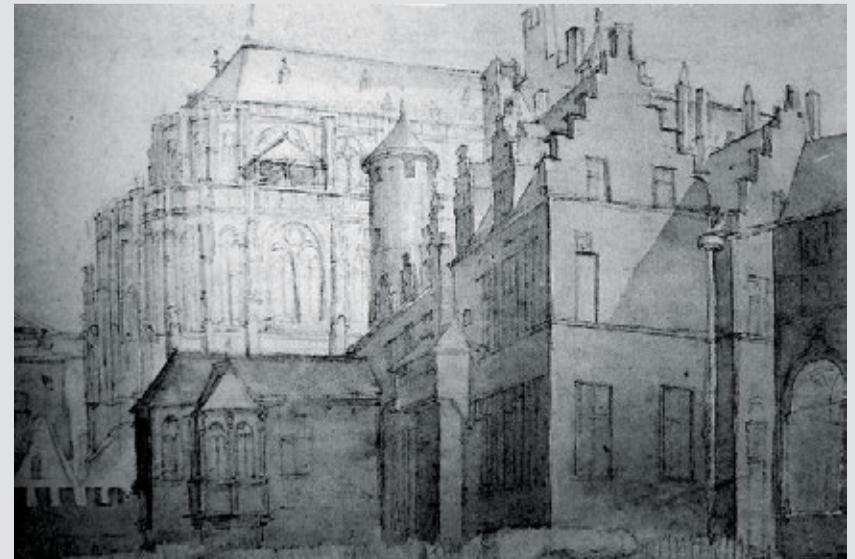
Drawing of part of rue Isabelle, Anonymous, 18<sup>th</sup> century. This drawing shows a section of Rue Isabelle just outside the palace. In the foreground, the baroque fountain occupies the street corner, in front of a dummy façade wall that provides a visual extension of the crossbowmen's building. Behind the wall, the turret is a remnant of the first city wall running alongside the palace grounds.

## THE REMAINS OF HOOGSTRAETEN HOUSE

The space formerly occupied by Hoogstraeten House is owned by the Ministry of the Brussels-Capital Region. An archaeological dig, restoration work and new developments are in progress.

This wash-drawing by a Florentine travelling to Brussels in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, Remigio Cantagallina, gives an idea of the scale of the house that then overlooked one of the "Jews' staircases" lined with houses: a Jewish community was established here in the Middle Ages, until the anti-Semitic persecutions of 1370. This view shows the house, stepped gables, the main building, private chapel and, in the foreground, a gallery that was partly preserved.

In 1774, when the new place Royale was redesigned, the City of Brussels bought up part of the house in order to demolish it. The other part underwent many ups and downs. Chamberlain Cornelle, Count of Spangen, erected a huge building in its place. Some features of the old Hoogstraeten House were preserved. In 1820, the new building where Alexander I, Tsar of Russia, lived came into the possession of the Prince of Orange who made alterations to it. Confiscated by the Belgian Government when the country became independent in 1830, the Spangen House was used by a number of public institutions including the Court of Auditors and the Ministry of the Brussels-Capital Region.



Washdrawing by Cantagallina, the Hoogstraeten House and the chapel of the Brussels palace, south orientation, 17<sup>th</sup> century.

# Everyday life in the Coudenberg palace

Coudenberg palace was the scene of a court "society". Foreign guests were received there. Magnificent receptions and feasts were held there, sometimes with the authorities of the City of Brussels.

The Central Government of the Low Countries sat in the palace to settle affairs of state. In the immediate entourage of the prince or his representative, the nobles, councillors and secretaries formed an aristocratic "elite" that handled social and economic relations with Brussels.

## The court environment

The Low Countries was not a kingdom but a group of principalities. The sovereign was recognised by the Assemblies of States of each entity as "natural prince". The *Joyeuse Entrée* of Brabant was a constitutional act under which the Duke, when he came to power, acknowledged and granted a number of privileges and exemptions for the citizens of Brabant.

The city of Brussels took advantage of Brabant's incorporation into the possessions of the Dukes of Burgundy in the 14<sup>th</sup> century to assert its role as capital. Claiming royal birthright, Duke Philip the Good aimed to display his power there in the form of a magnificent palace worthy of his political ambition. He obtained considerable advantages

from the Magistrate of Brussels and adopted a policy of centralising the Low Countries.

The Hapsburg dynasty ruled the Low Countries from the marriage in 1477 of Mary of Burgundy to Maximilian of Austria, up to the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Emperor Charles V achieved the culmination of the process of unifying the territory of the Low Countries, declaring them "one and indivisible". But they did not survive the uprising of the latter half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century against the authority of the "natural sovereign". The republican confederation of the United Provinces split away from the southern Low Countries. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the territories were further reduced in size during Louis XIV's wars of conquest.

Charles V was the last monarch to stay in the Brussels Palace. His successors delegated responsibility for the territories to a governor or governess.

The king or emperor continued to exert control from his foreign residence in Madrid and later Vienna. Correspondence on the "affairs of the Low Countries" reached Brussels sometimes long after the event. But they bear witness to the monarch's attachment to the royal prerogatives: the power to make laws, grant pardons and reduce sentences, mint coinage, appoint officials, judges, local authorities and church dignitaries, command the army, raise taxes, organise the customs system and summon the States. Public acts always mentioned his name and full title.

Portraits of  
Philip the Good (1396-1467),  
Charles the Bold (1433-1477),  
Margaret of Hungary (1480-1530),  
Charles V (1500-1558),  
Mary of Austria (1505-1558),  
Philip II (1527-1598).



The City partly funded the enlargement of the palace, seeing it as an effective means of securing its prestige, supporting its economic growth and raising its profile in relation to the other cities of the Low Countries and Brabant.

From the departure of Philip II for Spain in 1559 until the journey of Joseph II in 1781, no further monarchs stayed in Brussels. In the absence of the prince in the Low Countries, a personal representative, chosen from the princes of the bloodline, even if illegitimate, was appointed with powers limited by means of specific instructions. There was a succession of governors under the Duke of Burgundy, Philip the Fair, after he acquired the crowns of Spain, obliging him to travel frequently abroad. Elected emperor, Charles V appointed a permanent Governess-General. Mary of Hungary, his sister, appointed in 1531, was the first Governess to occupy the old palace of Coudenberg. The previous incumbent, Margaret of Austria, still resided in Mechelen which kept within its walls the Grand Council of the Low Countries, the highest court of justice of the Ancien Régime, and which in 1559 became the seat of a new archbishopric.

With the marriage of Archduke Albert of Austria, Governor-General, to the Infanta Isabelle, from 1599 to 1621 Brussels was once again home to monarchs, appointed by the Spanish King with a special status. The archdukes lived in the Coudenberg palace and revived a luxurious court lifestyle after the period of political instability in the Low Countries during the latter half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. At the turn of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, Governor-General Maximilian Emmanuel of Bavaria brought a breath of fresh air to the Brussels palace with his artistic patronage.

Under the Austrian Hapsburgs, the return to lasting peace gave the Emperor's representatives the opportunity to make a display of luxury and expand the princes' pleasures in the capital of the "Belgian provinces".

Until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, before the appointment of the Imperial Plenipotentiary Minister, the equivalent of a prime minister, the Governor-General enjoyed relatively broad decision-making powers and independence, although the major acts of public life were always reserved for the sovereign.

In mediaeval times, the prince obtained assistance from personalities from the nobility, the army or the Church. From the 15<sup>th</sup> century,

a succession of university-educated technocrats climbed up through the ranks of the institutions specialising in legal and financial affairs. All these officials met in a variety of bodies and were consulted on internal and external matters. When 1 October 1531 Emperor Charles V formally set up three government councils around Mary of Hungary, he put in place an institutional mechanism that enabled him to retain control over his direct representatives and bring together as many political players in the Low Countries as possible around a common project, the centralised monarchy.

The modern States gradually removed the members of the upper aristocracy from any real control of public affairs. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the nobility was ousted from the institutions and confined to strictly honorific court functions.

The Head of the Privy Council was the hub of all incoming and outgoing business. He distributed the mail and worked in close cooperation with the usher who was guardian of the seals and responsible for

#### THE ENTENTE CORDIALE OF THE ADMINISTRATION

**The secretaries of the government councils argued incessantly about the revenue linked to the acts they were drafting, the rights to dispatches paid by the citizens, which were very lucrative and enabled them to supplement their official salaries. These payments were subject to violent quarrels between**

**officials... Rules were made to redistribute the profits by means of a "common purse", a shared fund into which the secretaries paid the duties collected. But unending problems ensued when anyone fell ill or went on mission for the Governor-General outside Brussels.**



Signature of seven secretaries of the Privy Council on a request submitted to Mary of Hungary regarding remunerations.

handling the acts. Some central institutions sat at the Coudenberg palace: the Privy Council and the Council of Finances held their sessions and kept their archives there which were unfortunately lost in the fire of 1731.

News of politics throughout Europe reached the Coudenberg palace. Exchanges of letters with foreign courts were packed with information for Brussels of international events of special interest to the Hapsburgs and their representatives. The princes corresponded prolifically with one another. They exchanged news and gifts, negotiated treaties, supported peace initiatives or threatened military action. Several secretaries with a gift for foreign languages were responsible for translating the letters, summarising them for the Governor-General and subordinate Councils. These European exchanges raised the profile of the Brussels representative of the king or emperor and their entourage: although they remained under the supervision of a distant monarch, they also took part in the entente of the nations. Diplomats were sent on mission to England, Denmark, and the States of the Holy Roman Empire, to pay the respects and offer the “friendship” of their sovereign and Governor-General, to discuss news, resolve conflicts, and especially to maintain or stimulate trade with the Low Countries.

Coudenberg palace was a closed society in relation to the rest of the city. The entrance courtyard was separated from the public by the place des Bailles, fenced around with grilles and statues separating the reserved areas from the public areas where the population could observe the comings and goings and displays of pomp. And yet the Coudenberg was not cut off from the inhabitants who frequented the district, mainly the small traders who set up their stalls near the place des Bailles and in the Impasse du Borgendael. Suppliers also visited the court on a daily basis, for deliveries of staple commodities, commissions of works of art or materials used to build or restore the palace.

Noblemen, councillors and courtesans were eager to reside in the immediate vicinity of the Coudenberg palace. In the service of the monarch and his delegates, they endeavoured to establish themselves in the sphere of power. They had residences and palaces built in the district that vied with one another for grandeur and beauty, thus giving that part of the city of Brussels an aristocratic flavour.

### **RUBENS, ARTIST-DIPLOMAT OF THE COURT OF BRUSSELS**

**The Governors-General usually had members of their institutions represent them abroad. Sometimes, they made use of extraordinary personalities. Rubens occupied a dominant position in the European artistic world of his time. His painting was to the taste of the archdukes who commissioned many canvasses from him, true masterpieces of baroque art that satisfied the triumphalist demands of the Catholic Counter-Reformation. He mastered many languages and maintained a prolific correspondence of a very high intellectual level; he was summoned to the court to carry out certain diplomatic missions abroad, to Philip VI of Spain or Charles I of England. They were highly honoured and acknowledged his visits with letters of ennoblement.**

### **Infrastructure**

A host of royal servants were responsible for the day-to-day subsistence at the palace. A huge staff manned the kitchens. Over time, they grew in number and specialised in bakery, patisserie, roasting and saucemaking. Most of the consumables came from Brussels merchants who took pride in being able to fulfil all the palace's orders. The wine from the court vineyard was not worthy of the royal table; this privilege was reserved for the wines of France and the Rhine. Impressive quantities of meat were consumed each day: the main joints were of mutton, pork and beef, trimmed with the wares of “sparrow catchers” or hunters of rabbits or partridges. Fishmongers supplied cod, salmon, eels and herring. Carp were also taken from the palace fishpond.

Culinary art was cultivated in the court environment. New ideas were tried, such as spices from the East and vegetables from America. The princes also followed suit with the new culture of table art. Court etiquette required a worthy host to adapt to the proprieties: at the royal table, cutlery grew complex, while some dishes were served in special dishes and plates, technical and artistic masterpieces from the workshops of china makers and goldsmiths. Porcelain from China or earthenware from Delft were highly prized, to the extent that the great cities of Europe tried to imitate them and obtained permission from the local authorities to counterfeit them. Judging by the pictorial representations of the period, one could get the false impression that Coudenberg palace was a haven of peace, free of noise, where everything worked smoothly. Such a large residence required daily maintenance of the buildings. A court works office was responsible for this full-time. It dealt with maintenance, restoration, repairs, ordering of supplies, etc. The various parts of the palace were built at different times, sometimes over many years owing to a lack of resources or political unrest. The chapel took over 30 years to build! The building works dragged on, even though the contracts between the palace and the suppliers specified deadlines.

### **Entertainment**

The City and citizens of Brussels spent astronomical sums to demonstrate their loyalty to the crown and take part in the triumphalism of

### **CONVENIENCES: CUSTOMS AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE**

**From the 15<sup>th</sup> century the palace apartments were equipped with the most modern conveniences. Organic waste and damaged crockery were disposed of through the latrines into the cesspits. This made it possible to recover a great many objects discarded in the latrines of the Aula Magna.**

**The rooms were heated by large stoves made of varnished tiles. These tiles diffused the heat and were often decorated with their owners' coats of arms. On the other hand, the Aula Magna was equipped with monumental fireplaces, an ostentatious display of wealth to impress the guests.**

**Under the apartments on the park side, the baths provided many social functions. Everything was provided: basins of Écaussines stone, a boiler of brass, a dresser, table and baths of Danish wood, etc. In this ceremonial bathroom, the Duke could take the waters together with his guests.**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL OBJECTS:  
TANGIBLE REMNANTS OF EVERYDAY LIFE AND  
THE RICH DECORATION OF THE PALACE**

Many objects have been found during the archaeological digs of the old palace. Most come from the latrines of the *Aula Magna* and the main building. They provide first-hand documentation of the customs and amenities of palace life, mainly from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. For instance, the Archdukes' table was decorated with Venetian-style glassware.

"Venetian-style glassware" was produced locally, inspired by Venetian techniques and decors from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards. The translucent, water-white glass was obtained by adding soda and refined potash. In Brussels, the first permit to make Venice glassware was granted in 1623, to Antonio Miotti, related to the renowned glassmaker of Murano.

For everyday use, "common" glassware was influenced by German glass manufacture from the Middle Ages. This translucent, green glassware was obtained using sand and potash extracted from plant sources. In 1648, Jean Savonetti was granted an official permit to make this type of glass in Brussels. At banquets, drink flowed freely. Wine or beer were served in large individual beige and grey stoneware jugs. Several drinking jugs of Raeren stoneware of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries have been found intact on the Coudenberg archaeological site.

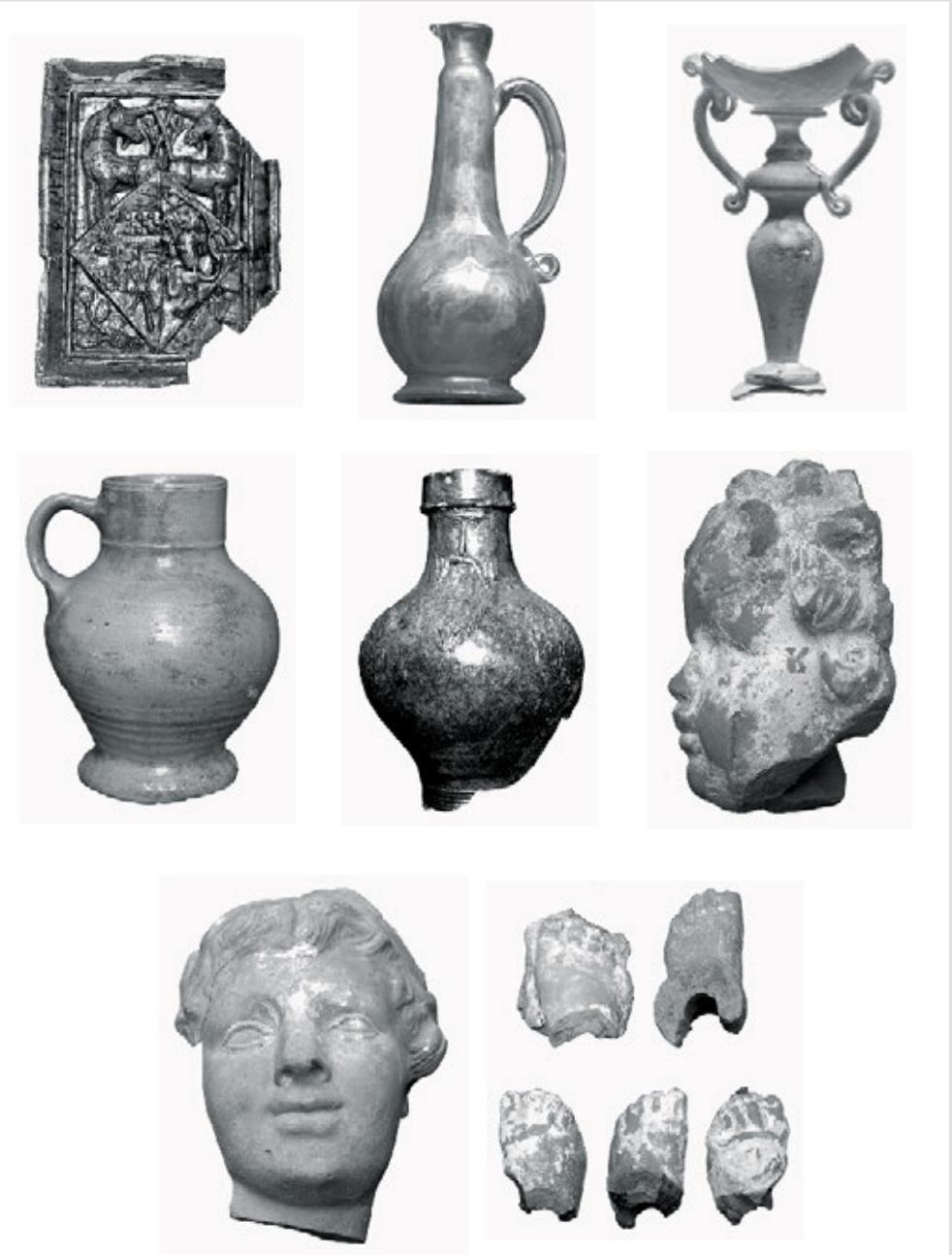
A "Bellarmine" – or "Bartmann" jug – was a stoneware jug decorated with a bearded head, applied most often to the neck using a mould. Such jugs were used to hold household liquids, such as vinegar, oil and wine. A wide variety of Bellarmine jugs have been found across Europe dating from the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Some specimens found on the archaeological site may date from the 17<sup>th</sup> century and feature medallions on the belly.

The decoration of the palace and gardens is also illustrated by many archaeological remains. These include metal objects found out of context or brought together again after the palace fire. They comprise parts of chest and door hinges and fittings for wooden furniture. There are examples of the palace's locks in the form of keys, bolts and latches; many nails, clamps and staples come from the demolished buildings. Lead from the roofing, gutters and windows has also been found in the deposits examined.

Furthermore, a store of scorched armour was protected by a staircase communicating between the service rooms under the *Aula Magna*. There are fifteen suits of iron armour probably belonging to the palace guard of the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century. The finds also include a portable canon and a fireback dated 1599 bearing the arms of Archdukes Albert and Isabelle.

Comprehensive restorations using mechanical or chemical treatments should enable a sample to be made fully legible in order to determine how and what they were used for, and engraved decoration to be interpreted.

In 2000, a pile of broken terracotta statues was discovered in the backfill under the main building. The statues and bases were moulded; they still bear traces of several coats of whitewash. Similar statues are depicted on an engraving of feasts in the palace. These statues of cherubs were arranged on a long balustrade built parallel to the façade of the main building, below the ramp down to the gardens.



Tile of a stove, phial, glass stem, jug, bartmann-jug, terracotta statues.



View of the park during the festivities for the take of Buda (detail), 17<sup>th</sup> century.

the dynasty. The inauguration ceremonies of monarchs such as the Duke of Brabant in accordance with the *Joyeuse Entrée* of Jeanne and Wenceslas, their solemn entrance or those of the governors-general responsible for governing the Low Countries were occasions for magnificent celebrations and popular rejoicing. Grand processions were organised to add ceremony to the receptions. Enchanting light shows, fireworks, artillery salves, ringing of bells, concerts and thanksgivings were ordered. Triumphal arches were set up, made of wood or canvas, decorated with royal coats of arms, emblems or devices, praising their merits, exhorting them to govern well, combined with many mythological, allegorical and historical allusions. The spectacle was such that it brought visitors from outside Brussels, it was hoped in large numbers, to applaud, eat and drink, and to indirectly repay the expenses incurred by means of the taxes on consumables. Any prince had to arrange extraordinary attractions: hunts, sleigh races and masquerades were part of the most extrovert entertainments of the court of Brussels to attract the attention of the inhabitants and the admiration of the curious, guests and travelers. The palace residents also took pleasure in simpler pastimes.



"Book of information on kings and princes", early 15<sup>th</sup> century.

The various parts of the gardens were laid out as splendid leisure areas concealed from view. Here, one could relax, bathe, play games and enjoy the fragrances of the flowers or the shade of the trees.



Procession of horsemen and camels at the entrance to the Bailles yard, on the occasion of a *Joyeuse Entrée*.

### Literature, art and religion

The presence of the court in Brussels was a great opportunity for artists and craftsmen to fill their order books. Magnificence was necessary to demonstrate their power, but the successive princes and governors-general in Brussels were also seeking personal, less ostentatious and more intimate satisfaction. The palace library was built in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. In the tradition of the house of Valois from which they descended, the Dukes of Burgundy cultivated a marked taste for books. Philip the Good collected nine hundred manuscripts to assemble one of the largest royal libraries of his time. His breviary and the "Belles Heures du Duc Jean de Berry" are among the most famous manuscripts in his collection. A third of his works survive today, and 247 of them are kept in the Albert I Royal Library.



Allegory of Sight (detail), J. Breughel, 1617. In the background, the palace of Brussels.

The palace contained countless collection items: the Prince was proud of his tapestries, paintings, gold and silver, furniture and jewels and took them with him on his travels. Until the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, the court was itinerant. After abdicating in 1555, Charles V removed the main paintings and statues of the Brussels collection from his residences in the Low Countries to his retreat in Spain, including 24 works by Titian, his favourite painter.

The tapestry collection was begun under the Dukes of Brabant. They were used as festive decorations for the great ceremonies, weddings or diplomatic meetings. For the princes' tapestries, very expensive materials were generally used, such as silk and gold and silver thread. In Tournai, Robert Dary and Jean de l'Ortie wove the eight large tapestries depicting the history of Gideon, hung for the chapters of the Golden Fleece. To celebrate his military victories, the States-General gave Charles V a series of tapestries, now kept in Naples, relating his exploits at the battle of Pavia and the defeat of his ancestral enemy, the King of France.

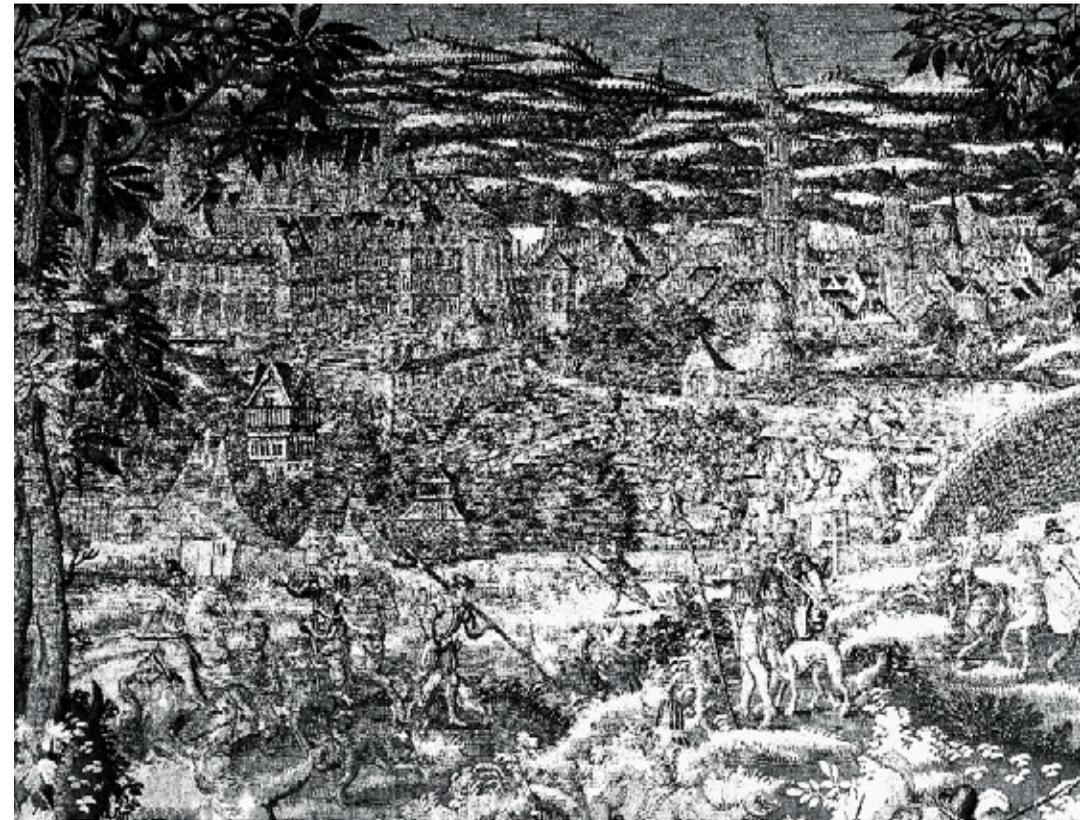
There was a court official responsible for the huge collection of tapestries, looking after their transport, hanging, maintenance and repair. Archdukes Albert and Isabelle encouraged the Brussels workshops, buying their works and giving them as presents to their foreign guests, since the remarkable quality of the workmanship was renowned throughout Europe.

Many of the most distinguished paintings that can be seen in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna come from the Coudenberg palace. They belonged to Archduke Leopold William who was Governor-General of the Low Countries from 1647 to 1656. In Brussels he created an exceptional art gallery, which he took away to his retreat in Vienna; on his death it passed to Emperor Leopold I. The painter David Teniers depicted it in his gallery of paintings. Other Governors-General were enlightened patrons: the twelve Rubens acquired by Maximilian Emmanuel of Bavaria – now kept in the Munich Pinacothek – were taken away to his retreat, so saving them from the 1731 fire.

Charles V's jewels were exceptional. An inventory of 1545 describes the treasure kept in the Coudenberg palace: jewels, gold and silver dishes, pearls and precious stones, necklaces and clothing of the orders of chivalry. Entire rooms of the palace were filled with curiosities



Frontispiece from the catalogue of Léopold Guillaume's art gallery.



Tapestry, "Meet of the hunt in the palace gardens", Brussels workshop, 17<sup>th</sup> century.

from the New World to impress visitors. The famous artist Dürer admired the Aztec objects there.

Music was an integral part of palace life. Performances were given during meals and at religious services, where choristers were employed and paid out of the royal purse. The Low Countries specialised in making instruments, such as harpsichords with an exceptional action that were rediscovered in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as interest in ancient music grew.

Catholicism was hugely influential in the Low Countries. Heretical movements were repressed in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Protestants were massacred or exiled. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the Jews who had been living on Coudenberg hill under ducal protection suffered terrible anti-Semitic persecution. A supposed miracle associated with the alleged profanation of the hosts at the collegiate church of St. Gudula



Isabelle in habit, after Van Dyck, around 1628.

gave rise to a devotion that was remembered into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. From 1531, at the initiative of Margaret of Austria, a procession accompanied by a fair was organised every July for this "Blessed Sacrament of the Miracle".

As exponents of the Counter-Reformation, the Archdukes made public displays of their faith. A devout believer, Archduchess Isabelle wore the habit of a Clarissa nun on the death of her husband. She created a public street bearing her name to get to the collegiate church of St. Gudula.

She honoured pilgrimages by her presence, such as the one of Notre-Dame de Laeken. She took an active part in the Ommegang, the procession from the church of Notre-Dame du Sablon, linked to the devotion of the *Grand Serment des Arbalétriers* for a statue of the Virgin.

Events linked to the life and death of the prince or governor-general were occasions for many expressions of piety. A sumptuous funeral procession was organised in Brussels after the death of Charles V.

The funeral of Archduke Albert in 1621 was in the same tradition, especially as his body was buried in Brussels.



"The magnificent and sumptuous funeral...", Plantin, 1559.

Fortunately, the old palace of Coudenberg in Brussels, has not disappeared completely. In the basements of the present-day Mont des Arts district, thousands of visitors every year can still gain access to the remarkable remains of its architecture. This archaeological site and the paintings and engravings kept in

the Museum of the City of Brussels – Maison du Roi – bear witness to Brussels' illustrious past. We are constantly adding to our knowledge in this field thanks to the research and work of historians, historians of art, archaeologists and specialists on the history of Brussels.

Former Palace of Brussels – Coudenberg Archaeological Site

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© Published by: Ministry of the Brussels-Capital Region,  
Direction for Monuments and Sites, Patrick Crahay, Director  
CCN – Rue du Progrès 80 – 1035 Brussels – Tel.: 032 800 13680

PRINTED IN BELGIUM

LEGAL DEPOSIT: D/2006/4860/017 - ISBN: 2-930457-08-2

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## **The old palace of Coudenberg**

Since mediaeval times, Coudenberg hill has been home to the reigning princes and the central administration of the Low Countries. The palace developed for over 800 years around the mediaeval main building with the construction of a majestic reception hall, the *Aula Magna*, the Place des Bailles and the Ducal chapel. A focus of intense political and cultural life, the history of the old palace of Brussels is intimately bound up with that of Europe as a whole.

In 1731 a fire destroyed this royal residence, which was among the finest in Europe. The archaeological digs have brought to light many remains that tell us about life at court from the Burgundian period to the present day. The archaeological site is now a museum... under the Place Royale.

