



Brussels – Spiritual History (2)

Grand Place

center of power, trade, rebellions, executions, processions and festivities

This second article¹ aims at giving a short history of the Grand Place. Its goal is to provide **background information as fuel for prayer** and prayer walks around this square.

The Grand Place

Origin

Although the earliest historical details concerning Brussels (979 or earlier) are connected with the Place Saint G ry, the town centre moved very quickly in the **11th century** towards the Grand Place (then known as the "**Nedermerckt**" (Lower Market)). In the beginning this was a marshy area surrounded by sandbanks on which shops and dwellings were constructed little by little. Its

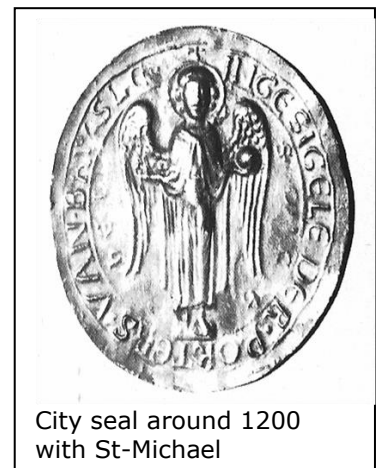


position was central, lying on the old merchant route which criss-crossed the town and linked the Duke's palace on the Coudenberg to the river Zenne.

In the 13th century the Breadhouse (Bread Market), a Cloth house (Cloth Market) and a Slaughterhouse (Meat Market) were built around this market place; at that time these were just wooden halls covered over. The first role the Grand Place had was clearly **(1)** an **economic role**. Later on, several Patrician's houses were built of stone next to some of the wooden houses.

In 1229 Brussels got its city rights from the Duke of Brabant. During the 12th century a council of aldermen (councillors/magistrates) was set up from the seven most distinguished Patrician families². In 1301 the city bought its first building on the Grand Place for administrative purposes. Even the Amman (?), the Duke's representative, had a house there. After 1302 the guilds and craftsmen were given more freedom and also went to build their houses on the Grand Place (most of the houses standing there today were once the property of the various guilds). They were also given seats on the city council later on. And so the Grand Place became more and more a **(2) power centre**.

Architecture



City seal around 1200 with St-Michael

¹ The first article of the "Spiritual History of Brussels" is about the Place Saint-G ry, the oldest historical beginning of Brussels. See www.pray4belgium.be under "downloads".

² These **seven "families"** were the families Sleuws, Serhuyghs, Steenweeghs, Rodenbeke, Serroefs, Coudenberg and Sweerts; they were responsible for guarding the seven city gates until the French Revolution. Descendants or successors of these families still exist today.



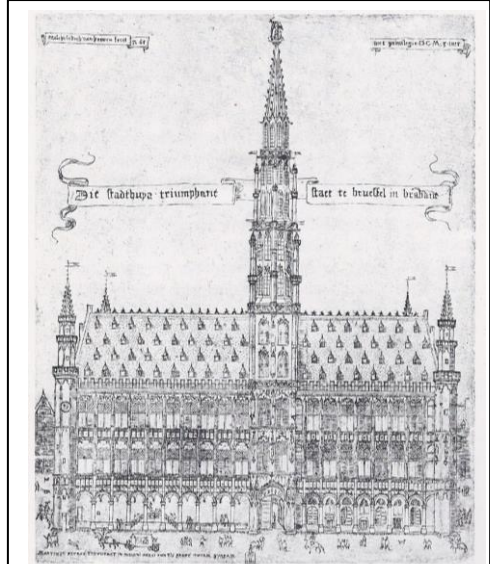
All facades of the Grand Place

Along with the flourishing of the city there arose the urge (?) from the city council to



Saint-Michael on top of the tower

establish her power and independence as a city with the **construction of a large Town Hall**: in 1402 the left wing of the town hall was built. A second wing was completed between 1444 and 1450 and the monumental tower from 1449 to 1454. The 5 metre high copper statue of Saint Michaël³ crushing the devil was lifted up onto the top in 1454. In 1405 the duke built the "Duke's House"⁴ right opposite the town hall on the site of the Bread House to establish his power as duke in front of the city.



Oldest picture of the Town Hall, 1565

The architecture of the Grand Place is the result of a centuries long "battle" for power and influence between the city council and the duke (later king and emperor), but also between the seven aristocratic families and the guilds/craftsmen.

The abundance of styles that we see today in the facades (from gothic, classical and renaissance to the naturalism of the Flemish and Italian baroque) shows the strong individualism of each house and/or guild.

On 13-15 August 1695 Brussels was bombarded by the French army: 3,000 bombs and 1,200 fireballs destroyed 3,830 houses; the Grand Place was also largely devastated except for some of the facade and the tower of the town hall, but was rebuilt in three years.

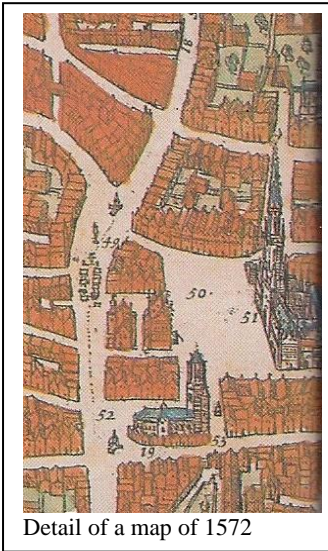
In January 1793 much destruction took place again through the French Revolution: every souvenir of the Old Regime, all the statues inspired by Christianity or imperialism, or anything that had to do with the guilds, were completely destroyed.



Logo of the city of Brussels

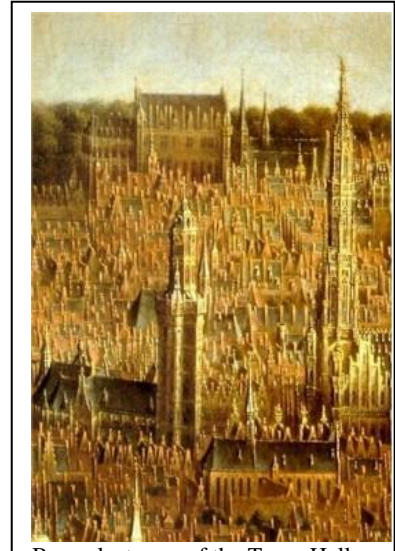
³ **Saint Michael** was probably the second patron saint of the city (after Saint Gudulle) thanks to Duke Lambert II (Balderik) around the middle of the 11th century. From the 13th century on the archangel was depicted on the city seal. This figure is a mixture of old heathen legends of dragon slayers, the Biblical archangel Michael (according to Daniel 10:21 and 12:1 the prince of Israël, and not of Brussels!) who was honoured as a saint and functioned as the "Christianised version" of older (Roman, Greek and German) gods.

⁴ This building was demolished in 1515 by Charles V to be replaced by a larger house : "The King's House" ("La Maison du Roi") (built 1515-1536). In 1625 it was again restored by archduchess Isabella and provided with Catholic superscriptions; in 1873 it was again demolished by the liberal city council since the building was dilapidated and had a very catholic superscription (religious symbols were removed). After this a reconstruction of the sixteenth century building in neo-gothic style was carried out. Since then the Museum of the city of Brussels has been established here.



Detail of a map of 1572

Under the inspiration of the mayor Karel Buls (1881-1899) the Grand Place was slowly and thoroughly restored to its current splendour. 290 new statues were placed in the niches: in the front facade 172 statues (of princes, dukes, knights, squires and others); in the portal entrance 5 patron saints, 6 virtues and 8 prophets; in the side facade (Bulsstraat) 91 mayors from 1420-1589; in the side facade (Guldenhoofdstraat) 16 artists and scholars from the 12th-17th centuries. In 1998 the Grand Place was recognised by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site.



Brussels, tower of the Town Hall before the bombing of 1695

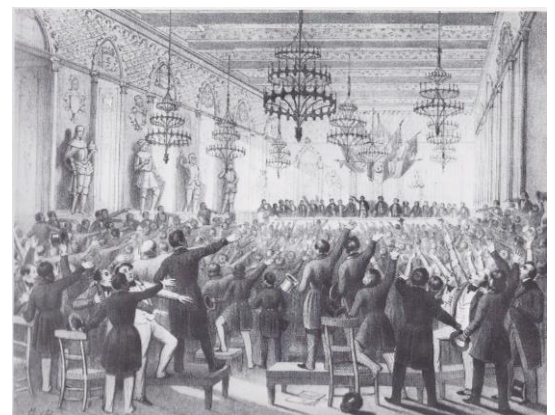
A power centre

From all of this it can clearly be seen that the Grand Place of the 13th century was an important centre of power:

- the **city council** was established there (and showed its power through the large town hall),
- the seven **families of the city fathers** who dominated the city council,
- the guilds and craftsmen who united all the professional groups, and who had a lot of influence right up to the French Revolution
- the **duke** (later king/emperor) had a house there (or else his representative, the Amman)
- the **States of Brabant** (where the nobility, the church top and the town authorities met) began meeting together from 1717 on in a building where the rear wing of this town hall now is (originally a cloth hall)
- the "**Joyous Entry**" of each new prince/king took place on the Grand Place from 1356 to 1780, on the occasion of which these men had to promise to respect the city's rights.
- there were also many **grand state visits** on the Grand Place: kings, emperors, archdukes, presidents, the pope⁵... were all received with great pomp and splendour.
- three **political parties** were set up here: the Liberal Party (in the gothic hall of the town hall in 1846, founded by the Freemasons), the "Belgian Workers Party" (in "De Zwaan", 1885, the current day socialists) and the Volksunie (1954, a Flemish-Nationalistic party; in the café Sint-Michiël (in the "Dukes of Brabant").



Shields of the seven families.



Opening meeting of the liberal party in the Gothic hall of the town hall, 1846

⁵ A list of the most important of these **state visits**: Johanna from Castilia (1496), Emperor Philip II (1549), Charles V's mourning procession (1558), Alexander Farnese (married Mary of Portugal, 1565), William of Orange (1577), archduke Ernst (1594), archduke Albrecht and Isabella (1599), Philip V (king of Spain, 1702), Czar Peter The Great (1717), Emperor Charles VI (1717), Emperor Franz II (1793), Napoleon (1803 and 1805), King Willem I (1815), King Willem III (official reconciliation between Belgium & The Netherlands, 1884), Emperor Willem II (1910), the American president Thomas Wilson (1919), the Spanish King (1923), the Rumanian King (1924), King Fouad I of Egypt (1927), Queen Wilhelmina (1939), Montgomery, Eisenhower, De Gaulle and Churchill (1945), Pope John Paul II (1985), the Japanese Emperor Akihito (1993)

A place of people's uprising, protests, public or political executions

The Grand Place was often **(3) the stage for uprisings and protests by the people, and of public or political executions**. In 1306, for example, the craftsmen rose up against the Patricians, and more than 70 people were killed. In 1356 the Patrician Everaerd 't Serclaes drove back the troops of the Flemish Count Lodewijk van Male there. In 1421, after the uprising of the guilds, the Amman was beheaded by the regent. On 1 July 1523 Hendrik Voes and Jan Van Essen, two young Augustinian monks from Antwerp were burned at the stake: they were the very first protestant martyrs in the whole of Europe! On 5 June 1568 Counts Egmont and Hoorne were beheaded commissioned by the Spanish Duke of Alva, found guilty of treason, lese majesty and uproar (because they were tolerant of Protestantism); five days earlier 20 nobles had been executed there too. On 19 September 1719 it was the turn of the Guild dean Frans Anneessens, because of his involvement in an uproar of the people (the minister of the governor wanted to suppress the power of the guilds symbolically). During the "Brabant Revolution" (against the Austrian Emperor Jozef II and proclaiming the "Republic of the United Belgian States", 1790) many important events were also staged on the Grand Place. Every one of the conquerors, oppressors and liberators who would follow was obliged to come and set foot on this place symbolically or make his way to the town hall.

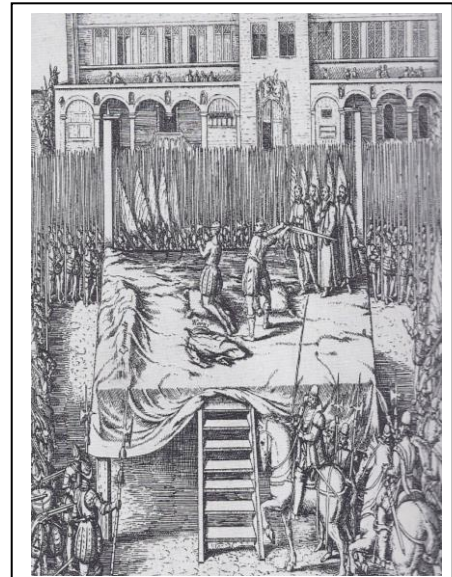
Even during the religious persecutions, protestants were executed with great regularity, 169 in total⁶ between 1523 and 1597!

Apart from being the place of political executions, the Grand Place was also the place of the gallows and the scaffold for criminals (until 1848!), sometimes public tortures for gruesome misdeeds.

A place of festivities

For as long as people could remember the Grand Place was also **(4) the place for festivities, celebrations, tournaments, competitions, games, performances, processions...** The giants (especially "Janneke and Mieke", who were extremely popular in Brussels) would always be at the head during such processions (as far back as the 16th century).

National and international heroes were also welcomed there (e.g. Stanley in 1890, Lindbergh in 1927 ...) and royal weddings took place. Today there are the bi-annual flower carpet, the "Ommegang"⁷ and many concerts.



Execution of the Counts Egmont and Hoorne, 1566



Fragment of a painting of the "Ommegang" in 1615?

⁶ According to J. Decavele; and in the years 1567-1569 alone 119; these executions were not all carried out on the Grand Place.

⁷ The "Ommegang van Brussel" was originally a religious procession. As the story goes, in 1348, while Beatrijs Soetkens, a young woman from Antwerp, had a vision of Mary, she was given the task of stealing her statue from the Church of Our Beloved Lady in Antwerp and bringing it to Brussels to the Church of the Grand Sablon. This procession continued to grow: the archers guilds joined in, and later various guilds and organisations inside the city (city fathers, rhetoricians, the groups of craftsman, religious orders ...). In this way the procession allowed the city's elite to show

In addition to all of this, famous people have lived here for a short period of time, such as the poet Victor Hugo (1851) and Karl Marx (in 1847 he is supposed to have written one of his manifestos in the house "The Swan").

Spiritually:

- The buildings breathe out power and welfare, the **glorification of man**, while Christian symbols are almost completely absent.
- In the statues on the facades we can see a lot of **mixture**: e.g. on the facade of "De Coninck van Spaniën" ("The King of Spain") we can see starting from the bottom up Saint Aubertus (patron saint of bakers), then three Roman emperors, then Charles II, the king of Spain, then 6 mythological figures (?), and above all this: ...? These are full of mythical allegories, Roman mythology, a reference to a phoenix,
- The Brussels city council is from the beginning a stronghold of liberalism: the mayors between 1830 and 1909 were almost all freemasons (the irregular freemasonry was and is very anticlerical): Nicolas Rouppe, Charles de Brouckère, André Fontainas, Jules Anspach, Charles Buls, Emile de Mot (not Adolphe Max)
- An awful **lot of blood** has flowed on this place, both guilty and innocent.
- The blood of the **martyrs** can and must be used as a pleading ground (Revelation 6:10, 12:11, 16:6, 19:2): claiming the blood of the martyrs as seed for new Christians
- In the streets around the Grand Place we can find a number of very dark, occult shops and the centre of the homosexual movement; what attracts them?



Flower carpet on the Grand Place; at the left the "Maison du Roy", at the right the "Dukes of Brabant"

PRAY FOR:

* Cleansing of blood, innocent blood, martyr's blood: that it may be covered by Jesus' blood

* Recognition of Jesus as the rightful King above all kings: may He receive the place, recognition and honour to which He is entitled (Brussels, a bastion of liberalism and humanism, has excluded God from public life).



Portal of the Town Hall with St-Michael

off their power and independence. In 1549 it was set up to welcome Emperor Charles, who came to introduce his son, who later became Philip II, to the people. Since 1930 this tradition has taken on a whole new tone: each year, on the first Tuesday and Thursday in July, more than 1,400 participants take part in the procession.

On the internet, you can see a 360° virtual tour of the Grand Place:

<http://www.worldtour360.com/360.php?country=Belgium&swf=LaGrandPlaceGroteMarkt20100501&lang=en>

There is also a webcam that allows you to see live what is happening on the Grand Place:

<http://www.bruxelles.be/artdet.cfm/4664>



The 'Maison du Roi' in the 17th century



Statues on the City Hall

