



HISTORIUM BRUGGE

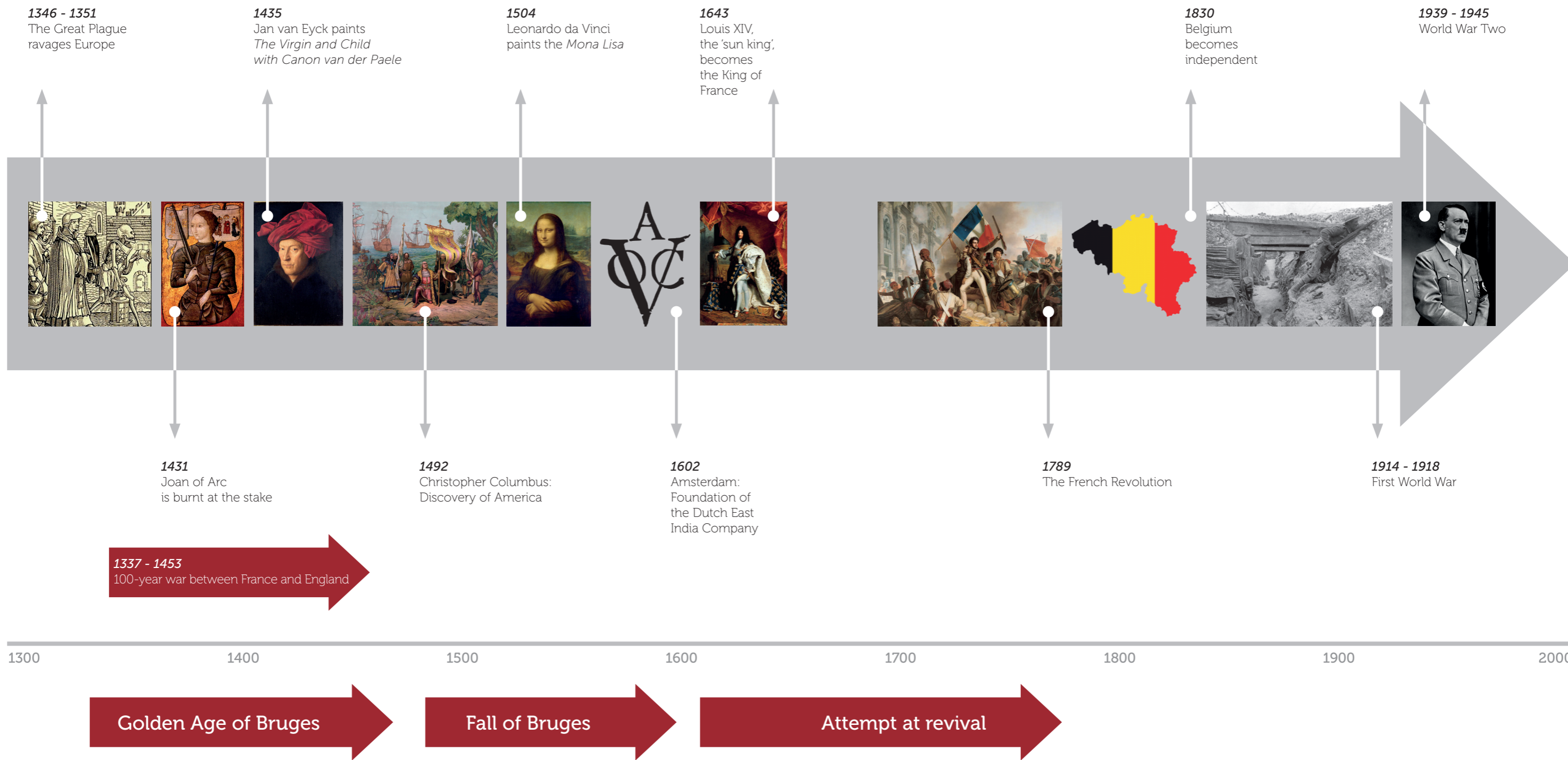
= Study pack =

This study pack introduces you to the Middle Ages to prepare you for your visit to the Historium.

This pack deals with the various themes that made Bruges great during the Golden Age (the period in which the Historium story takes place).



1. Positioning in time



2. Location on the map: Burgundy

- ➔ Bruges lies along the North Sea in North-West Europe.
- ➔ Bruges belonged to the County of Flanders that was ruled in its heyday by the Dukes of Burgundy (who included Philip the Good).



3. Boom as a European trading city (1280 – 1480)

The 'Golden' Age

Bruges prospered during the 13th and 14th centuries due to a combination of factors.

On the economic front, there was a huge growth in international trade and local industry. Many luxury goods were produced in Bruges. The world's first stock exchange was opened. In the 15th century, the young Flemish Primitive artists, including Jan van Eyck and Hans Memling, showed their creative flair in Bruges.

Geographically, Bruges mainly grew as a trading metropolis due to its favourable location. The city is located in North-West Europe, at the point where North and South Europe cross and it has a direct connection to the sea.

All these factors together ensured that Bruges grew into a bustling trading city and a powerful political stronghold.

Port

The city had access to the sea via the Zwin, a channel that flowed into the North Sea. Two important transshipment ports for Bruges were located here, Damme and Sluis.

Larger ships were unable to sail into Bruges. Their cargo was transferred to smaller, flat-bottomed boats.

This is shown nicely in the Historium Virtual Reality.



Linen industry

The most important imported product was wool from England. This also created an intense trade in wool between England and Flanders. English wool, together with wool produced in Flanders, was the most important raw material for the renowned Flemish linen. The linen produced in Flanders was then exported. Bruges became a well-known centre in Flanders for linen.

However, wool was not the only material that was imported. Other raw materials and commodities came from Northern countries, such as pelts from Russia and Eastern Europe, and oak wood from Poland.

Fine materials and alum for fixing the colour of the linen came from countries in the south, predominantly Italy.

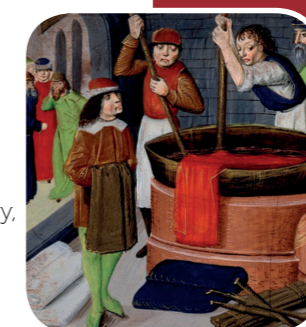
Other materials such as gem stones, pigments, ivory, oil and gold came from Eastern countries and North Africa.

Did you know?



Dyeing linen

- ◇ Complex chemical processes were involved in dyeing linen in bright colours.
- ◇ Blue dyers and red dyers each had separate guilds. A red dyer could not dye blue fabrics, and vice-versa.
- ◇ However, yellow could be dyed by both guilds as this was not a favoured colour. Yellow was considered the colour of betrayal.



Ter Beurse

Ter Beurse was a well-known inn in the 14th century run by the 'van der Beurse' family. During the Middle Ages, many merchants from across the world were drawn to Bruges. The merchants did their business around the tables of the Ter Beurse inn. Bills of exchange were bought and sold, money was exchanged, goods were stored, people were provided with a place to stay for the night, food and drink were served and provisions were offered for horses.

However, the merchants also met together in the square in front of the inn. The inn became a veritable financial centre for the city, akin to a Medieval Wall Street.

Today, we can still visit Ter Beurse. However, the facade of the building now dates from 1947.

The old Beursplein square is located where the current Vlamingsstraat meets Grauwwerkersstraat and Academiestraat.



Did you know?



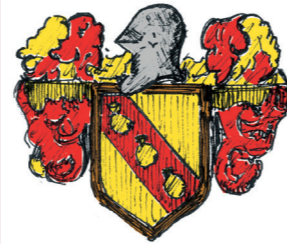
Ter Beurse

The 'beurs' in Bruges became a well-known concept and international merchants took the name 'beurs' back to their countries. The word was assimilated into various languages:

- ◇ Dutch: beurs
- ◇ Italian: borsa
- ◇ French: bourse
- ◇ German: Börse
- ◇ Russian: биржа
- ◇ Danish and Norwegian: børs
- ◇ Czech: burza

Coat of arms of the van der Beurse family

This coat of arms of the van der Beurse family was sculpted into the pediment of one of the houses.



There were three silver purses (called 'beurzen' in Dutch) in the coat of arms. This is how the merchants devised the expression 'ter beurze gaan' (going to the 'beurs') and the name for the square, 'Beursplein'.

Nation houses

The thriving financial activity in Bruges was made possible due to the presence of international merchants. Traders came to Bruges to set up their own warehouses and 'nation houses'. These houses represented the commerce of a country in a city.

The Italian cities of Venice (2), Florence (5), Genoa (3) and Lucca (4) all had nation houses near to Ter Beurse. Catalonia (6), Castile (7), Biscay (8), Portugal (9), England (10) and Scotland (11) also had nation houses in Bruges.

The German Hanseatic League (1) was not a nation, but rather a confederation of cities that traded with each other. The Hanseatic League was able to form an enclave in many of these cities. However, the Hanseatic League only acquired a single nation house in Bruges, the Oosterlingenhuis (literally, Easterners' house).



Tolhuis

A toll ('tol' in Dutch) was levied on everything sold in Bruges. The toll was a royal tax, in other words, a large part of it went to the ruler. During this time, Bruges was ruled by the Dukes of Burgundy.

You can still see and visit the tolhuis on Jan van Eyckplein.

Did you know?



Tolhuis

If you worked for the ruler, you were not required to pay the toll.

Pay attention to Jacob in our story – he does not pay a toll. His master, Jan van Eyck, is a court painter and so works for the ruler.



Trades

Artisans in the city joined forces in trade guilds. These were associations that defended the interests of their members. Almost every specialised craft, such as bakers, butchers and weavers, had their own trade guild. Members of the trade guilds looked after each other.

People learned their profession in the trade as apprentices. They went off to learn with their father or another master from the age of 6. When they reached the age of 12, the apprentices were fully trained and became mates. They were only able to independently start their own business or workshop as a master craftsman, and even take on mates and apprentices, once they had passed a master craftsman test. In order to keep trades and workshops within families, tradespeople from the same profession would marry off their children to each other's children.

Members of a trade often settled in the same neighbourhood or street. Many of the streets in Bruges are still named after that trade. These include Smedenstraat (Blacksmiths' street), Cordoaniersstraat (Cordwainers' Street - cordwainers were leather workers), Rozenhoedkaai (Rosewood bay) and Huidevettersplein (Tanners' square).



Did you know?

Trades

- ◇ When you followed an apprenticeship with a master, you had to sleep in the workshop, and you would often get a slap from your master.
- ◇ No one was able to practise a trade without being a member of a guild.
- ◇ During this period, people usually lived, worked and sold their goods in the same room.



4. Bruges as a centre for painting

Jan van Eyck

In the Historium, you will meet Jan van Eyck, one of the greatest painters from the Middle Ages. He is considered the best of the Flemish Primitives. People from all over Europe ordered his paintings. Jan van Eyck was one of the first painters who gave himself an individual identity instead of just being a 'craftsman'. He signed his paintings. This was extremely unusual at the time!

Jan van Eyck was from the town of Maaseik. He worked for John III, Duke of Bavaria and the Count of Holland. After his death, Jan van Eyck moved to Bruges. He worked here as a court painter and decorator for the Duke of Burgundy, Philip the Good.

He was also a diplomat for the duke. In this role, he went on various travels in which he probably received further training in painting.

Jan van Eyck died in Bruges in 1441 and was buried in St. Donatian's Church.

Painting

Jan van Eyck played a significant contribution to the revolution in painting in the Low Countries during the 15th century. His work defined the history of painting. He painted accurately realistic portraits. His sharp eye for detail and craftsmanship allowed him to represent reality in an unprecedented way. His brilliant use of colour, feeling for perspective and masterful oil painting technique took painting to new heights.



Painting technique

Jan van Eyck built up his painting in various layers that he applied on oak panels:

1. *Layer of binder on the panels:* seals the wood from the paint layer
2. *White background (gesso):* mixture of binder and gypsum or chalk
3. *Sketch in ink or black paint*
4. *Thin layer of paint (imprimatura)*
5. *Grisaille:* accurately elaborated drawing in black and white tempera paint
6. *Colour is added to the grisaille layer.*

Did you know?



Jan van Eyck

- ◇ The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb (Saint Bavo's Cathedral, Ghent) is the greatest and most famous painting by Jan van Eyck.
- ◇ Jan van Eyck's motto was 'als ich can' (which means: 'the best I can do').
- ◇ Jan van Eyck used colour in his paintings that was made by mixing pigments (including lead white and Verona green) with a binder made from egg yolk, natural resin or drying oils.
- ◇ Jan van Eyck had a brother, Hubert van Eyck, who was also a painter, but was slightly less well-known.

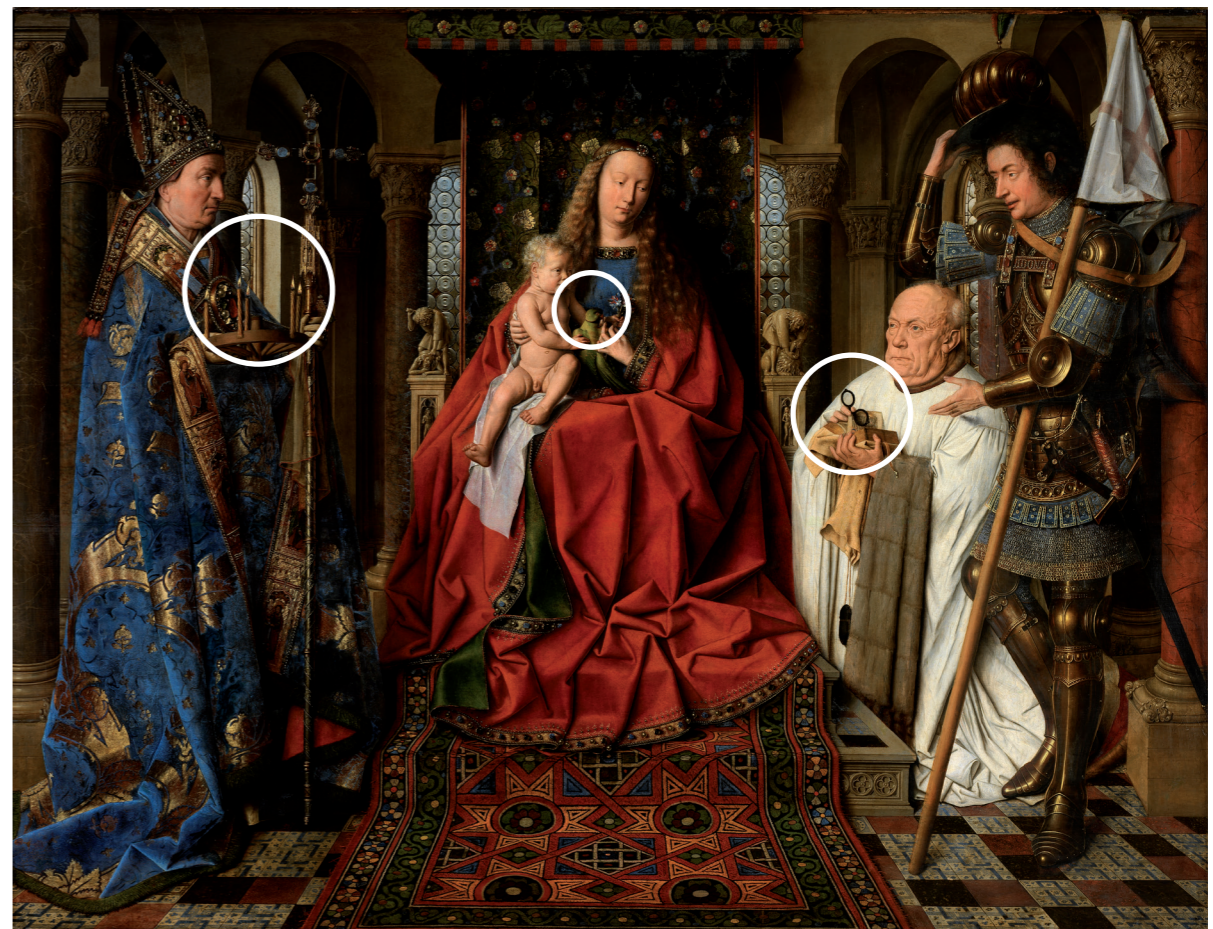
The Virgin and Child with Canon van der Paele

The painting 'The Virgin and Child with Canon van der Paele' is one of the best-known and the second largest works by Jan van Eyck. He painted it between 1434 and 1436. This painting is key to the story of the Historium and hangs today in the Groeninge Museum in Bruges.

Van Eyck was commissioned to paint it by canon Joris van der Paele (see the inscription below the frame). It was to serve as an epitaph (memorial table) for the canon's grave in St. Donatian's Church.

The inscription reads as follows: 'Master Joris van der Paele, canon at this church, commissioned the painter Johannes van Eyck to produce this work and he founded two 'kapelaines' as part of the choir, 1434. He completed it, however, in 1436'. (A 'kapelaine' is a foundation consisting of goods or money for masses to be read for the salvation of a person's soul).

The painting is crammed with hidden symbolism. Here are a few examples, though there is much more hidden in the painting!



Saint Donatien of Reims holding a wheel with 5 lighted candles

According to legend, Donatien was thrown into the river Tiber in Rome as a child for the sake of his belief. Pope Dionysus threw him a wheel with 5 lighted candles. This saved him from death by drowning. The candles seemed to stay lit and showed where the child could be pulled out from the water.

Green ring-shaped parakeet

Symbolises the human soul

Fur (almucium), glasses and prayer book

Alludes to the canon's wealth and wisdom

Recurrent colours: blue, red, silver

These are the colours of the coat of arms of Bruges.

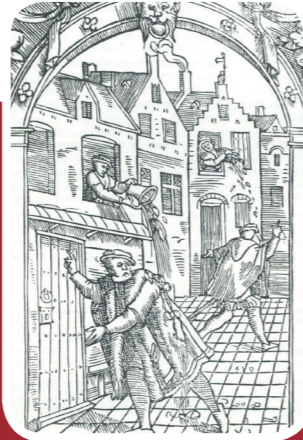
5. Streets of Bruges

Medieval streets

During the Middle Ages, streets were considerably different to how they are now. Only the main streets were paved with cobblestones and there were no pavements. Water drained mainly to the canals surrounding the city. There were basins or fountains dotted around the city that provided water, but the water was not very clean. This is also the reason why people preferred to drink beer rather than water. Alcohol flowed copiously in the taverns and these were places where you certainly couldn't avoid seeing a fight or two.

Lively squares

People's lives mainly revolved around the streets. The streets used to buzz with activity. The Markt and Beursplein neighbourhood was cosmopolitan. Here you would see traders selling their wares on the street, money being exchanged, and goods being loaded and unloaded. Trades were often carried out on the street.



Did you know?

Streets of Bruges

- ◇ Streets in the Middle Ages were very smelly places. Residents would just throw rubbish from their windows and doors onto the street, so they were covered in rubbish.
- ◇ Many animals just did their necessities on the streets. This meant that when it rained or snowed, the ground rapidly turned into a dirty, stinky pool of mud.

6. Religion

Important role of the church

Faith and superstition ruled the lives of people in the Middle Ages. People who turned their back on the church were persecuted. It was impossible to imagine life in society without the church. The clergy were called on to help with important life events, such as births, marriages, sickness and death.

Pardons

Fear of the final judgment was deeply ingrained in the people. Clerics had to support people with their journey from the temporary into the eternal life.

Sins could be redeemed with a 'pardon.' This system of imposing fines developed very quickly from the 11th century onwards.

At this time, forgiveness for sins was connected with pious actions. For instance, someone who took part in a crusade would receive a full pardon for his sins. After death, he would be guaranteed of a place close to God.

Later in the Middle Ages, everyone could buy a pardon. The proceeds from these pardons were used for things such as building and decorating churches, convents and monasteries.

Popular protest against the trade in pardons and the luxurious lives of clerics led to the Reformation in the 16th century.



Did you know?

Religion

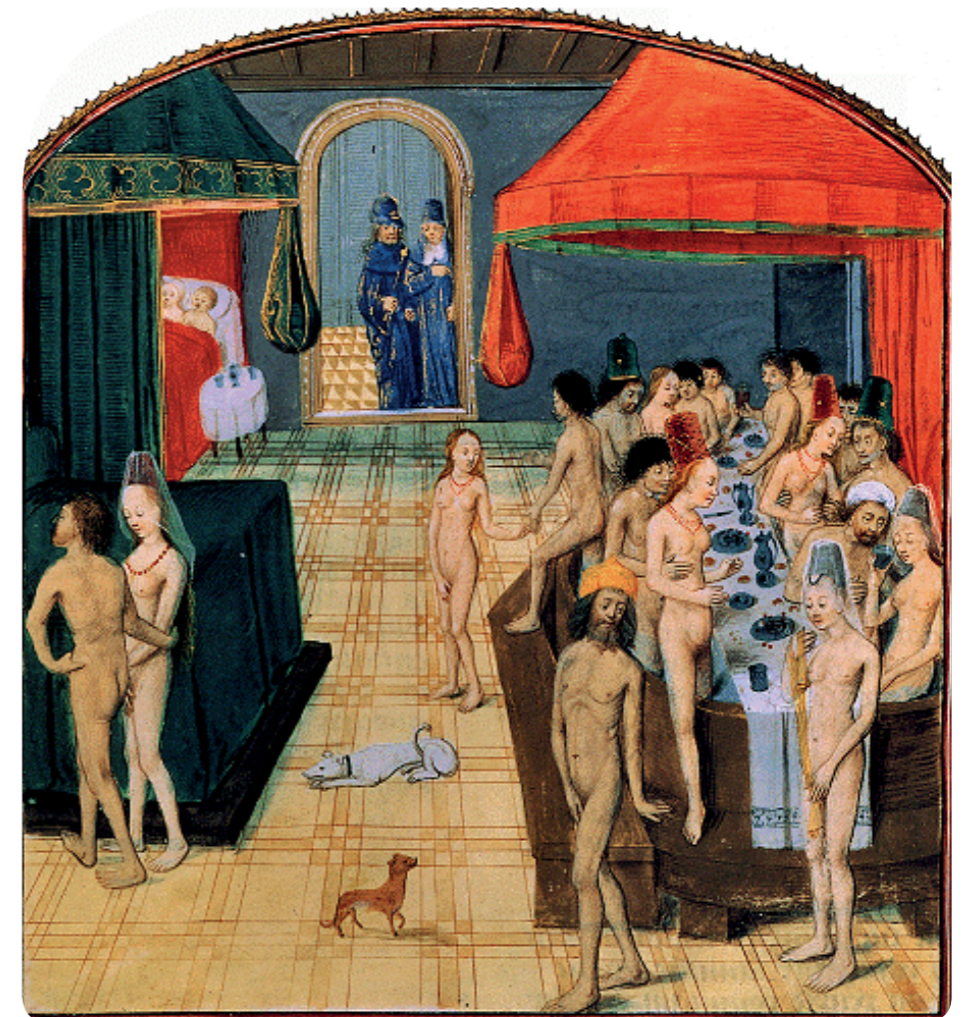
- ◇ In the Middle Ages, people believed that witches could turn into cats. This meant that hundreds of cats were burnt at the stake.
- ◇ During the Middle Ages, owls had a supernatural status. They were able to see in the dark which led people to believe that they were priestesses, witches and wizards in disguise.



7. Bathhouses

Public meeting place

During the Middle Ages, only the rich had their own bath. However, people did have the option of going to a bathhouse, which were also known as 'stews'. People could enjoy a hot bath, food and music at these public bathhouses. We still find bathhouses in Turkey, Japan and some other countries. Bathhouses were extremely important for a trading city such as Bruges. Many traders from abroad also came to the bathhouses to make social or business contacts, or to meet prostitutes. Het buitenland kwamen ook naar de badhuizen om sociale en zakelijke contacten te leggen, of voor de gezelschapsdames.



Did you know?

Bathhouses

- ◇ Nowadays, we treat our business partners to a meal. In the Middle Ages, you would treat your business partner to a trip to a bathhouse.
- ◇ Soap was hardly ever used in the Middle Ages. People washed themselves with herbs, such as sage.
- ◇ In the Middle Ages, people washed with their clothes on, as being naked was frowned upon. However, an exception was made in the bathhouses.
- ◇ Stooftstraat ('Stew street') in Bruges was a well-known street with bathhouses. Nowadays, you can find many tourist shops on this street.



8. View over the city

Market Square (Markt)

The Market Square is still the beating heart of Bruges. In the past, folk festivals, executions, tournaments and concerts were traditionally held here. A market is now held here on Wednesdays. The panoramic terrace of the Historium offers a splendid view of the Market Square.

Belfry (Belfort)

The Belfort is the most striking, but also the oldest building on the Market Square. It is an imposing building with a height of 83 metres and slopes slightly towards Wollestraat.

If you are sporty, you can climb up the 366 steps to the top to enjoy a magnificent view of the entire city and far beyond.

The Belfry clock used to mark the times when craftsmen would work and rest. The tower watchers kept a careful eye on the city and would sound the alarm if a calamity or fire struck.

The height of the Belfort varied throughout the years. As the city grew, so the tower also grew in height.

The top of the tower has been burnt many times due to lightning strikes. In 1280, the top part of the tower burnt down which led to the loss of the archives prior to 1280. This caused the local aldermen to move to the Burg in the Scepenhuys, which 100 years later was converted into the town hall.

Goods used to be stored and traded in the city halls next to the Belfry. This is now used for organising events and exhibitions.

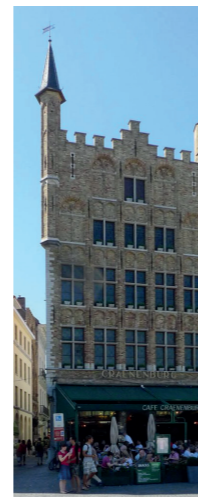


Two unusual houses

There are two other unusual Medieval houses opposite the Market Square. On the left of the Market Square, you can see Bouchoute House (Huis Bouchoute), and on the right, Craenburg House (Huis Craenburg).

Bouchoute house still has its original facade from the 14th century. The characteristic features of this house are the wind cock and the golden ball on the roof. The golden ball is Quetelet's ball (named after the Belgian astronomer), which was installed in 1839, and worked as a sun dial. When the shadow of the ball coincides with the line of the copper nails between the cobblestones on the Market Square, it is exactly 12 noon.

You can see Craenburg House on the right of Bouchoute House. Nowadays you can get something nice to eat and drink here, but in 1488 this was where Archduke Maximilian of Austria spent time imprisoned.



Two special men

The statute of Jan Breydel and Pieter De Coninck stands in the middle of the Market Square.

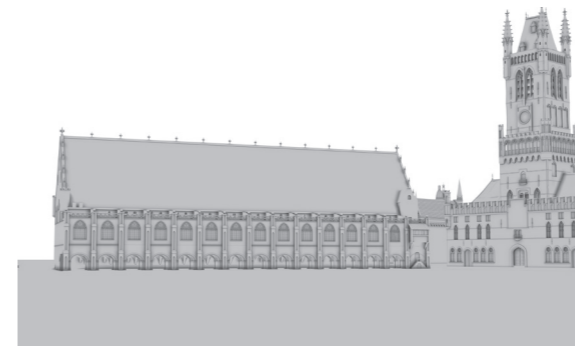
These two men led a major uprising in 1301 and 1302 against the French king and pro-French aristocrats (the 'Leliards').

The uprising culminated in the Battle of the Golden Spurs in 1302. This event plays a role in regional sentiment for many Flemish people.



Bringing buildings back to life that have disappeared

The Historium brings back to life many spectacular buildings that no longer exist today. Virtual Reality, based on scientific research and historical expertise, allows you to get a realistic picture of the buildings.



Waterhalle

The Waterhalle was 25 metres wide and stretched along the entire eastern side of the Markt and had a length of almost 100 metres.

The Waterhalle was built on the water of the Reye canal that crossed the city. It enabled ships to be unloaded in a dry area. The upper levels of the Waterhalle were used for storage.

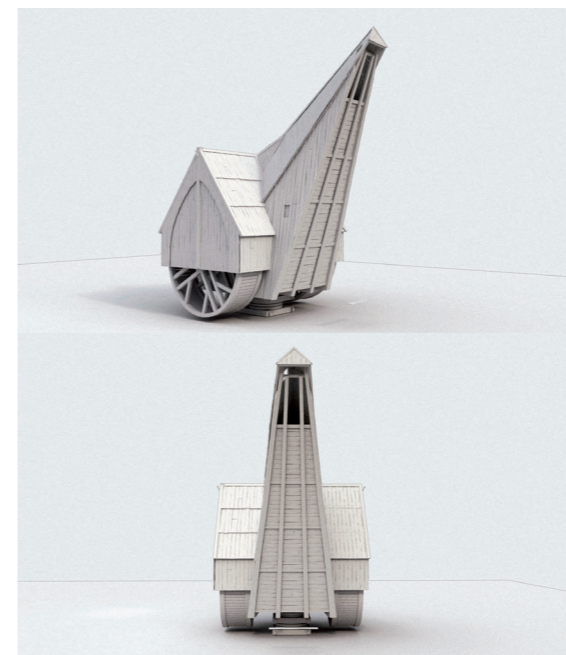
As Bruges declined at the end of the 15th century, the Waterhalle also lost its role. It was demolished at the end of the 18th century. The Waterhalle was located in the place where the Historium currently stands, and it was a unique wonder of the world in Bruges.

St. Donatian's Church

St. Donatian's Church on the Burg was the main church of Bruges. The painting 'The Virgin and Child with Canon van der Paele' used to hang here as an epitaph above the canon's grave.

In 1799, the building, which had since become a cathedral, was auctioned and subsequently demolished by the French. Through this symbolic act, the French wanted to break the link between the church and the state after the French Revolution.

You will get a magnificent view of this church in the Historium Virtual Reality. You can still see the foundations of St. Donatian's Cathedral in the Crown Plaza hotel on the Burg. If you want to visit the vaults, ask at the reception and they will let you visit for free.



Treadwheel crane

In 1288, the city of Bruges erected a crane on the market square, which was situated along the Reye canal at the time. In 1290, the crane had to make way for the construction of the Waterhalle and it was rebuilt on the quay of Kraanplein, near to Sint-Jansplein. It was demolished in 1767.

The crane was used regularly and often needed to be repaired. It was able to lift 1800 kg.

A crane charge had to be paid to use the crane. Users also had to pay a labour charge for the people who operated the crane.

In 2002, students from Bruges VTI Technical School reconstructed the harbour crane. It was initially located on Kraanplein, though you can now admire the reconstruction on Sasplein.

