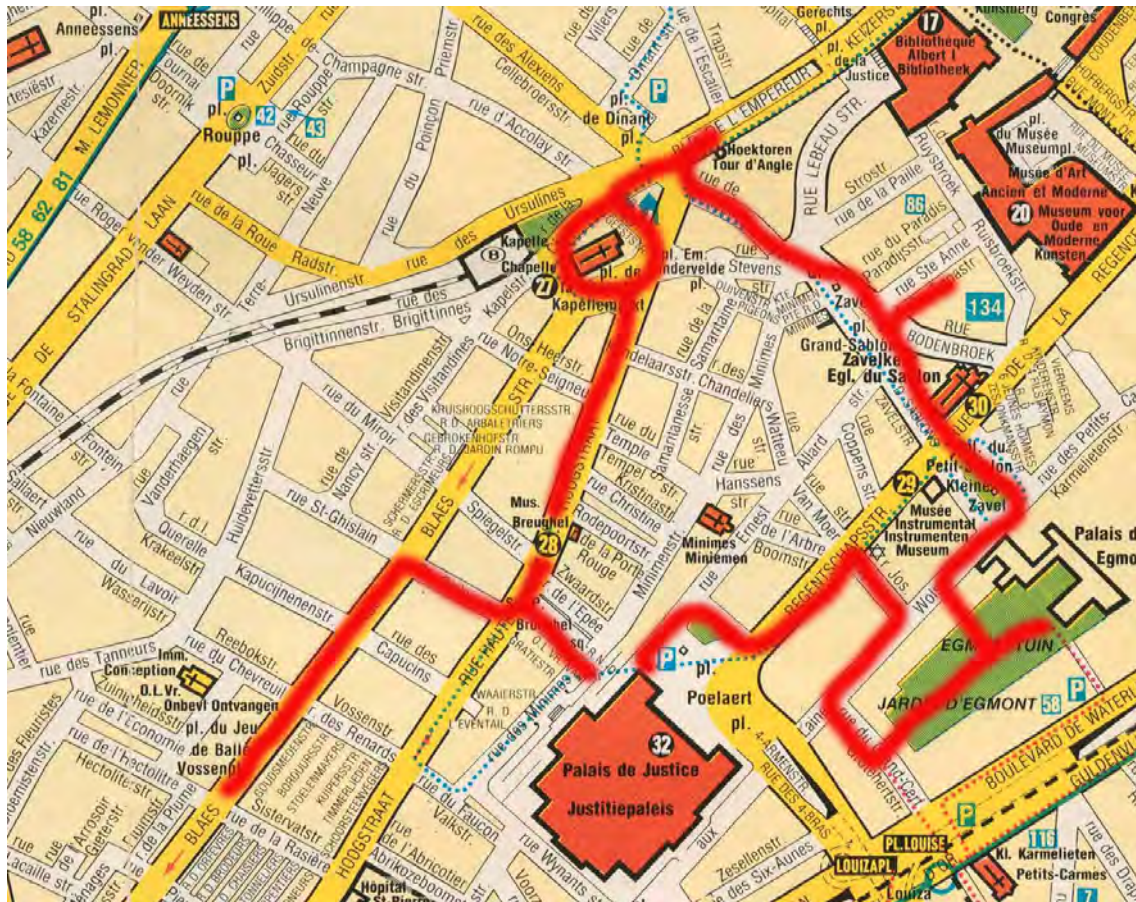


HISTORICAL WALKS IN BRUSSELS

FROM
LE PALAIS DE JUSTICE
TO
LES MAROLLES

[illegible]

From the Justice Palast to the Marolles



Content

Le palais de justice	3
The synagogue	6
Parc Egmont	7
Le petit Sablon.....	8
Our Lady of Sablon	10
Tour d'Angle	15
Notre Dame de la Chapelle.....	16
Les Marolles	18
Halle Gate.....	26

Le palais de justice

We start our walk in the Poelart's square, just in front of the Palais de Justice. Jose Poelart was the great architect of Leopold II, whom he helped to endow this city with great monuments.



Joseph Poelaert began his career as a building inspector and almost immediately as an architect of the city of Brussels. One of his first works was the restoration of the Place des Barricades in 1849. From 1850 he dedicated himself to the design of the column of the congress. The conditions imposed on it are curious. It must have been more prominent than the Paris Vendôme column and more beautiful than the Trajan column of Rome. It was the Belgian modeller Eugène Simonis who sculpted the bas-reliefs of the provinces. On the other hand, the statue of Leopold on the top of the column was first built by Joseph Geefs.

At that time (the middle of the XVIII century) Brussels experienced a flood that destroyed the Sainte-Catherine district. Poelaert was in

charge of its reconstruction although he did not finish it. In 1852 Poelaert was the most reputed architect of Belgium, but he was also criticized for his architecture which was described as massive with rudimentary ornamentation and a tendency to multiply the initial budget.

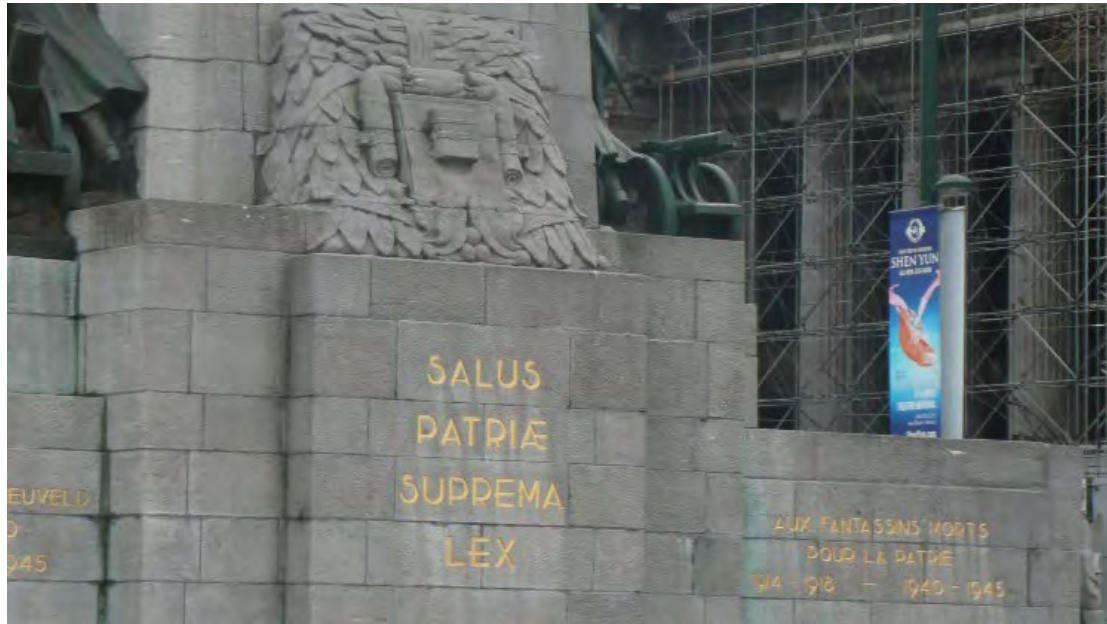
On January 21, 1855, a fire destroyed the opera of La Monnaie. Poelaert wins the competition for its reconstruction. Chronicles tell that on the day of its inauguration the mayor of Brussels during the first interval presented to the public the architect to whom this beautiful theatre was owed and was applauded by the public. In 1859 he resigned from public service.

Nevertheless, a royal mandate on March 27, 1860, announces the construction of a new courthouse. It is an international competition, but none of the 28 projects is selected. The Minister of Justice asked Poelaert for help, and he proposed a scheme of 20,000 m² worth 3 million francs. Poelaert retired to Paris to prepare the plans, and at the end, his project grew and occupied 26000 square meters for a budget of 50 million francs. This radical increase was due to the expropriations in the district of Marolles.

The project had the frontal opposition of the whole neighbourhood because the expropriations were forced. For many years the term Architect was an insult to many people in Brussels. But the support of the king forced the approval of the project and Jules Anspach gave the go-ahead. The work lasted 17 years, from 1866 to 1883.

The palace was built partly on the convent of the ladies of Berlaymont and on the park of the Hotel de Merode and constitutes as a border between the upper and lower part of the city: the district of Les Marolles.

That is why the inhabitants of the area invented a new insult for Poelaert: "**Schieve architect**" (something like a twisted architect). The building was crowned on the plans by a pyramid but was eventually replaced by a copper dome with a royal crown on the cuspid. The same one that melted after the fire provoked by the Germans in their withdrawal from Brussels and that damaged it severely.



Just in front of the palace, there is a monument to those who fell in the war, in the two wars, which are still very marked in the collective unconscious of the people of Brussels and Belgium.

From the esplanade of the Palais de Justice, there is an impressive panorama of the whole of Brussels, of the lower part of course.

It is possible to take a free elevator that descends towards the district des Marolles, but we prefer to take a different way.



The synagogue

We retrace our steps and turn left to Rue de la Regence. We will find ourselves right on the corner with the Great Synagogue of Brussels.
(בית הכנסת הכנסת הגדול של בריסל)



Its appearance is impressive, and it looks like a cathedral. It is known as the Great Synagogue of Europe. It is the official synagogue of Judaism in Belgium, and since June 4, 2008, with the Conference of European Rabbis the main temple in Europe.

In 1831, when the independence of Belgium, the Hebrew cult is officially recognised again, but the Brussels Jewish community did not have a place of devotion. Three years later, they acquired a building called "petite Boucherie" ("small butcher's shop"), and the Jewish community built a building that was inaugurated in 1878.

In order not to confuse it with a church, they decided to finish off the Romanesque-style building with Byzantine elements. For me, it looks like a church.

There are other solemn institutions in this street, a few meters further on we find the Benelux headquarters (the antecedent of the European Union) which regroups Belgium, Holland and Luxembourg as a de facto economic union.



Parc Egmont



We continue our walk around the Palais d'Egmont. The Arenberg family bequeathed the palace at the beginning of the 20th century to the Belgian State. Today it houses offices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and is used to host foreign dignitaries and organise international conferences and receptions.

It is worthwhile to continue along this street and turn left to reach the gardens of Count Egmont. It is a place full of peace and tranquillity in the centre of the city.



Le petit Sablon

Coming back, we cross the Rue de la Régence and head towards the Petit Sablon. There are two Sablons in the city, the small one and the big one. Here we will find a beautiful garden that leads to the Palace of Egmont, the hero of Brussels par excellence... The park was inaugurated in 1890 on the eve of 21 July, the date on which the Belgian national holiday would be celebrated ever since. For me, it is the most beautiful garden in Brussels after the Botanique. The most spectacular is the bronze statue of Egmont and Hoorn that was previously in the Grand Place, and that was moved here because the building behind it was the old palace of Count Egmont.

It is worth spending a few minutes in this garden as it is an open-air museum. It is now a park full of statues. Surrounding the two heroes of the nation (Egmont and Hoorn) are the statues of "10 famous Belgians" of the sixteenth century arranged in a double row of honour. They are William of Orange, Hendrik van Brederode, Filips van Marnix van Sint Aldegonde, Cornelis Floris De Vriendt, Rembert Dodoens, Gerard Mercator, Abraham Ortelius, Barend Van Orley, Jean de Locquenghien and Lodewijk van Bodeghem.

Normal people may not know anyone, but they may be familiar with one of them, Gerard Mercator.

Gerard Mercator was born in Rupelmonde, Flanders. His name was Gerard Kremer. Mercator is the Latinization of his name, which means merchant. In 1534, Mercator devoted himself to the study of mathematics, astronomy and geography and also learned to make engravings thanks to the help of Gaspard van der Heyden, engraver and builder of globes (spherical maps). In 1544 he was accused of heresy and spent seven months in prison. He was appointed court cosmographer by Duke William of Cléveris in 1564.



During these years, he conceived the idea of a new projection applicable to maps, which he used for the first time in 1569, which

would later be known as the Mercator projection. When you see a modern plan, think that you owe it to him in a certain way. The statue holds in its hand a globe that symbolises the perspective it has transmitted to humanity.

But these are not all the statues in the park. In reality, the entire Petit Sablon is delimited by a fence lined with columns on which bronze statues are representing various trades and referring to commerce, industry and art. They are guild statues representing all the trades of the city during its golden age.



Our Lady of Sablon

We continue with our walk, and we find one of the most beautiful churches in Brussels, I mean Our Lady of Sablon, Onze-Lieve-Vrouwen Zavel. It was built in the fifteenth century with a Gothic style of Brabant, is therefore related to the Cathedral of San Miguel and Santa Gúdula. Originally on the site of the church, there was a chapel built by the city's archers in 1304.

Inside there are some works of art such as the carved wooden pulpit of the year 1697. The central nave is illuminated by sunlight thanks to eleven substantial stained glass windows that reach 15 meters in height. It is impressive when one enters the cathedral and sees the altar decorated by these vast windows.



The church also has its legend. It seems that a young woman from Antwerp had a vision in which the Virgin asked her to take her image to Brussels. She took a boat and, once in Brussels, delivered a statue of the Virgin to the chapel of the archers. The chapel soon became a place of pilgrimage and had to be enlarged.



The history of the church is linked to the guild of the city's archers who organized their party once a year. This event is immortalized by Pieter Snayers' painting entitled Feast of the Crossbowmen in front of the Church of Onze-Lieve-Vrouw ten Zave.

This painting is a detailed historical document on the celebrations of the Catholic Confraternities in Brussels. At first, it was thought that the work represented a visit of the court to the cathedral of Reims. In 1979 Matías Díaz Padrón attributed it to Snayers who identified it as the feast of the crossbowmen in front of the church of Onze-Lieve-Vrouw ten Zave in Brussels, on 23 April 1651.

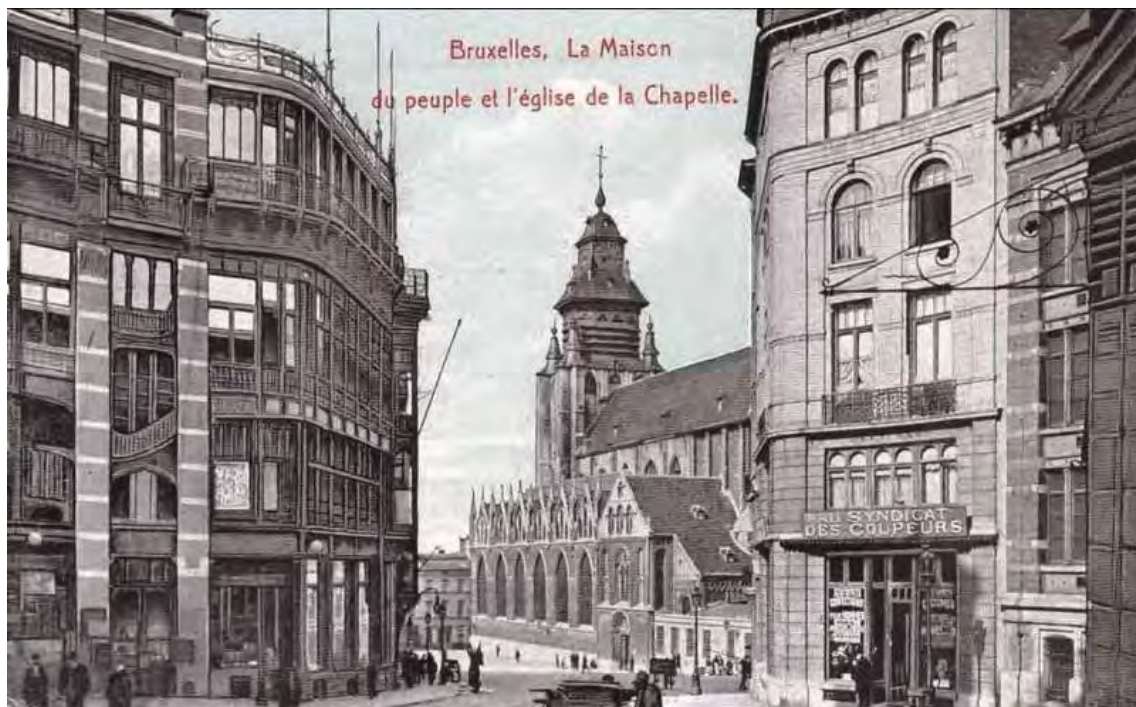


There is another painting by this painter entitled The Triumph of Archduchess Isabella in the Ommeganck in Brussels on 31 May 1615, in which he depicted a significant procession carried out by the guild of crossbowmen on the occasion of the coronation of Isabella. In the also

we can observe the grandiosity of the civil parades in this city during his golden age ended a few years due to the wars of religion.

Let's go into the square of the Grand Sablon so-called because it was a sandbank in its origins. On Sundays there is an antique market which is quite expensive to my taste but where you can find interesting objects for those who can pay for them.

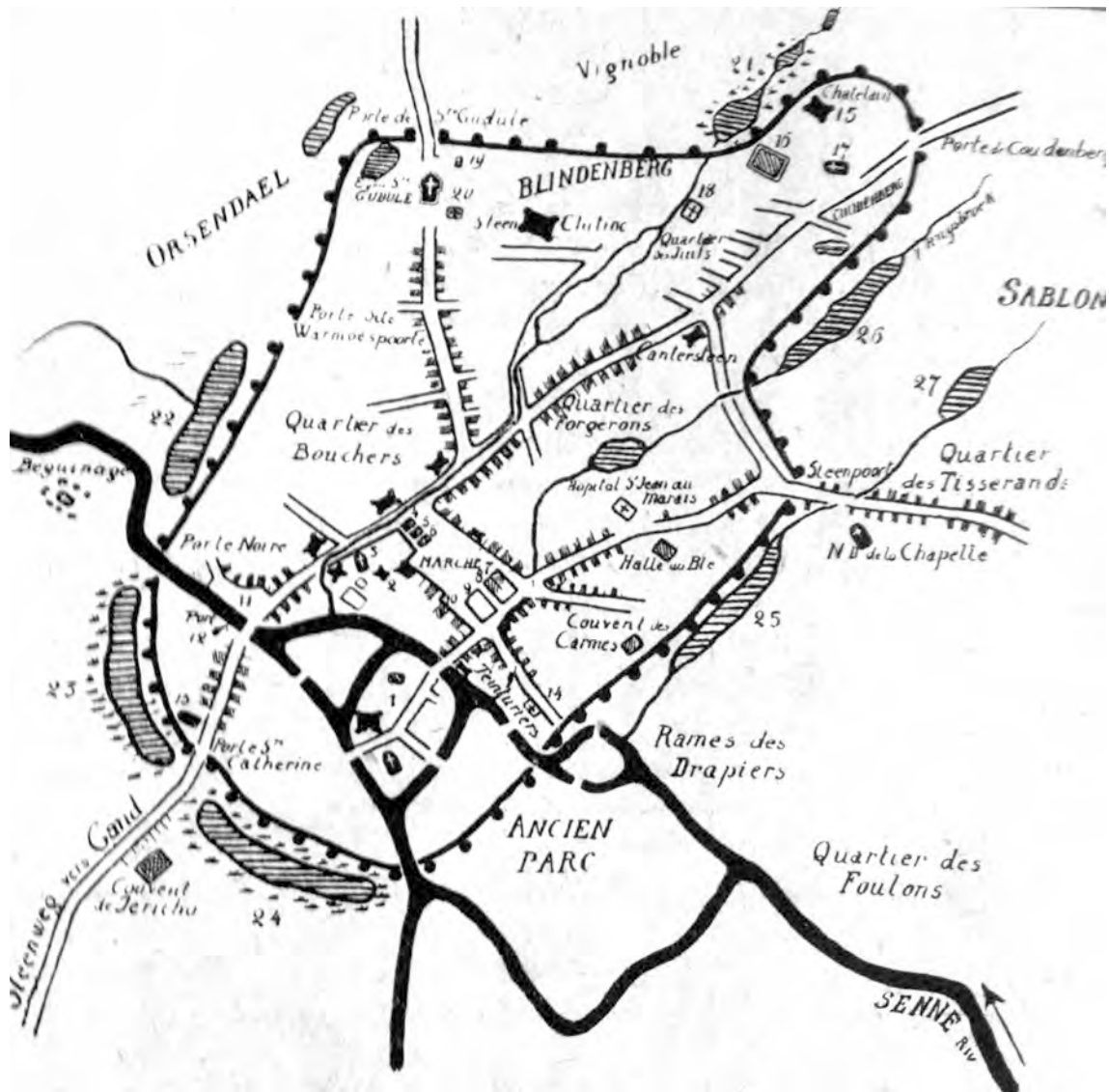
The Grand Sablon is linked to Spain by chance. During the Civil War, socialist organizations and some Belgian Catholic associations took in and adopted the Spanish children who had managed to escape the Franco's bombings.



On Place Emile Vandervelde, where the Grand Sablon ends, there was "La maison du Peuple", built according to Victor Horta's plans, demolished in 1965, the headquarters of the Belgian Socialist Party and a reception centre where the evacuated children were given to their adoptive parents.

The current square in front of the church is relatively modern and was built on a sandbank (remember that "sablon" means sandy area). The processions and festivities in honour of the Virgen del Sablon, which we have seen in the previous paintings, were celebrated there.

If we travel back in time to the 13th century, we will see a map of the city quite different from the one we see today. The Sablon was in the area outside the walls. Some of the ponds that surrounded the town still exist, but many have disappeared. It is incredible to discover the city's past and to learn how things have changed.



The swamps dried up, and even the river that gave trade opportunities to this city was buried. But there remain the names of the streets and the memory of the old places that are still there even though they have changed. However, there remains a germ of the town in the past.

If we look at the map, we will be able to glimpse the pentagon that we have mentioned so many times as the hearth of Brussels. And that has to do with the successive walls of this city that expanded and expanded until forming the present nucleus of the city of Brussels.

After this little historical speech, let's go back to the Sablon and its history a couple of centuries later. Nearby was the palace of the princes de Tour et Tassis (von Thurn und Taxis), which was demolished in 1872.

On November 12, 1516, the Thurn and Taxis family established a postal service in Brussels, which reached Rome, Naples, Spain (where Francis de Tassis had established several headquarters since 1505), Germany and France through swindles.



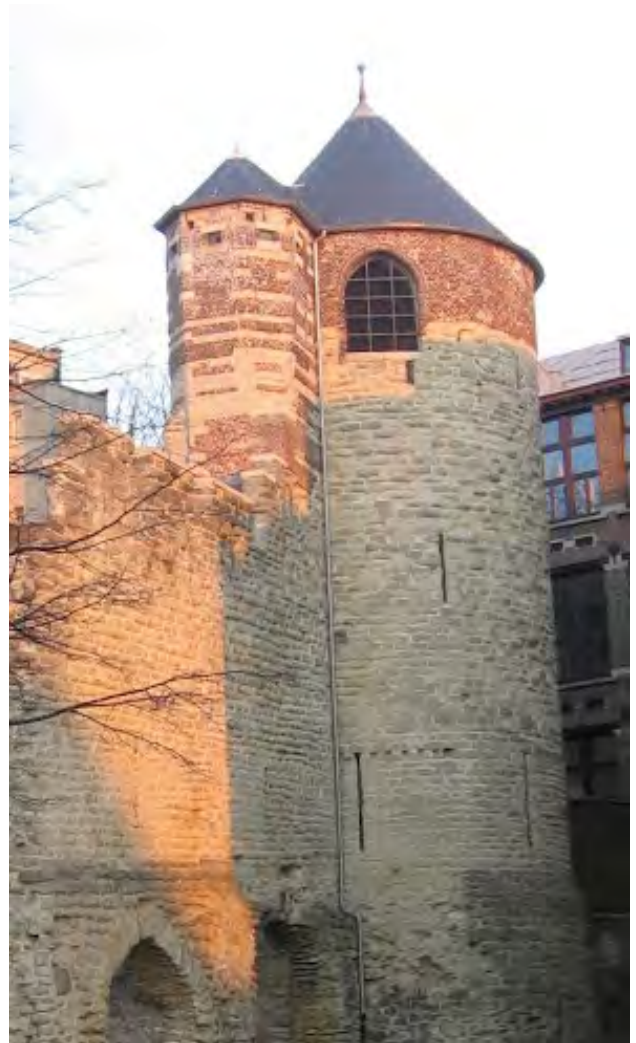
The life of this family is impressive; they came from Bergamo in Italy, where they moved to Germany and got the title of Count. They were mainly dedicated to sending messages and constituted the first European postal service. The company Thurn and Taxis lasted until the 18th century, when its headquarters in territories under Spanish rule were bought by the government of those countries, ceasing to operate as a private company in the territories of the Bourbons. Inside the church of Onze-Lieve-Vrouw ten Zave is the funeral chapel of the von Thurn und Taxis family.

Tour d'Angle

Very close we find some remains of the ancient walls of the city, such as this tower called Tour d'Angle (or Tower Aneessens). We already know that the walled enclosures of the city expanded over time. The first was built in the 12th century and the second in the 14th century.

The first one had a perimeter of 4 Km. The second ring that covered 8 Km. It had 72 semicircular towers and 7 entrance gates.

This tower is one of the surviving remains. They cannot be visited, and I am afraid that they will be integrated into some luxury hotel that uses it as a tourist attraction. We already find an example of this in the Torre Negra of the Plaza de Santa Catarina.



Notre Dame de la Chapelle



The rue Haute starts at the place de la Chapelle where we find a beautiful church called Notre Dame de la Chapelle. The church has its origins in a chapel belonging to a monastery of Benedictine monks in the thirteenth century, which was expanded and elevated to parish church centuries later. Thanks to the royal donation of five fragments of the Cross of Christ, in 1250, the church became a place of pilgrimage.

The history of this church follows the general tone of the religious buildings in Brussels. It was robbed in 1574 by the Calvinists who destroyed all the furniture. In 1695 it was severely damaged by the

bombing of the city by the French. In 1708 it was just restored, and the baroque bell tower replaced the pinnacle of the west tower with ardoise tiles that give it this special touch.

It is curious to note that it is also the parish of the Polish community of Brussels and that inside the posters are also in this language.

The church has in its interior the tombs of famous people of the history of the city. For example, Pieter Brueghel the Elder (mentioned earlier) and François Anneessens (the leader of the guilds, who was executed for defending civil rights) are buried.

In the 19th century Belgium, which had recently acquired its independence, made Anneessens a patriotic hero and presented itself as resistant against Austrian despotism, just as the counts of Egmont were against the Spaniards. Particular emphasis was given to the phrase that he pronounced before dying decapitated in the Grand Place refusing to apologise to the Austrians:

Never. I die innocent. May my death atone for my sins and be useful to my country.

There is a statue of him in the square which bears his name not far from Les Marolles on Boulevard Anneessens.



Les Marolles

The district of Les Marolles has no administrative existence, but it is considered the most traditional in the city. It could be compared to Lavapiés in Madrid. In this neighbourhood, the real Brussels or the city's slang was spoken. It has traditionally housed the city's most underprivileged inhabitants. And also, the most revolutionary. Today, artisans, workers and the elderly live in the neighbourhood. One-third of the housing is for social protection.

To descend to Les Marolles we will take the rue Haute from the Notre Dame de la Chapelle.

Remember that there is a free elevator next to the Palace of Justice.

This elevator has its convenient as we can see the significant difference in height between the high and low area of the city.



Parallel to the Rue Haute is the street of Minimes whose history is extraordinary. At the end of the 16th century, this street was called Bovendael and was frequented by prostitutes. In 1597 the streets of and that communicated with the High street (rue Haute) were closed

at night with some fences to avoid that the prostitutes arrived at the rue Haute and that they remained in their zone of the street Minimes. The architect Poelart also lived in this street.

We will continue along this street until we reach the parish church of Saints John and Stephen. The name of this street has to do with this parish. The minimos are the members of a religious order created in Italy by St. Francis of Paula. The Minimos are religious who live with very little (that's why the name). St. Francis of Paula entrusted them with the care of the excluded, that is to say, the delinquents, the prostitutes and their children.

This church also has a chapel built under the model of the house of Santa di Loreto. I not sure if you know this story, but it is one of the



most amazing of the Catholic Church. The home was originally located in the Holy Land, but during the Crusades and before the advance of the Muslim troops, the Christians feared that it would be destroyed. Thus, a member of the powerful Angeli family (governors of Epirus) financed the relocation of the house to what is now Croatia in 1291. Two years later, it was transported to Ancona, and on December 10, 1294, it arrived in the town of Loreto. But soon the rumour spread that the house had been moved by angels by air and therefore Our Lady of Loreto is the patron saint of pilots aviators.

The history of this church was quite hectic, as was the history of almost all the churches in Brussels. It was burned several times, and in 1796 the French revolutionaries destroyed it. The current chapel was inaugurated in 1819. In its interior, there is an organ and the typical baroque pulpits super recharged so of the taste of this city. It still maintains its popular spirit of a congregation helping the needy.



We return on our steps, and we went to the rue Haute that constitutes the axis of the district of Les Marolles.

In the number 132 of this street, we will find Brueghel's house. This great painter came to live in Brussels because of his mother-in-law. He lived in Antwerp and had a relationship with a very lying maid whom he wanted to leave. In 1562, at the request of his future mother-in-law, he moved to Brussels, to the district of Marolles, in a house with staggered roofs in the medieval Flemish style typical of the sixteenth century. In the church of Our Lady of the Chapel (Notre-Dame de la Chapelle or Kapellekerk) he married, in 1563, Mayken Coecke, daughter of his master Pieter Coecke van Aelst.



Bosch, Brueghel and Magritte are my tree favorites painters, so this house has symbolic value for me. I don't know if they know the works of this painter, but they are very special and dreamlike. They perfectly reflect the spirit of those years in Flanders, bloody by religious wars and occupying armies. He was also one of the favorites painters of Philip II, who had in his bedroom the table of the garden of delights. Many of Bosch's works, as he was known, are in the Prado Museum.



We're still walking down High Street. In the sixteenth century, a large part of this neighbourhood was still rural, and only this street was paved and continued to the door of Hal. Curiously this street was not always a popular area. During the 17th and 18th centuries, the Brussels bourgeoisie built beautiful houses along this street. It was the industrial revolution that returned this neighbourhood to its proletarian character.



The time has come to talk again about the palace of justice because its imposing mass in the heights makes it always present in the neighbourhood. To build it 75 owners of this part of Marolles were expropriated in 1863 and compensated. Concerning the inhabitants who rented the houses, they were rehoused in a city garden built by Polaert in the district of Uccle. Let's remember that Poelaert himself lived in this neighbourhood, precisely close to the Minimes street we visited earlier.

Part of the fame of revolutionaries that the inhabitants of the area have, has to do with the Palace of Justice and the expropriations. In 1883 to protest against the increase in the price of life, the inhabitants of Les Marolles ransacked the palace of justice, but this popular revolt had nothing to do with the expropriations since they were twenty years earlier, in 1863.



We continue our walk along rue de Blaes which is parallel to rue Haute. In this street, we will find many shops of antiques, but our objective is to arrive at the square of the Game of Ball. The square is also known as Old Market. La Place de Jeu de Balle was created in 1854, at the same time as Rue Blaes. At that time, it was called "Renard" because it adjoined the Rue du Renard, which already existed in the 15th century.

The name ball game takes its name from the Basque ball, which became very popular in the nineteenth century. It has a certain Spanish air and here is the parish church of the Immaculate Conception which is the parish of the Spanish community in Brussels.

Halle Gate

Rue Haute flows into Halle Gate at the southern end of the city's pentagon. This gate is a vestige of the ancient walls that surrounded the city, and its survival is the result of chance. It was a prison, and this is what saved it from demolition.

From its battlements, one could glimpse the fort of Monterey today disappear. Let's start with the story of this impressive gate. It was built in 1381, as one of the entrances to the second walled enclosure of the medieval city.



First acquired the name of door of Obbrussel (High Brussels, that was the denomination of the present Saint Gilles) At first it had a military function but it finished in 1564. The defense of the southern area was centred in the fort of Monterey, not far away. The walled enclosure had 7 towers that were destroyed between 1818 and 1840 to allow the creation of boulevards that constitute the petit centure of Brussels.

After the destruction of the walls, it had different functions. It served as a granary, a deposit for the indigent, a prison, an archive and was transformed into a museum from 1847 onwards.

It must be said that previously it was much uglier and that its current appearance is due to an artistic recreation. But let's understand it in

its context. In 1830, when Belgium became independent, demolition work on the ruins of the second wall reached this gate. The rulers decided to keep it because the country was looking for great images to symbolise their past.

In 1860 it was decided to renovate the gate and turn it into a museum. The project was entrusted to Henri Beyaert, and work was carried out between 1868 and 1871. The spirit of the time was not looking for authenticity, but for an embellishing reconstruction, a kind of recreation of a romantic vision of the Middle Ages. Many decorative elements were added to the original tower much more austere. In 1847 the door became the Royal Museum of Arms, Armour, Antiquities and Ethnology. In 1889 it became clear that the tower was too small to house all the collections that were later moved to the fiftieth anniversary. Only the armours remained in this place. In 1975 the Royal Museum of the Army and Military History was also moved.

If we go up to the last floor, we will enjoy an impressive view of the south zone of the city, especially of the district of Saint Gilles.

