Changes to commercial topography in late medieval Brussels

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In this essay I will focus on changes to the commercial topography of late medieval Brussels and its correlation with urban development. Since the work of Henri Pirenne, trade has been considered as an essential factor in the growth of late medieval towns. As a result commercial activities have left traces in urban space. Market places and guild halls are well known examples.

Changes to commercial topography in late medieval Brussels, Bram Vannieuwenhuyze

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Annotation: In this paper the commercial topography of late medieval Brussels is studied from several viewpoints. Toponyms, the location of market spaces, trade flows and commercial activities are analysed. By combining the results it is possible to distinguish consecutive phases in the commercial history of Brussels, which were closely linked to general trends in the town development.

Introduction

Medieval town development can be studied from various angles. In this essay I will focus on changes to the commercial topography of late medieval Brussels and its correlation with urban development. Since the work of Henri Pirenne (Pirenne 1927), trade has been considered as an essential factor in the growth of late medieval towns. As a result commercial activities have left traces in urban space. Market places and guild halls are well known examples.

In late medieval Brussels – and in many other late medieval towns – these commercial spaces bore particular names. Generally speaking, these can be divided into two linguistic elements. The first often mentioned the specific product traded (e.g. 'fish', 'corn' or 'wool'), while the second usually referred to material or spatial characteristics (e.g. 'market', 'hall' or 'house'). By studying these elements separately, it is possible to learn more about trade flows between the hinterland and the town and the integration of these commercial spaces in the urban environment. Mapping the correlation between these trade flows and the location of the commercial spaces provides an insight in the spatial pattern of the town as a whole. Obviously, changes and continuity in these patterns are closely linked to town development.

In this paper the commercial topography of late medieval Brussels is analysed in this way. Attention is paid to particular commercial spaces and their attendant trade flows. The commercial topography patterns will be reconstructed by marking the information on maps. I will draw a chronological scheme by distinguishing the various phases and attempting to link them to the general town development of late medieval Brussels.

A 'market chain' around the *Coudenberg* (11th-12th centuries)

The *Coudenberg* was – and still is – an important part of the town of Brussels. Since medieval times, the lords built their residences on the eastern side of this hill (Smolar-Meynart et all. 1991). Historical, morphological and topological analysis shows that the *Coudenberg* was perhaps the oldest (pre-urban) settlement of Brussels (Vannieuwenhuyze 2008), but this has not yet been borne out by archaeological research. On the southern, western and northern side of this pre-urban settlement, a borough grew up during 11th and 12th centuries. This borough was probably defended by a rudimentary fortification (Vannieuwenhuyze 2008).

One of the elements providing justification for this borough was the existence of a number of surrounding market places. By mapping the medieval urban market places of Brussels, a kind of 'market chain' around the *Coudenberg* and the borough can be traced (figure 1). The names of these market places reveal that basic foodstuffs were traded there. I shall provide a brief outline below.

Figure 1:
The 'market chain' around the *Coudenberg* and the adjacent borough
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Since grain was a vital component in nutrition, supplies of grain may be considered one of the fundamental needs of urban society. Consequently, the site on which this product was traded formed a vital hub in the late medieval town. This was also true for Brussels. Grain markets were concentrated in the same area. The Corn House (*Korenhuis*) was a rudimentary trade hall situated on a triangular square in the south of the old town. Mention is made of this ducal hall, which housed the wholesale trade of corn and grain, as early as 1292 (Dickstein-Bernard 1981). In fact, the wholesale trade was not limited to the hall itself, but encompassed a wider area called the 'liberty of the Corn house'. Adjacent to the square was Corn House street (*Korenhuisstraat*) which led to a street market, the so-called Pongelmarkt. Urban edicts tell us that this street name referred to retain grain sales (see for instance Archives de la Ville de Bruxelles (AVB), Archives Anciennes (AA), cartulaire V, p. 256; ASB, AA, cartulaire IX, f° 203 v°-204 v°; ASB, AA, cartulaire IX, f° 105-106).

Retail and wholesale grain markets were thus situated next to each other, in the southern part of the old town centre. This location made sense because there is evidence that grain was imported predominantly over land from Hainaut, a region to the South of Brussels. In January 1422 for instance, the Brussels town council forbade grain retailers (*korenbiters*) or the inhabitants of the town from buying grain in Hainaut and selling or transporting it elsewhere, without bringing it to Brussels (Favresse 1947). In the middle of the 15th century, over 60% of the town's grain stocks were stored in the south of the town, principally within the gates and inside the towers of the city wall (ASB, AA, cartulaire IX, f° 207 v°-208). In all likelihood, this grain was stocked immediately on arrival. Other sources tell us that grain was shipped downstream along the Zenne River from Brussels. As early as the end of the 11th or the beginning of the 12th century, the inhabitants of the rural settlement of Sint-Pieters-Leeuw were ordered to transport their grain to Brussels via an embarkation point at Saint Othele's bridge (Despy 1997).

These facts show that the town was a transhipment place for the grain trade. The Corn House and Pongelmarkt therefore played a pivotal role in this trade system. These two areas were situated geographically between the import flow (by land) and the export flow (by water). By way of comparison, it is known that late medieval London had a similar grain trade system (Campbell et all. 1993).

Cattle and horse markets also existed around the Coudenberg and its adjacent borough. The oldest known Cattle market (*Veemarkt*) was located north of the Coudenberg. As with other markets (see below), this location was certainly determined by attraction and rejection factors. Meat was a main ingredient on the menu, but the livestock and slaughtering trade engendered serious pollution. For this reason, this trade was kept outside the borough. As a result, it comes as no surprise to learn that the Cattle market was relocated when a new town wall was erected around Brussels during the 13th century. From the beginning of the 14th century, a new Cattle market (*Veemarkt*) appeared outside the Saint Gudula gate, while the former site became known as the Old Cattle market (*Oude Veemarkt*).

Cattle husbandry did not of course take place within the town itself. Stock farming took place on the wide green pastures around the town (de Waha 1979; Dickstein-Bernard 1981; Charruadas & Deligne 2007), especially between Brussels and the nearby town of Vilvoorde to the North. The alluvial marshland between the towns was an agricultural area par excellence. From there, the cattle were brought into Brussels, either to the Cattle market or the butchers' quarter (see below). It is no coincidence that all successive Cattle markets and the butchers' quarter were situated in the northern parts of the old town centre, reflecting the direction of the trade flow.

Besides cattle, horses were traded in late medieval Brussels. The Horse market, mentioned as early as 1305, was situated on the so-called Zavel, a wide open space (probably a former stone pit) south of the *Coudenberg*. The oldest ducal rent register dated 1321 also mentions a forum Pillefridorum in or near the small village of Obbrussel to the south of Brussels. It is not exactly clear if this term meant a market for ceremonial horses or dray horses and donkeys (Martens 1958). Nonetheless, horses appear to have been imported from the South which explains why these specific market places are located here.

The oldest mention of the wood trade in Brussels dates back to 1204 (Bonenfant 1953). It is, however, obvious that wood was commercialised much earlier, since it was a vital component in the construction industry and for heating houses. Despite this, historians have not yet focused their attention on the urban fabric or Brussels urban wood trade. Fortunately, medieval toponyms give information on how the wood trade was organised. There were two wood markets in Brussels and both were situated around the Coudenberg. The oldest Wood market (*Houtmarkt*) was located north of the Coudenberg, at the end of the so-called Pottery (see below). The second Wood market (*Houtmarkt*) was a part of the already mentioned Zavel on the south side of the hill.

It is much more difficult to understand why the markets were implanted on these sites. On one hand, it is clear that wood was imported from the Zoniën forest, which covered a considerable territory to the south east, east and north east of Brussels. On the other, wood could also be cut down in the marshlands near the Zenne River. The existence of toponyms such as Holland and Nederbruul (Vannieuwenhuyze 2008), coupled with archaeological evidence (Munaut 2001), suggest the presence of woodlands in that locality. The location of the wood markets may indeed be a kind of 'compromise': they were situated near the *Coudenberg*, at points where the trade flows of wood converged.

The Pottery (Putterij) was a winding street linking the Wood market to the Fish market (see below). It is the only medieval street name in Brussels that can be related to stone production and/or trade. To date, several explanations for this toponym have been published, for instance 'the neighbourhood of wells', 'the territory of frogs' and even 'the red light district' (see i.a. Henne & Wauters 1845; Des Marez 1935; d'Osta 1986). Based on the Latin form Potria and in comparison with the Bruges Potterierei, my preference is 'the potters' neighbourhood'.

As in Bruges and other towns (De Witte 1989; Alexandre-Bidon 2002), the production and trade in ceramics was forced to move out of the borough because the potters' ovens produced harmful smoke and constituted a fire risk. Nevertheless, ceramics were an essential product in medieval (urban) society which explains why the Pottery was located close to the borough. Once again, attraction and rejection factors determined the choice of location. Later on, Brussels potters' neighbourhood was relocated as the old town centre swelled in population. Since the end of the 13th century limekilns and brick burning kilns had sprung up in a sparsely urbanised area outside the town wall, next to the Zenne River (Vannieuwenhuyze 2007). Only the toponym survives as a reminder within the old town.

This systematic overview clearly shows that basic products were traded on the markets around the Coudenberg and the adjacent borough. Grain, cattle, horses, wood and pottery were used on a daily basis, which explains why they are located near human settlement. Nevertheless, trade and production were also the source of much inconvenience (pollution, stench, noise, commotion, usury, etc.) and were thus kept outside the borough. Ultimately, market location was also determined by product provenance. As a result, market implantations reflected the trade flows in the town (figure 2). As the old town centre became increasingly densely populated during the 13th and 14th centuries, harmful activities such as cattle trade and pottery production were removed to the outskirts. All these conclusions lead to the hypothesis that the 'market chain' around the Coudenberg and adjacent borough date back to the 12th and 13th centuries or perhaps even earlier.
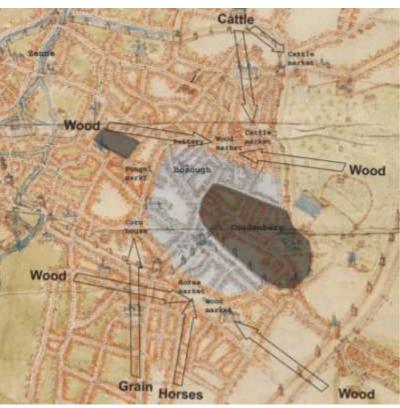
Figure 2: Market implantations and trade flows
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The Fish market and the creation of a new commercial artery between the upper and lower town (13th century)

Besides grain, fish and meat were main ingredients on the medieval menu. They may be considered as equivalent products. Fishermen and butchers still belonged to the same association at the end of the 13th century, before separating during the 14th century. In 1289 they received the Fish market from the Duke of Brabant in exchange for an annual ground rent (Favresse 1938). Some families are known to have traded in both fish and meat (Deligne 2003).

Nevertheless, the provenance and production processes of fish and meat were different. To put it simply: fish came out of water, meat was land-based. Caught or farmed fish could be traded without many intermediate steps, whereas the husbandry and slaughtering of cattle required more time and space. These differences in the food chain and production processes were reflected spatially in the existence of different market places: fish was traded on the Fish market, meat in the Butchers Hall.

In late medieval Brussels fish evidently came from the local river, the Zenne. In 1312 Duke John II of Brabant officially sanctioned the catching of fish in the river by Brussels inhabitants (AVB, AA, liasse 769). Medieval records and toponyms indicate that fish were caught and/or farmed inside the town, in the vicinity of the isle of Saint Gorik (Sint-Gorikseiland). Fish reservoirs (savoiren) were set up in the river and several fishermen in this neighbourhood were proprietors (Deligne 2003).

Some fish were also imported. The existence of a 'salt fishermen' association (*zoutvissersambacht*) indicates that sea fish were brought to Brussels via the Zenne River (the shortest way to the North Sea). In addition, many fishponds were created in the urban hinterland during the 13th and 14th centuries to supply the town (Deligne 2003).

Surprisingly, the late medieval Fish market (*Vismarkt*) of Brussels was not located near the Zenne or in the fishermen's neighbourhood. It lay halfway along the right flank of the valley. This location had nothing to do with fishing activities. Nevertheless, in medieval times a little brook (the *Spiegelbeek*) flowed through or near the Fish Market. There is no evidence that it was ever used for fishing. Some records suggest it was artificially created (Vannieuwenhuyze 2008). This brook apparently played an essential role in the organisation and division of the market places (see below). The Fish market did not belong to the 'market chain' around the *Coudenberg* or adjacent borough. It was located a little further on, near the Zenne River.

It is my opinion that the location of the Brussels Fish market was a consequence of several factors. Firstly, the market place was situated in between the Zenne River – where the fish were caught or transported – and the borough adjoining the Coudenberg. It is known from other towns that fish markets were often set up outside fortifications or

castles (De Meulemeester 1989; Laleman 2000; Hietala 2006). Again, the dual factors of attraction and rejection explained the choice of location: as argued above, fish was a main ingredient, but the fish trade caused considerable inconvenience (especially unpleasant odours), as clearly demonstrated by many urban edicts from the 14th and 15th centuries (AVB, AA, cartulaire IX, f° 96 v°). The location near the Zenne River also indicated the direction of the trade flow (from the Zenne to the upper town).

Secondly, the Fish market was located at the beginning of a commercial artery which ran alongside the *Spiegelbeek* from the upper town borough to the river in the lower part of town (figure 3). Several market places and commercial complexes were created along the length of the brook: a ducal complex of trade halls (Bread house, Meat house, Cloth hall), Shoe Market (Schoenbeek or Schoenmarkt), Bloodpudding market (Pensmarkt), Herring street (Haringstraat), Pepper street (Peperstraat), Saint Nicholas market (Sint-Niklaasmarkt), Milk street (Melkstraat) and the Second-hand Clothes market (Oude markt). The Spiegelbeek appears to have been an artificially created brook, fed by water from a natural stream a little further on, within the building plots in the butchers' quarter (Vannieuwenhuyze 2008). Consequently, the brook appears to have been created with the aim of reorganising the commercial space and infrastructure. Let us take a look at these various market spaces.

Figure 3: The commercial artery alongside the *Spiegelbeek*
(© Royal Library of Belgium, Département des Manuscrits, n° 22.090).

As mentioned above, grain was sold in the Corn House and on the Pongelmarkt. After the grain had been brought to the town hall to be weighed and sent to the mills on the river, the bakers baked their bread. In the 13th century, bread had to be sold in the ducal Bread house (*Broodhuis*), which was a part of the ducal trade hall complex near the *Spiegelbeek*. Subsequently, however, the building seems to have lost its initial function. During the 15th and 16th centuries it was used as courthouse and clothes hall and its rooms were rented to the chambers of rhetoric and guilds (Pergameni 1942-1943).

It is no coincidence that the medieval Fish market and Butchers' hall (*Vleeshuis*) were situated next to each other. As mentioned above, the fish and meat trades were complementary activities. The Butchers' hall, mentioned for the first time in 1276 (Martens 1976), was part of the larger ducal complex of trade halls. The Duke of Brabant rented out the so-called *vleessteden* or *vleesstallen*, which were rudimentary counters for selling meat. Opposite the Butchers' hall was the butchers' quarter, comprising two central arteries both called Butchers' street (*Vleeshouwersstraat*). The study of the spatial morphology, archaeological results and street names suggest that the butchers' quarter was the site of an older landscape with agrarian functions (Diekmann 1997; Vannieuwenhuyze 2008). The quarter probably came into being from the 13th century onwards. From that time the butchers' quarter evolved into a clearly defined social and spatial quarter, where nearly all Brussels butchers lived and worked (Deligne, Billen & Kusman 2004).

Surprisingly, nearly all the clothes markets were located alongside the commercial artery between the upper and lower town. The ducal Cloth hall (Lakenhuis) was situated at the back of the Butchers' Hall. It is mentioned from 1221 (Martiny 1992). Trade in second-hand clothes took place around Saint Nicholas church, while shoes could be purchased in the Shoe market along the Spiegelbeek.

As in other cities, trading also took place in churchyards (Jean-Marie 2007). In late medieval Brussels the churchyard of Saint Nicholas (*Sint-Niklaaskerkhof*) was used for this purpose. In 1360 an urban edict stipulated that the trade in roast game and rabbits should take place on this site (ASB, AA, cartulaire V, p. 256). Later, the site became known as the Saint Nicholas market (*Sint-Niklaasmarkt*), clearly reflecting its commercial function. The Spiegelbeek – called here the Saint Nicholas brook (Sint-Niklaasbeek) – played a role in defining the commercial space. Ultimately, trade in milk and dairy products also took place in the vicinity of Saint Nicholas church (Lindemans 1947).

The creation of the commercial artery alongside the *Spiegelbeek* was presumably an indication of the growing interest in the economic potential of the river and lower town. This trend began back in the 12th century with the construction of water mills and a port. As a result, new trade flows sprang up, leading from the river to the *Coudenberg* and the borough. The Duke of Brabant adapted his economic policy and built a ducal complex of trade halls in its midst. The *Spiegelbeek* was artificially created to supply water and define the commercial areas. Consequently, more and more markets were set up alongside the brook. The area around the church of Saint Nicholas became one of the town's most important commercial hubs.

The centralisation of markets (14th-15th centuries)

In the 14th century a second commercial artery may have been created, although this is a matter of some conjecture. Maybe the 'project' simply failed. This second artery was also connected to an artificial brook, the so-called *Smaelbeek*. In common with the other commercial artery, it led from the upper town to the Zenne River (figure 4).

Figure 4: The commercial artery alongside the *Smaelbeek*
(© Royal Library of Belgium, Département des Manuscrits, n° 22.090).

The *Smaelbeek* flowed by Saint John's hospital. Urban edicts tell us that in the second half of the 14th century the butter was traded in its cemetery (Favresse 1947b). Further down, the brook passed the already mentioned *Pongelmarkt*, where the retail grain trade took place. Then it divided into two branches, one following Fullers' street (*Volderstraat*) and the other the Coal market (*Kolenmarkt*). As the toponym Fullers' street indicates, the fullers used to be concentrated in this area. However, after the 1306 urban revolt, fullers and weavers were officially banned from staying overnight in the town centre (Vandecandelaere 2008). As a result, Fullers' street became a 'vacant' space soon occupied by other activities. During the 14th century a wine staple market was created in the street (Des Marez 1901) and in 1360 the urban council decided to move the Friday trade in eggs, butter and cheese to this site (ASB, AA, cartulaire V, p. 256).

The other branch of the *Smaelbeek* followed the Coal market, a winding road leading to Saint Jacob's gate. To date, not much is known about the coal trade in late medieval Brussels. Once again, the location of this particular street name can reveal things about the trade flow. Outside the gate, the Coal market spread along an artery leading to the nearby village of Anderlecht, the town of Halle and the county of Hainaut. From at least the 13th century on, coal is known to be extracted in the Borinage and other parts of Hainaut (Hansotte 1975). Once again, the location of the Coal market probably reflected the direction of the trade flow to Brussels.

Despite the concentration of several market places alongside the *Smaelbeek*, this artery never prospered in the same way as the *Spiegelbeek*'s commercial artery. Perhaps this was due to another intriguing development that occurred during the 14th and 15th centuries: the spatial concentration and centralisation of urban power on the Grand-Place. During the 13th and especially the 14th century, the urban power of Brussels underwent considerable expansion. (Des Marez 1936). In architectural terms, this trend was reflected in the construction of a monumental town hall, an official cloth hall and a rectangular-shaped public square (figure 5). These elements were all concentrated near a former common pasture. Since the 12th century this had been called the Lower market (*Nedermarkt*) or Common market (*Gemene markt*). Buildings began to spring up and gradually encompassed the square. In the 14th and 15th centuries the rectangular Grand-Place (G*rote Markt*) took on its definitive shape (Deligne 2009). It was at this time that the Gothic town hall was completed.

Figure 5: The Brussels Grand-Place, with the monumental town hall,
the urban cloth hall and the ducal complex
(© Royal Library of Belgium, Département des Manuscrits, n° 22.090).

As happened in the medieval twin town of Leuven (Maesschalck & Viaene 1998), Brussels town council started its architectural campaign in the 14th century. In 1301 the Brussels aldermen bought the stone building de Meerte on the Nedermarkt as a meeting place and to house its growing administration. From 1353 onwards a majestic Cloth hall (Lakenhalle) was built, which opened around 1360. This urban hall was the counterpart of the ducal Cloth hall, located on the other side of the Nedermarkt. The urban hall was designed for trade in entire clothes (Dikstein-Bernard 1981).

Some decades later a new town hall was built. At the beginning of the 15th century, the left wing and a belfry were constructed. The right wing was only added in the middle of the century (Maesschalck & Viaene 1960). The rectangular Grand-Place was built up and completed following the construction of the town hall (Vannieuwenhuyze 2008). From then on, the adjacent houses were increasingly occupied by the corporations. The Grand-Place became the Public Square par excellence, where edicts were promulgated, processions and tournaments held and public punishments and executions carried out, etc. (Soenen & Vanrie 2007).

In addition to all these activities, the Grand-Place was where all sorts of foodstuffs were traded. Urban edicts regulated the sale of vegetables, hay, butter, roast game, pigs, cattle, eggs, chickens, pigeons, ducks, fruit, parsley, carrots, onions and other products (Lindemans 1947), especially during the free market day established by Duke Philip the Good in 1452 (ASB, AA, cartulaire VIII, f° 308-310 v°). Conversely, other urban edicts prohibited the sale of specific products on the Grand-Place (ASB, AA, cartulaire V, p. 256; ASB, AA, n° 1455, f° 1-12 v°). This was probably due to a sumptuary policy or because the trade of these products was already organised elsewhere.

Of course, once the Grand-Place was complete, various urban events were concentrated within its confines and this also applied to trade. From now on, the location of market spaces no longer reflected the direction of trade flows. These fell under a centralised urban authority. However, many old markets survived, especially those causing urban nuisance.

A canal linking Brussels and Antwerp (16th century)

Following over a century of negotiations, Brussels finally started digging a canal to link the town to the Rupel River, an affluent of the Scheldt (Engels 1843; Deligne 2003). The canal came up to Brussels old town wall (figure 6) and so a new inner harbour was created. The ditches of the former town wall were transformed into docks and the banks into quays. Work was complete in 1561 and the canal officially inaugurated.

Figure 6: The new canal came up to Brussels old town wall
(© Royal Library of Belgium, Département des Cartes et Plans, III 3271 XXXI Bruxelles).

This project provided an enormous stimulus to the development of the town of Brussels, especially in the north-western quarter (where the canal had been dug). Until then, this had been a sparsely urbanised area with wide green spaces and little economic activity. The advent of the canal resulted in the complete re-orientation of the market spaces (Billen 2000). The canal provided a direct and fast connection between Brussels, the Scheldt, the economically booming town of Antwerp and ultimately the North Sea. The docks replaced the older harbour on the Zenne River and in so doing became the prime commercial space. Even before the official inauguration in 1561 some markets were transferred from the upper town to the docklands. To achieve this, the town council had to expropriate additional properties. The case of the wharf near Saint Catherine's gate, which was created to store all kinds of goods, shows that this could lead to serious judicial complications (ASB, AA, liasse 111).

Here I will restrict myself to a single example: the relocation of the Cattle market. As a result of the canal being created, the Cattle market near Saint Gudula's gate was removed and transferred to the docklands. In July 1564 the town council bought several plots of land to finance the digging of the canal and the relocation of the Cattle market. The latter was set up on the former Jericho ditch (Jerichogracht), which was filled in with earth (ASB, AA, n° 794, f° 116 v°-117 v°). Consequently, the former Cattle market near Saint Gudula's gate was called the Old Cattle market (Oude Veemarkt), while the new site, logically enough, was called the New Cattle market (Nieuwe Veemarkt) (d'Osta 1979). These toponyms thus clearly reflected the changes in commercial topography.

Conclusion

In this paper the commercial topography of late medieval Brussels was studied from several viewpoints. Toponyms, the location of market spaces, trade flows and commercial activities were analysed. By combining the results it has been possible to distinguish consecutive phases in its commercial history (figure 7), which were closely linked to general trends in the town development of Brussels. A brief recapitulation follows.

Figure 7: The location of market spaces in late medieval Brussels
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Initially, basic products such as grain, wood, pottery and cattle were traded in a kind of 'market chain', located around the Coudenberg and its adjacent borough. The location of these markets was certainly due to attraction and rejection factors. On one hand the inhabitants of the borough needed these products on a daily basis, so they were set up in close proximity to human habitation. On the other, these markets caused inconvenience (pollution, stench, noise, commotion, usury, etc.) and large areas were needed. Given this dual reason, markets were kept outside the borough. Following urbanisation and the densification of the market area, only the market names have survived as reminders.

In the 13th century, a new phase started. Increasing attention was paid to the economic potential of the Zenne River and its surrounding marshlands. The area was drained, branches of the river were rectified, mills were built and streets and an inner harbour were created. The organisation of commercial spaces followed this trend. The Duke of Brabant created a complex of trade halls between the Coudenberg and the river. A new commercial artery evolved alongside the artificial Spiegelbeek, which provided water to the merchants and defined specific market spaces. The area around Saint Nicholas church became one of the commercial hubs of the late medieval and early modern town.

However, one market place was more important and that was the Grand-Place. It seems that the town council invented a 'master plan' to restructure urban space around their initial town hall de Meerte, which was simply a stone house near a wide common pasture. During the 14th and 15th centuries an urban cloth hall was constructed, a majestic Gothic town hall with belfry was built and the former common market place was transformed into the spacious and rectangular Grand-Place. All kinds of activities and authorities were attracted to the new space, clearly revealing the centralistic forces of urban power. In addition, urban edicts rigorously laid down commercial practices.

The last phase started in the second half of the 16th century. The creation of a canal between Brussels and the Scheldt led to a direct and fast ship connection between Brussels and Antwerp. This caused the market places and commercial infrastructure to be relocated. Some were set up in the new dockland area. It was only during the Industrial Revolution in the 19th century that new changes to the commercial topography of Brussels took place.

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