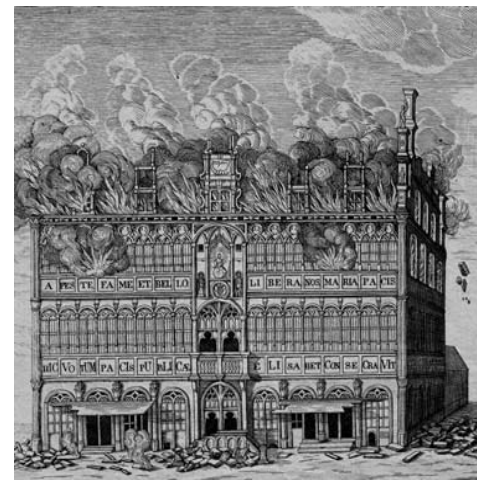
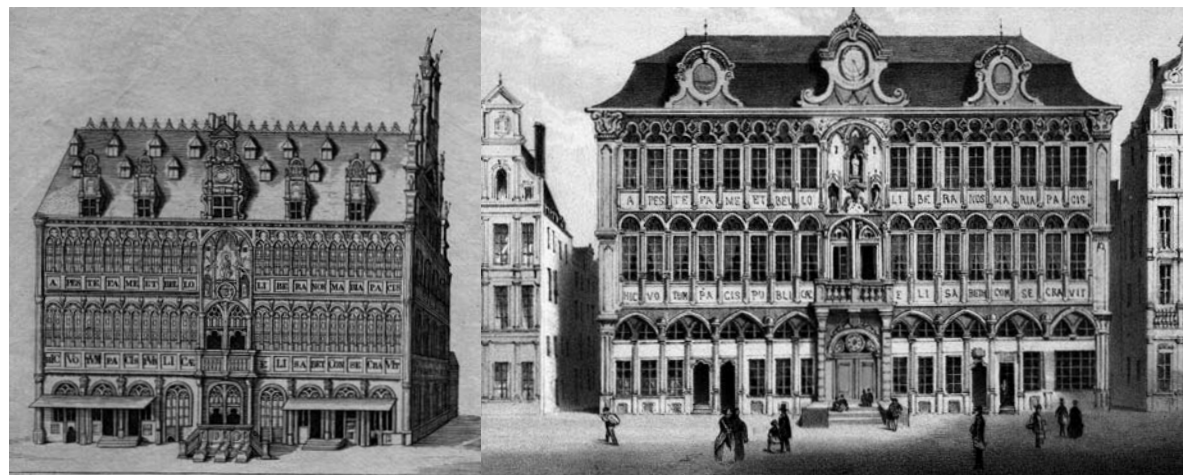


The *Broodhuis* (or Bread House - known as the *Maison du Roi* or King's House in French), which now houses the Museum of the City of Brussels, is a building whose roots date back far into the past of the Grand-Place. Very early on in the history of Brussels, this market square was the economic centre of the city. Trading focused around a series of halls or covered markets on the north-eastern side of the square.

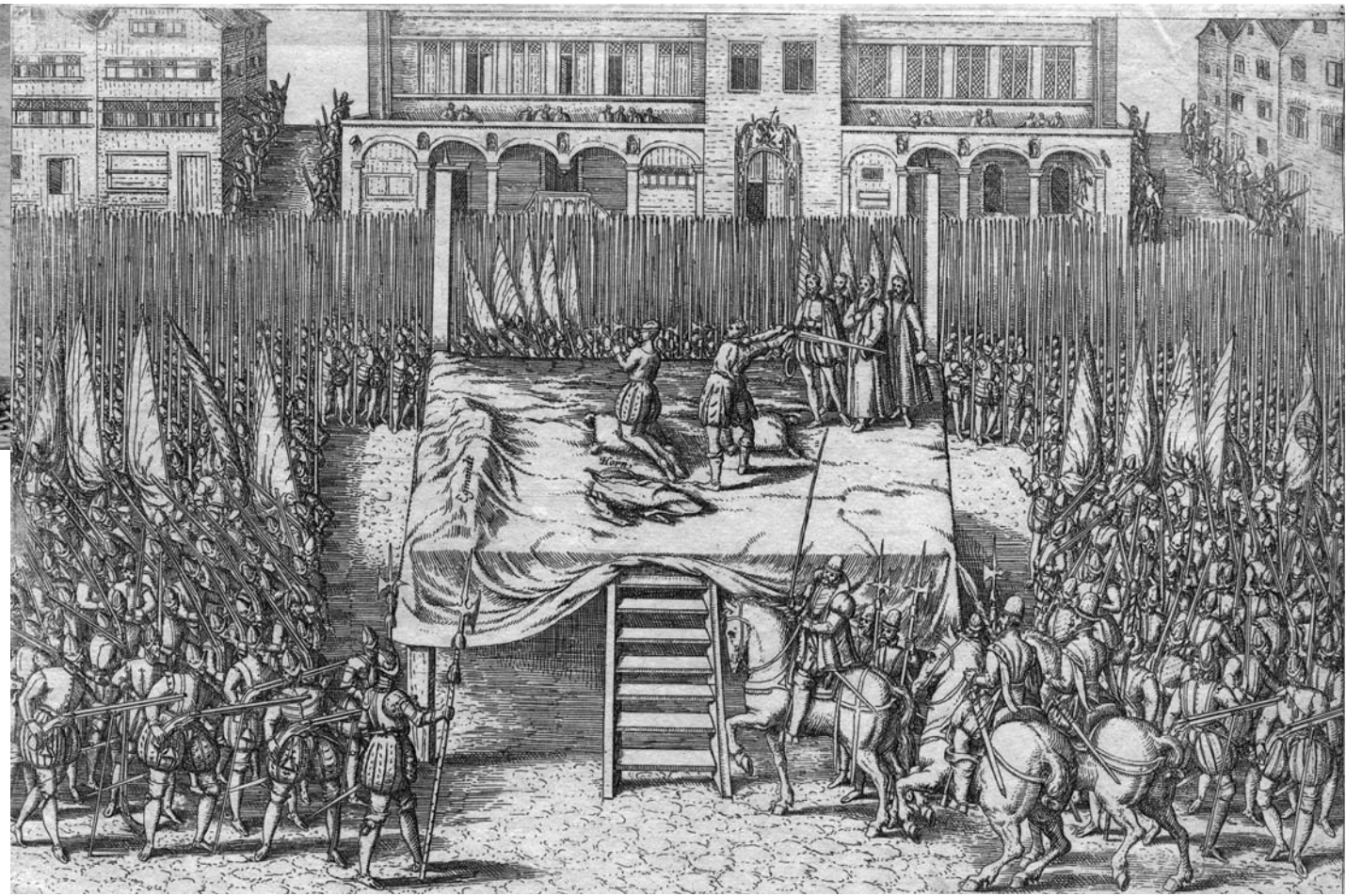
The Meat Hall, the Wool Hall, the Cloth Hall and the Bread Hall were located here in the 13th century, on a site belonging to the Duke of Brabant. These halls were simple wooden constructions that offered the merchants and their stalls protection from the weather.

Although the hall complex disappeared in the early 15th century, most of the successive buildings erected on the site of the former Bread Hall continued to be known in Dutch as the *Broodhuys*. Before this, however, the Duke built 's *Hertogenhuys* or the Duke's House on the site, installing offices there where financial business was transacted, and which were responsible for defending his interests in the city and more specifically for tax collection. Later on, other special courts were established there. These courts were under his authority and were competent to deal with infringements of the forestry and hunting law in areas such as the Soignes forest. When the future emperor Charles V took possession of the building in the early 16th century, it was seriously dilapidated.

He therefore decided to replace 's *Coninkshuys* (the King's House), now so named because in addition to being Duke of Brabant, Charles was also the King of Spain, with a new, larger building. The plans were the work of the Malines court architect Antoine Keldermans, while Louis van Bodegem designed the interior and city architect Henri van Pede completed the project in 1536. The structure, with its late-Gothic front facade and side facades in the early Renaissance style closely resembled the front building of the present-day *Maison du Roi*, but the tower and the galleries were missing. In 1625, Infante Isabella, Charles' granddaughter, had the front facade embellished, adding amongst other things a statue of Mary and an inscription placing the building under the protection of Our Lady of Peace (**Fig. 1**).



The *Maison du Roi* was heavily damaged during the bombardment of 1695 (**Fig. 2**). During the subsequent reconstruction of the Grand-Place, it underwent slight restoration. More thorough restoration work, which radically altered the appearance of the building, was undertaken in 1767: a mansard roof was added and the two side facades were concealed behind masonry in the classical style. Classical elements were also added to the front facade and the statues of saints to the left and right of the statue of Mary made way for an imperial eagle and a heraldic lion (**Fig. 3**).



Through the centuries, the *Maison du Roi* continued to fulfil its function as a symbol of the presence of the power of the prince in the city. The courts of his domains sat there and this was the place where political prisoners were held. For instance, Count Egmont and Count Hoorne, victims of the Spanish political repression, spent their last night here before they were beheaded in the Grand-Place on 5 July 1568 (**Fig. 4**). However, some rooms on the upper storeys were leased to the military guilds which met there, while shops were established on the ground floor.

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During the French occupation at the end of the 18th century, the Maison du Roi became the property of the nation. The revolutionaries changed its name to the 'People's House', but as in the past, the building continued to be used for a variety of purposes. The City acquired the premises in the early 19th century and in 1811 sold it to Paul Arconati-Visconti, the lord of Gaasbeek. Although it was to change hands under private ownership a couple more times after this, the rooms of the Maison du Roi continued to be leased to all sorts of associations and there were still shops and cafes on the ground floor (**Fig. 5**).

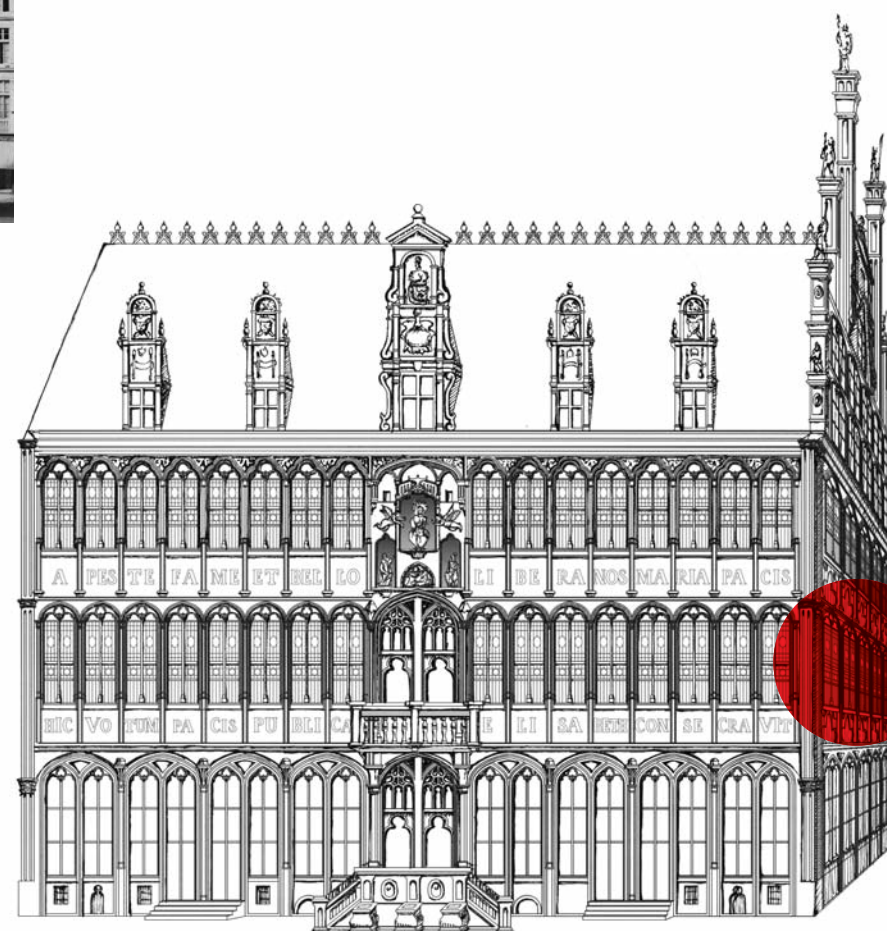
However, Brussels city council was nurturing plans to locate public services in the Maison du Roi. After it was purchased in 1860, city architect Pierre-Victor Jamaer, a great admirer of Viollet-Le-Duc, was given the task of drawing up a restoration plan.

As the aim was to achieve a faithful restoration, all available sources had to be thoroughly examined. The old building was meticulously measured and copies were made of all interesting details. City archivist and historian Alphonse Wauters undertook the historical investigation, searching out pictures, plans and descriptions of the 16th century building, while Jamaer analysed the Town Hall in Oudenaarde, which was also a creation of the architect Henri van Pede. The extremely poor condition of the building meant that the restoration was to turn into a reconstruction, during which the facades were demolished down to the foundations and then rebuilt once the foundations had been strengthened (**Fig. 6**).

In the meantime, the City had also become the owner of all the houses between rue Chair et Pain, rue des

Harengs and rue du Poivre, some of which had become outbuildings of the former Maison du Roi in the course of time. This enabled Jamaer to add a brick outbuilding to the new bluestone construction in which he was able to include not only the staircase but also all sorts of service rooms. Finally, the tower and galleries which had probably been planned in the 16th century but were never actually built were added to the neo-Gothic Maison du Roi. In addition the building was lavishly decorated with glass windows and gilded bronze statues. The interior, too, for which Jamaer had to use other Gothic examples as a basis since the interior architecture of the old Maison du Roi had undergone too many changes, was refurbished with a great deal of attention to historical details and the best materials.

Work began in 1873 and lasted more than twenty years, costing almost two million francs - a fabulous sum for the time.



Few material witnesses of the 16th Maison du Roi remain. Until the 1970s, parts of two facade bays were kept in the inner courtyard of the Brussels Academy, but they have now disappeared without a trace. The only other remains are found in the Museum.

The corner fillings in the early Renaissance style, bearing coats of arms, which were hung in this room just beneath the arches, come from the two side facades of the old Maison du Roi. They reappeared from beneath the 18th century masonry work when the facades were cleared for investigation in 1873 (**Fig. 7**).

In addition, the gilded stone eagle and lion with its coat of arms placed on the front facade in 1767 have also survived the turbulent history of the Maison du Roi. They were removed along with the statue of Mary during the French rule, but Paul Arconeti-Visconti had them brought back and they adorned the building until the eve of the restoration. Today they are exhibited respectively at the back of the hall (above the bluestone frame of an entrance gate) and on the stairs to the second floor (**Fig. 8**).

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