

## Brugge (Belgium)

No 996

### Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	The Historic Centre of Brugge
<i>Location</i>	Province of West-Vlaanderen (West Flanders)
<i>State Party</i>	Belgium
<i>Date</i>	1 July 1999

### Justification by State Party

Brugge (Bruges) is a special case in the sense that it already includes parts of two World Heritage nominations, the Flemish Béguinages (inscribed in 1998) and the Belfries of Flanders and Wallonia (inscribed in 1999).

The Historic Town of Brugge is testimony, over a long period, of a considerable exchange of influences on the development of architecture.

Brugge participated in the development of brick Gothic, which is characteristic of northern Europe and the Baltic; its major architectural impact is seen in early medieval churches, and particularly in the Burgundian period, which represents the apogee of Brugge. This architecture determines strongly the character of the historic centre of the town. Brugge has been an important commercial centre, the last part of the large Hanseatic chain. In this position, it has favoured innovative artistic influences, including the introduction especially of Italian but also of Spanish artists into the region.

#### Criterion ii

Brugge is a town which has conserved spatial and structural organizations that characterize its different phases of development, and the historic centre has continued covering exactly the same area as the perimeter of the old settlement.

The site is an outstanding example of an architectural ensemble, illustrating significant periods in human history.

Brugge is known as a commercial metropolis in the heart of Europe. Still an active, living city, it has nevertheless preserved the architectural and urban structures that document the different phases of its development, including the Grand-Place with its grand bell-tower, the Béguinage, as well as the hospitals, the religious and commercial complexes, and the historic urban fabric that document the different stages. Brugge is characterized by continuity reflected in the relative harmony of changes. As part of this continuity, the late 19th century renovation of facades introduced a Neo-Gothic style that is special for Brugge,

interpreting the medieval “Hansa” style with elements drawn from 19th century Romanticism.

#### Criterion iv

The site is associated with masterpieces of art, which are of outstanding universal significance.

The city has been the centre of patronage and development of painting in the Middle Ages when artists such as Jan van Eyck and Hans Memling came to Brugge to work. The city is the birthplace of the Flemish Primitives. Many of these paintings were exported and influenced painting in Europe, but exceptionally important collections also remain in the city itself.

#### Criterion vi

[**Note** This is a slightly abridged and modified version of the text in the nomination dossier.]

### Category of property

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a *group of buildings*.

### History and Description

#### History

Archaeological excavations have shown evidence of human presence in the area of Brugge from the Iron Age and the Gallo-Roman period. In the 8th century, Brugge was described as *Municipium Frandrense*, the headquarters of the *Pagus Frandrensis* and the residence of the Merovingian counts. It was the military and administrative centre of the region, and commercial links with Scandinavia started at the same time. The name of Brugge is first mentioned in the 9th century and is documented in Carolingian coins bearing the name *Bruggia*. In this period, it was part of a defence system against the Normans, and the first fortification existed in 851 at the site of the present-day Bourg. The settlement developed gradually and it became a harbour and commercial centre with European connections. The first city walls were built in 1127: the traces of these can still be read in the inner canals of the city centre. A sea canal was dug up to Brugge to facilitate navigation, thus consolidating its maritime role, which lasted until the 15th century, with Damme, Hoeke, and Monnikenrede as transition sites.

From 1200 to 1400 Brugge was the economic capital of Europe north of the Alps. The Brugge fair was established in 1200 and contacts with Britain were the first to develop, particularly related to wool. This was followed by other regions – northern Europe, the German countries, and the Mediterranean. The growing prosperity of the city was reflected in the construction of public buildings, such as the imposing belfry in the Grand-Place, and Brugge was quickly established as an economic capital of Europe. The palace of the van der Buerse family became the monetary centre, giving its name to the concept of the *Bourse* (stock exchange). Following its growth the town developed a series of social institutions from the 14th century onwards, including the Saint-Jean Hospital and the typical small God’s Houses (*Hôtels-Dieu*) and hospices. The Gothic town hall of 1376 remains the oldest in the Low Countries.

From 1384 to 1500 Brugge enjoyed its Golden Age under the Dukes of Burgundy. Under Philippe le Bon (1419–67) in particular, Brugge became a centre of court life, as well as

that of Flemish art, involving Jan van Eyck, who contributed to the development of the Flemish Primitive school of painting as well as exercising an influence on European art in general. Other painters include Petrus Christus, Hans Memling, Gerard David, and many who have remained anonymous. At the same time Brugge became the centre for miniature painting, and also for printing soon after Gutenberg: it was responsible for the first books in French and English. Owing to the presence of Italians Brugge soon became a centre of Humanism and the Renaissance. Building activity continued and Brugge was provided by a series of noble palaces and religious ensembles of great prestige.

From the late 15th century, Brugge gradually entered a period of stagnation. The Flemish regions were integrated into the Habsburg Empire, and the discovery of America displaced economic interests from the Atlantic to the Mediterranean. Brugge continued dealing with the textile industry and retained its Spanish connections, but its role in maritime trade was soon replaced by that of Antwerp. Nevertheless, it remained active in the international monetary market and continued as a centre of Humanism; Erasmus called it "the new Athens" and Thomas More wrote his *Utopia* there. Architecturally the medieval Gothic remained the common reference and was merged into a characteristic Brugge style.

From 1600 to 1800, as a result of the construction of canal systems, Brugge re-established its maritime connection, but only at a modest level. Building activities continued, however, and a ban of 1616 on the use of wood in building facades led to renovations in more substantial materials. The population of Brugge remained relatively small all through this period and the need to extend beyond the medieval city walls only arose much later. The influence of the Counter-Reformation was strong in Brugge, resulting in a series of religious ensembles. At the end of the 18th century the Habsburg Emperor Joseph II ordered the demolition of "useless" convents, and others were destroyed as a result of the French Revolution, including the cathedral of Saint-Donatien.

From 1815 to 1830 Brugge was part of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands and since 1830 it has been part of Belgium. The railway reached to Brugge in 1834, causing some changes in the urban fabric. Starting in 1854, the municipal administration prepared plans for urban transformations in the spirit of Haussmann, but only one of these was implemented, in the area of the new theatre, where the medieval fabric was destroyed. During the 19th century, a colony of English aristocrats influenced the cultural life of the city and contributed to a renewed interest in the artistic heritage of Brugge and the restoration of historic buildings, including the founding of the *Société d'Emulation pour l'histoire et les antiquités de la Flandre Occidentale*. Some of the restorations were fairly substantial, resulting in the building of copies of lost historic buildings. At the same time, tourism found a new interest in the old town. Some damage was incurred during the two World Wars, but as a whole, however, the historic town survived well. From 1968 policies focused on the conservation of the historic town, resulting in the establishment of the *Service de la Conservation et de la Rénovation urbaine* and the first urban structure plan.

### Description

Brugge is situated in the intersection of the polders of the maritime plain and the sandy interior of Flanders. The area is fairly low, rising to only some 7.5m above sea level. The historic city is delimited by its defensive walls, which were built starting in 1297 and provided with a system of bastions at the beginning of the 17th century. The walls were 6800m long and enclosed an area of 410ha. The plan dating from 1275 was sufficient to contain the development of the city until the 18th century. In 1782–84 part of the fortifications were dismantled, and in the 19th century the ramparts were transformed into promenades. Four gates still survive, as well as one of the defence towers. The core of the town developed from two major poles, one around the Burg of the counts, a square island of 16ha, and the other the residential quarter of the merchants at the Old Burg, from where the city started its expansion in the 12th century. The defensive wall of 1127 can be traced in a series of canals in the inner city.

The urban fabric of Brugge is characterized by the tissue of small lanes and the succession of small public squares. The most important of the squares are the Burg and the Grand-Place. The former was originally dominated by the cathedral of Saint-Donatien (demolished in 1799–1800) and the ducal residence, later replaced by the double chapel of Saint Basile (1134–57). For some 1000 years the Burg square has remained the symbol of the alliance of religious and civic authorities, as well as the seat of several public institutions, including the dispensing of justice. The Grand-Place, on the other hand, is the site of the halls, the belfry, and the Waterhalle, symbolizing municipal autonomy. The inner city developed as the area of wealthy families, while the outer quarters accommodated the working-class people. The characteristic districts include Marais, West-Brugge, Sainte-Anne, Sainte-Gilles, and the more recent Madeleine.

In the 19th century the increase of population provided the incentive for parcelling out the green areas. The only area to be subject to Haussmann-type renovation was around the new theatre, starting from 1864. The city of Brugge is characterized by its canals, which partly follow natural watercourses and are partly artificial. Locally, these are known as *Reie*, which can be translated as "quay." Brugge has also maintained a number of green areas within its walls, except for the innermost part. Many of the gardens and parks belong to religious complexes.

The architecture of Brugge, from the Middle Ages until modern times, is principally characterized by brick Gothic, and particularly by a style of construction known as *travée brugeoise*. This is similar to the brick Gothic found in northern Germany (eg Doesburg), and is usually classified in different types, indicating its evolution. This type of construction was well established in the early 16th century and, with some later variations, it was maintained until the 17th century. It also became the main inspiration for restorations in the 19th century.

The following are the different types of interesting historic buildings and complexes in Brugge.

The church of *Saint-Sauveur* is first mentioned in 988; it was rebuilt starting in the 13th century in French Gothic. From 1834, Saint-Sauveur has been the cathedral church of Brugge. The church of *Notre Dame* is first mentioned as a parish church in 1089. Its tower is 120m tall, the tallest belfry in Europe. It contains a complete series of the coats of

arms of the Order of the Golden Fleece (1468). The churches of *Sainte-Anne* and *Sainte-Walburge* are good examples of 17th century Baroque, typical of the Counter-Reformation in the southern Low Countries. The church of *Sainte-Madeleine* (1851–53, by Thomas Harper King) is a key building in the Gothic Revival. The *Jerusalem Chapel* was built after a pilgrimage to Jerusalem (1471–72), and refers to the church of Saint Sepulchre. The double chapel of *Saint-Basile* (1134–57), known as the Chapel of the Holy Blood, was built in the mid 12th century. The lower part has retained its Romanesque interior, while the upper part was restored in the 19th century.

The convents include the former *Abbey of Dunes*, built in 1628–42 by Cistercian monks. The church is in classical style from the end of the 18th century. The former *Convent of the Jesuits*, with two aisles dating from the 17th century, has been used as a school since the suppression of the order. Currently, the complex is under restoration. The *Béguinage Princier de la Vigne* was established in the 13th century; its name refers to Philippe le Bel, King of France. The spatial articulation is typically medieval, with some late Gothic and 17th century transformations. Since 1927 it has been occupied by a Benedictine congregation. The *Hôtels-Dieu* (God's Houses) are a characteristic feature of the town; some 46 still exist today. They were built to accommodate aged people and there are basically two types, one with a central garden, the other along the street. The oldest of these date from the 14th century. Their current use still corresponds with the original intention, since they are rented to the elderly with limited financial resources. The *Hôpital Saint-Jean* was established in the mid 12th century. The three medieval parts that survive were used until the middle of the 19th century; since then they have been transformed for museum use. The 19th century part of the hospital was restored and transformed into a congress centre after 1976.

The public buildings include the 13th century ensemble consisting of the commercial *Halls and the Belfry* (83m), which symbolize municipal autonomy. The Town Hall dates mainly from 1376–86 and is one of the oldest town halls in the Low Countries. The *Palace of Franc de Brugge* has a complex history: it is the site of the residence of the count in the 11th century, which was occupied by the Court of Justice and civic administration from the 14th century. The buildings were transformed in the early 16th century and other parts were added in the 18th century. From 1795 until 1984 they housed the Court of Justice, and since then the municipal administration has been located there.

The historic town of Brugge has some 10,000 buildings, of which about half are considered to be of architectural or landscape value. The range of the buildings includes those dating from the Middle Ages (13th–14th centuries), the Burgundian period (15th century), the late Gothic (16th–17th centuries), regional Baroque (17th century), French influence (18th century), Neo-Classical (19th century), and revival styles (19th and 20th centuries)

The suggested boundary of the nomination includes the entire historic town, and it can be considered appropriate. A buffer zone surrounds this on all sides. The nominated area will include a new concert hall that is under construction. This is being built on land cleared for a former railway in the 19th century. According to the ICOMOS expert mission, the building does not harm the historic character of the town.

The boundary also reflects the historical limits of the city and has become the identity for its population.

## Management and Protection

### *Legal status*

The historic town is a conglomerate of public and private ownership. There is a list of historic buildings, which are protected under the law of 7 August 1931 regarding urban and rural monuments and sites, as modified by the decrees of 3 March 1976 and 22 February 1995. All buildings that do not have specific protection fall under the municipal regulations.

### *Management*

The first Structure Plan for Brugge was prepared in 1972, setting out the basis for the planning and management of the city, and including conservation, as well as traffic plans. The Stad of Brugge has actively sustained the character of the historic centre by encouraging the provision of housing, controlling development, and intervening in the public domain. As traffic has been progressively removed, open spaces have been laid out, pavements widened, and streets paved. Parks and gardens have been created and renovated as an essential contribution to urban renewal. A television distribution system has been introduced, thus obviating the need for television aerials. Brugge has also renewed the canal system in order to remove pollution from drains and provide an attractive feature to the town.

The Stad of Brugge and its consultants are currently preparing a new Structure Plan for the city and the surrounding area. This plan sets out objectives and strategies to implement the protection and care of the city. The completed draft provides the basis of a Management Plan for the city. The city also has management plans for tourism, following the guidelines of *Toerisme Vlaanderen* 1999–2000. Special plans are prepared for the year 2002, when an influx of visitors is expected to Brugge, and consequently a special Plan Tourism 2002 is under preparation.

## Conservation and Authenticity

### *Conservation history*

Conservation management of the city has been continuous since 1877. In this period, thanks to the governor Amédée Visart de Bocarmé, restoration became an integral part of the city's policy. Numerous buildings, and especially their artistic street fronts, were restored. The period also promoted a debate about restoration principles. Thomas Harper King, James Weale, and Jean de Béthune, disciples of Ruskin and Pugin, were in favour of respectful treatment based on scientific study of the buildings, and care to use historically authentic materials so far as possible. Others were disciples of Viollet-le-Duc, including the city architect Louis Delacenserie. Several historic buildings have thus been subject to rather heavy stylistic restoration (eg the Town Hall, Greffe Civil, Gruuthuse Palace), and similar restorations have continued even after the two World Wars. However, since the 1960s the approach has become more conservative.

In 1968, a scientifically accurate inventory of historic buildings was published by Dr Luc de Vliegher, and this has

remained a basic reference for conservation. Gradually attention has thus addressed non-monumental buildings, the ordinary residential fabric of the town. As a result of the communal fusion, Brugge was subject to new dynamism; it was the first town in Belgium to create a special Service for the Urban Conservation and Renovation, as well as approving the first Structure Plan in Belgium in 1972. In 1975, thanks to its conservation programmes, Brugge was selected as one of the examples of the European Architectural Heritage Year. Since 1978, there has been a constant policy to finance conservation projects. This includes also structural and functional improvements, and has made it possible to guarantee the conservative rehabilitation of many run-down areas, such as those of Sainte-Anne, Saint-Gilles, West-Brugge, Marais, and along rue Longue.

#### *Authenticity*

The historic centre of Brugge illustrates continuity on an urban site that has been occupied since the 11th century. Records survive to show control having been exercised over development since the 15th century. Since the late 19th century there has been conscious attention to the history of the town, and the debates about modalities have followed the international trends in the field of restoration and conservation.

The continuity of occupation in the historic town has retained the original pattern of streets, canals, and open spaces. For the most part, buildings have retained the original parcels of land. The transformations that have taken place over time respect the functional changes in the town, and have become part of its historic authenticity, in a parallel way to Siena in Italy. Even though the city walls have been lost, the perimeter of the historic town is clearly readable today, marked also by the surviving gates and the defence tower.

The history of the town and its buildings is well represented in the historic structures that embody practically all periods of history since the foundation of the city. Even though there have been some modern transformations, these can be considered of minor impact on the whole. The Brugge style of restoration itself has become an item of interest. The different renovations reflect the international restoration movement and have become part of the city's character today.

#### **Evaluation**

##### *Action by ICOMOS*

An ICOMOS expert mission visited Brugge in January 2000. ICOMOS also consulted its International Scientific Committee on Historic Towns and Villages.

##### *Qualities*

Brugge is an outstanding example of a medieval historic settlement, which has maintained its historic fabric as this has evolved over the centuries. Brugge is also a place where the original Gothic manner of building has been retained and revived, even up to the present day, becoming part of the identity of the town.

Having been one of the commercial and cultural capitals of Europe, with links to different parts of the world, Brugge has been a promoter of cultural and artistic movements, and is

particularly associated with the painting school of Flemish Primitives.

##### *Comparative analysis*

The nomination documents refer to other comparable cities in Europe, such as Cologne, Lübeck, and Florence in their form or Gand and Ypres in their economic development. In this comparison, however, Brugge comes out as an outstanding example, particularly in the light of its exceptional state of preservation. Compared with Malines, Antwerp, and Brussels, Brugge is the only town that has been able to retain the entirety of its medieval fabric and urban structure.

#### **Brief description**

Brugge is an outstanding example of a medieval historic settlement, which has well maintained its historic fabric as this has evolved over the centuries, and where the Gothic manner of building has become part of the identity of the town. One of the commercial and cultural capitals of Europe, Brugge has had cultural links to different parts of the world, being particularly associated with the school of the Flemish Primitives.

#### **Recommendation**

That the site be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria ii, iv, and vi*:

*Criterion ii* The Historic Town of Brugge is testimony, over a long period, of a considerable exchange of influences on the development of architecture, particularly in brick Gothic, as well as favouring innovative artistic influences in the development of medieval painting, being the birthplace of the school of the Flemish Primitives.

*Criterion iv* The Historic Town of Brugge is an outstanding example of an architectural ensemble, illustrating significant stages in the commercial and cultural fields in medieval Europe, of which the public, social, and religious institutions are a living testimony.

*Criterion vi* The town of Brugge has been the birthplace of the Flemish Primitives and a centre of patronage and development of painting in the Middle Ages with artists such as Jan van Eyck and Hans Memling.

ICOMOS, September 2000