



CICERONI
T R A V E L

THE COURT & THE CITY BRUSSELS & ANTWERP

TUESDAY 17 – SUNDAY 22 SEPTEMBER 2019 (6 DAYS)

LECTURER: HUGH MAGUIRE

£2290

- Stimulating, leisurely week absorbing the culture of seventeenth century Flanders
- A feast of sumptuous art by some of Europe's most distinguished painters, the Bruegel family, Rubens & Van Dyck
- Follow the change of architectural styles from Gothic to Renaissance & Baroque
- Time to explore Brussels, Antwerp & Mechelen
- Comfortable city centre 4* hotels



Peter Paul Rubens, The Raising of the Cross, Antwerp,
The Cathedral of our Lady

OVERVIEW

Flanders in the sixteenth century was ruled by the Spanish Hapsburgs, when with the death of the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V in 1556, it was inherited by his son, Phillip II of Spain. From 1598 the territory was jointly governed by Isabella, daughter of King Philip II, and her husband (and cousin) Archduke Albert VII of Austria, son of Emperor Maximilian II. They ruled from their palace in Brussels, creating a glittering court, served by some of the greatest Flemish artists of the day: Rubens, Van Dyck, the odd Bruegel and many more.

As with much of north-western Europe, Flanders was wrecked by the religious, dynastic and territorial conflicts which dominated the late sixteenth century. For instance, Calvinist control of Antwerp was only overcome following a prolonged siege by the great military commander Alessandro Farnese, Duke of Parma, who was governor of the Spanish Netherlands. Subsequently, Antwerp regained something of its former splendour and affluence and became a notable centre for publishing and the art market, until eventually overshadowed by the rise of Amsterdam and its own great Golden Age

This 'last gasp' golden age in Flanders saw the arts of painting and architecture used as tools in the consolidation of political and especially religious authority. What the Calvinist tradition abhorred, the Catholic tradition dramatically reiterated, and no other artist effectively managed to convey political and religious authority (and belief) as Peter Paul Rubens. He exerted an influence across the rest of Europe in the period, an influence which still bears fruit. Technically flawless, a brilliant draughtsman and colourist, his works were also expressions of complex theological concepts and where appropriate, political and dynastic claims – skills not lost on his many pupils, not least Anthony van Dyck, his one-time studio assistant.

Led by the Irish art historian, Hugh Maguire, the visit will take us to three cities of this Spanish Hapsburg realm – Brussels, Antwerp and Mechelen. We shall wonder at the exuberance of their art forms and the rapidity with which new, largely Italian inspired, styles and tastes were consolidated and confirmed as the norm.

In Brussels we will stay in the 4* Grand Hotel Place Rouppe, a charming boutique hotel in a neoclassical building on the historic Place Rouppe. In Antwerp we stay, aptly, at the 4 * Hotel Rubens, a more modest establishment, excellently located in the historic centre, close to the Cathedral and Grote Markt.

ITINERARY OUTLINE

Day 1: Tuesday 17 September – We travel from London by Eurostar to Brussels, arriving mid-afternoon. Having settled at our hotel, the **4* Grand Hotel Place Rouppe**, for a two-night stay, we will have a brief orientation walk in this characterful **St Jacques** area of the city. Later on we have dinner in the hotel – wine, water and coffee will be served with all group lunches and dinners.

Day 2: Wednesday 18 September – This morning we will make our way on foot to the nearby Baroque **Church of Notre-Dame de Bon Secours** and from there to the famous **Grote Markt**, or **Grand Place**, one of Europe's great open air drawing rooms, which we will consider in some detail. Following time for coffee at the famous **Galleries**

Saint Hubert we will make our way to the **Royal Museum of Fine Arts**, containing some of Bruegel's best-known works, as well as a significant collection of masterpieces by Rubens and Flemish artists of the seventeenth century. We will have a group lunch at *L'Ecailler du Palais Royal*, Le Sablon and the evening will be free – you may wish to partake in a performance this evening, and details of these will be issued once the programmes are published.

Day 3: Thursday 19 September – We depart our hotel with our luggage and travel to the lovely picturesque city of **Mechelen**, little visited by foreign tourists. Dominated by its cathedral, **Sint-Romboutskathedraal**, it hosts an array of notable buildings from the Medieval and Renaissance periods, its era of greatest economic and artistic significance – the future Emperor Charles V was raised here. However, the Baroque period is notable too, with the cathedral containing work by Van Dyck and an elaborate high altar by Lucas Faydherbe, who also designed the church of **Onze-Lieve-Vrouw van Leliëndaal**. The recently restored seventeenth century Jesuit church, the **Sint-Pieter-en-Paulkerk**, is attributed to the Jesuit priest Andreas, or Anton Losson. In spite of a turbulent history it remains one of the most intact interiors of the period in the Low Countries. The sumptuous **Begijnhofkerk**, or Sint-Alexius-en-Catharinakerk, was designed by the Jesuit brother, Pieter Huysens. Following time for lunch (not included) we will conclude our day with a visit to the **De Wit Royal Tapestry Manufacturers**, housed in the historic late fifteenth century Refuge House of Tongerlo Abbey. It specialises in the repair and restoration of tapestries – the art form for which Belgium was once celebrated internationally. We continue to Antwerp and our hotel, the **4* Hotel Rubens**, and later have a group dinner in a local restaurant.

Day 4: Friday 20 September – We spend the day in Antwerp on foot, and this morning we visit the **Grote Markt** with its massive Town Hall and impressive merchant houses. From here we explore the nearby streets, and visit the celebrated **Sint-Carolus-Borromeuskerk**, the influential Jesuit church in Antwerp. We will arrange a private visit to the nearby historic **Keizerskapel**, finishing our morning at the adjoining **Snijders & Rockoxhuis Museum** – a private collection occupying the premises once owned by Rubens's friend and patron, Nicolaas II Rockox, a leading figure in the economic and political life of the city. After some time for lunch (not included) we will continue to **Sint-Paulskirk**, an example of Flamboyant Gothic overlaid with Baroque detailing and particularly spectacular timberwork by Artus Quellin. The evening will be free.

Day 5: Saturday 21 September – This morning we visit two great house collections. The **Rubenshuis** was purchased in 1610 to house and display the artist's collections and evoke a sense of his extensive foreign travels, Italy in particular. Centuries later, the nearby **Museum Mayer Van den Bergh** was built for the collection amassed by Fritz Mayer Van den Bergh, including works by Bruegel and others. After free time for lunch (not included) we will visit the **Plantin-Moretus Museum**, a UNESCO World Heritage site. It is the former home and workshops, the *Officina Plantiniana*, of the prosperous Plantin-Moretus family who dominated the printing and publishing trades in the Spanish Netherlands. Dating back to the late sixteenth century, extended and embellished through the centuries, it also houses original art works by Rubens as well as one of the great historic book collections of Northern Europe. We will finish the afternoon at **Sint-Andrieskerk**, with its dramatic theatrical altarpieces as well as a discreet monument to Queen Mary Stuart. Tonight we have our final group dinner.

Day 6: Sunday 22 September – This morning we will visit the **Onze-Lieve Vrouwekathedraal (Cathedral of Our Lady)**, the highlight of any visit to Antwerp. Dominating the city skyline it contains three of the most celebrated and dramatic works by Rubens, notably his *Raising of* and *Descent from the Cross* and *Assumption*. Appropriately we will end our visit at **Sint-Jacobskerk**, the most intact and spectacular interior of the period and the final resting place of Rubens. We travel by coach to Brussels, where we take the Eurostar to London.

PRACTICALITIES

Price £2290 **Without Eurostar** £2145 **Deposit** £275

Single Supplement £295 (Double/Twin Room for Sole Use)

Hotels 2 nights with breakfast at the 4* Grand Hotel Place Rouppe, Brussels; 3 nights with breakfast at the 4* Rubens, Antwerp

Eurostar

Outward: Departs London St Pancras **1258**, arrive Brussels **1607**
Return: Departs Brussels **1656**, arrives London St Pancras **1806**

Price includes 3 dinners, 2 lunches & 2 meals on Eurostar with wine, water & coffee, all local transfers, City Tax, entry fees & gratuities, services of Hugh Maguire and our Tour Manager Chloe Pepper

Not included Travel to/from London, 2 dinners & 3 lunches



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