



Topic
Better Living

Subtopic
Travel

The Great Tours: Experiencing Medieval Europe

Course Guidebook

Professor Kenneth R. Bartlett
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PUBLISHED BY:

THE GREAT COURSES
Corporate Headquarters
4840 Westfields Boulevard, Suite 500
Chantilly, Virginia 20151-2299
Phone: 1-800-832-2412
Fax: 703-378-3819
www.thegreatcourses.com

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Professor Bartlett's other Great Courses include *The Development of European Civilization*, *The Italian Renaissance*, and *The Italians before Italy: Conflict and Competition in the Mediterranean*. ■

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The Great Tours: Experiencing Medieval Europe

Scope:

This course is a journey through the cities of Europe in the Middle Ages to visit 12 of the most diverse and interesting survivals from that long ago time. You will learn about the most important medieval buildings or neighborhoods and the social, political, and economic structures underlying these leading towns. You'll be engaged by legends and stories that will make each city come alive. The course is designed to take you into the past—to feel what it was like to live in a medieval city and to understand the complex nature of the society that created these remarkable urban environments.

What will emerge from our journey together is an understanding of the forces that characterized medieval European life over a substantial period of time and across a wide geographical area. We will visit cities in what are now the countries of Belgium, Poland, England, France, Spain, the Czech Republic, Germany, Croatia, and Malta. All of these medieval cities had unique characteristics, but all equally reflect the fundamental values of the Middle Ages.

The medieval period has been called the Age of Faith. Consequently, our cities are populated by a great many churches, from huge cathedrals, such as York Minster in York, the cathedral of St. Eulalia and the Holy Cross in Barcelona, and St. Vitus's Cathedral in Prague, to large and important parish churches, such as Our Lady before Týn in Prague and St. Jakob's in Rothenburg. We will also see the dynamic role played by the regular clergy—monks and nuns—through the great monastic houses in our cities, such as that of St. Dominic in Siena and St. Francis's monastery in Dubrovnik. You will learn that these religious communities fulfilled a great many functions besides the cure of souls. They ran orphanages and hospitals, pilgrims' hospices and pharmacies, old-age homes and poorhouses. In short, they were the social services agencies of every medieval town. And the prayers that monks and nuns said for both the living and the dead were seen as hope for

every citizen—whether alive or not—and served as a missile shield for all souls in the town, protecting them from natural and human disasters

Equally, the place of secular authority will become clear in our visits to the town halls, palaces, urban mansions, merchants' houses, and simple cottages of the poor. Meeting rooms and warehouses that made the medieval period a dynamic time of economic change; the great market squares, such as those in Bruges or Kraków; the open political spaces designed for all citizens, such as the Piazza del Campo in Siena—all of these indicate the importance of the idea of community in the medieval city. And you will come to understand how the dangers inherent in civic life, whether from disease, war, internal instability, or famine, could at least be mitigated by the collective responsibility of the community.

Medieval cities are also beautiful testaments to the glory of the civilization that created them. The degree of decoration in the secular and religious buildings, the size and elegance of the homes of the elite classes, and the careful attention to the decoration of open public spaces all leave us with an enormous respect for those who realized that comfort and efficiency do not exclude beauty and design. And many of these cities have sustained powerful memories of the various cultures that contributed to their beauty and shape. Such cities as Palermo and Mdina represent rich mixtures of styles and ideas left by their many conquerors and builders. Our journey, then, will help us understand how waves of people and colonizers have contributed exciting visual experiences that explicate the past.

The Middle Ages was a dangerous and violent period in European history—on what has been called the Violent Continent. Thus, we will see the walls, bastions, moats, and defenses that protected our 12 medieval towns. We will look at the incredible technology and inventiveness that made such cities as Carcassonne or Avignon secure in case of attack. We will also see the effects of taking down those walls and fortifications in the 19th century, an often unfortunate decision that did, however, provide the necessary space for parks and greenery in what had originally been a crowded urban world of brick and stone.

Our journey together will both instruct and delight. This course is a time machine to transport us through the ages and across vast distances. All you need is your imagination and attention, and the medieval city will open its gates to you.■

The Medieval City—A Feast for the Senses

Lecture 1

This course is something of a time machine, designed to allow you to experience life in the Middle Ages as you walk through some of the great cities of Europe, from Mdina on the island of Malta to York in England, from Barcelona in Spain to Kraków in Poland. Each city is unique—the product of its own history, geography, and culture—but all share certain characteristics that let us identify them as medieval. In this lecture, we’ll start by asking: What was the medieval city like, and what was it like to live there?

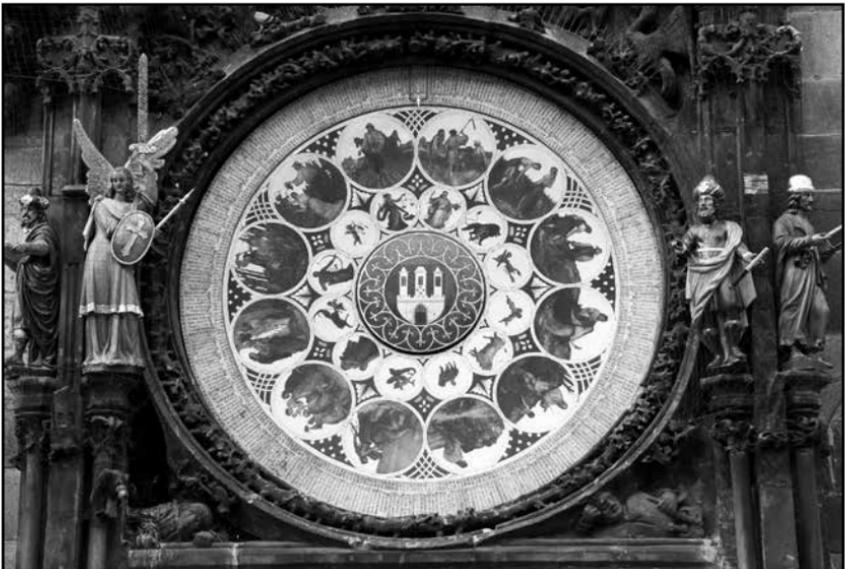
A Walk through the Market

- We begin our tour of medieval cities with a visit to the Markt in Bruges on market day. We see people at stalls, tables, or benches, selling a wide array of goods: food, including live animals; homemade goods, such as cloth; leather shoes and wooden clogs; and earthenware cups, bowls, and pots, as well as more carefully finished pottery.
- We see the table of an official assigned to ensure the accuracy of weights and measures used in the marketplace and to check the documents of foreign merchants. It would be wise to follow the rules in the market because the punishments for violating them can be harsh and humiliating.
- The smells of a medieval market would have been most unpleasant. The dozens of carts that brought merchandise to the square at sunrise were pulled by oxen, mules, or horses, and their manure was left where it fell. Further, those selling couldn’t leave their stalls or tables; beneath them would have been pots for human waste.
- At 6:00, the bells in the town clock would signal the closing of the market.

- Town clocks were an innovation in the Middle Ages, placed high above the squares so that they could be seen and heard by everyone.
- Previously, the day was punctuated by the ringing of the church bells for canonical hours, but with the town clock, civic authorities took control of residents' time, and religious authorities lost some of their power. Markets were regulated by city governments, not the Church.
- Of course, the church bells still sounded, marking the city as both heavenly and earthly.

Inside a Monastery

- The secular clergy—priests, answering to the bishop—were, as their name suggests, more in the world than monks, who might live in large monasteries with hundreds of their brothers.



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The town clock in Prague displays a procession of figures reminding us of our mortality—led by a skeleton with an hourglass.

- Inside a monastery, the cacophony of the market square is completely gone, silenced by walls many feet thick. We can hear the chanting of the monks and see light streaming through the stained-glass windows, creating an otherworldly atmosphere. Gothic churches lost their solid walls to windows, and the height of these churches seemed a miracle in itself as they reached toward heaven.
- Religious communities fulfilled a great many functions in the medieval city. Convents and monasteries were repositories for surplus children, and they ran the hospitals and pharmacies. They were also seen as vehicles to ensure divine protection and the spiritual well-being of the community. The sole duty of many in these religious communities was to pray for the souls of their fellow citizens.
- Medieval cities had dozens of religious houses, and these were the beneficiaries of legacies and gifts. The structure of these organizations was so effective that they attracted lay wannabes. We see this with the Beguins in Bruges, women who lived like nuns but were not nuns, occupying simple cottages and living good lives, even if not required to do so by an oath.
- The individual monk or nun occupied a small cell, as was appropriate for someone who had chosen a life of poverty. But collectively, large spaces were required to contain the community, such as the great preaching churches of the Dominicans and Franciscans.
 - Such preaching churches usually had large squares in front for overflow audiences, processions and, social interaction.
 - Keep in mind that everyone who was recognized as a member of the community was a Catholic Christian. Those who were not were outside the spiritual and social order of the town.

- Popular itinerant preachers filled the preaching churches with the faithful. Such preachers delivered more than good lessons and inspiring words; they combined theater and devotion.

Entertainment in the Medieval City

- Aside from sermons, theatre and performance—or processions—were the other official entertainments of the medieval city.
 - Some celebrations were unique: The visit of a king, pope, or emperor, for example, required all officials to put on their distinctive costumes, bring out the civic musicians, and hang the streets with colorful banners.
 - Other celebrations came with regularity, such as the feast days of patron saints or the reverence of a relic or picture. Such events brought out the clergy in their religious finery: bishops with golden copes and mitres, sacristans with candles and banners, and civic officials and members of religious confraternities. The people of the towns walked behind the processions, witnessing for their own faith and their membership in the community.
- Perhaps the most well-known of the secular processions and entertainments was the one preceding the Palio at Siena, which still occurs twice each summer on the feast days of the Virgin Mary. All 17 city neighborhoods were represented, as were the guilds, the university, and civic officials; the procession culminated in the arrival of the war cart bearing the banners of the free city.
- One of the duties of the rich and powerful was to provide the medieval equivalent of bread and circuses, often manifested in wedding celebrations. Such events not only made manifest the wealth and status of a family, but they cemented the family's civic role in the community.

Homes of the Wealthy

- Nobles often lived in large townhouses close to the market square and town hall—the center of civic power. City homes had no lawns

because land within the city walls was expensive. Such walls provided protection from the outside; city gates were locked at nightfall and not reopened until morning.

- Homes of the wealthy were often four stories tall, with the ground floor rented to shops. The main rooms of the home were on the second floor, or *piano nobile* (“noble floor”). Here, the family treasures would be displayed in large, richly decorated rooms. Furniture was never left in place or meant to serve one purpose; chairs and benches were carried where they were needed, and tables were used to serve meals or conduct business or as beds for servants.
- The room closest to the master bedroom was the treasury; an elaborately locked strongbox containing important documents, silver, gold, jewels, and precious objects. The master bedroom was always deep within the house to ensure the security of the master while he slept.
- Heat was provided by fireplaces with recessed flues; windows had glass; and walls were decorated with fresco painting. To reduce the risk of fire and the effects of heat and odors from cooking, the kitchen was always on the top floor.
- In the center of the house was a courtyard that allowed supplies or merchandise to be unloaded. There was also a well here, providing private water for the family.
 - Water was always a problem in medieval towns, which were often built on hills for security, making hydraulic pressure difficult to harness. One of the greatest threats to a town was losing control of fresh water to an enemy.
 - The supply of water was controlled by town officials and was usually distributed to fountains. These were surrounded by large squares to permit many people, usually poor women or servants, to collect the day’s supply or wash clothes in a separate basin.

- Medieval cities also required stores of grain to ensure that the population would be fed in times of famine or war. In some cities, religious hospitals controlled granaries and had an obligation to distribute bread to the poor.

Homes of the Poor

- Those at work in the marketplace would hurry home before the town curfew. Except for the night watchman and a few licensed individuals, no one was permitted to be out past dark. Medieval towns were dangerous, with no real police force and many poor and desperate people who would rob and kill if they could be sure there were no witnesses. There was also no street lighting, except for perhaps a few votive candles. The city was completely dark, and anyone out walking risked falling and breaking a bone as much being the victim of a crime. It was simply unwise to be out at night.
- The poor lived farther from the center of town than the nobles, on narrow streets piled with garbage and human and animal waste. A tinker from the market might occupy two rooms on the top floor of a tenement with his family and an apprentice. There was no privacy in the space, but privacy was not a concept that would be understood in the medieval city. Daily life was lived with others watching.
- Life in these crowded tenements was difficult: cold, dark, dirty, smoky, and full of the odors of human waste, cooking, and rotting food. Tenements were also noisy, with residents engaging in their trades at home. There were few outlets for comfort or entertainment in the home, but no one was lonely.
- On the day after market day, the tinker might deliver a pot to the home of a wealthy merchant and receive a few coins for his work. The town square would be empty of market stalls but filled with sound: the chiming of the civic clock and the announcement by the town trumpeter of a meeting of the civic government, open for all to view. As we'll see in these lectures, the life of a medieval city was indeed a rich, dynamic, and complex reflection of a splendid civilization.

Suggested Reading

Lilley, *Urban Life in the Middle Ages, 1000–1400*.

Mundy and Riesenber, *The Medieval Town*.

Nicholas, *The Growth of the Medieval City*.

———, *The Later Medieval City, 1300–1500*.

Pirenne, *Medieval Cities*

Pounds, *The Medieval City*.

Rorig, *The Medieval Town*.

Questions to Consider

1. Medieval cities developed without any kind of modern technology. How would your life and work change if you were transported back in time into a medieval town?
2. What elements make life in the medieval city attractive, despite the existence of poverty, hierarchy, and disease?

Rothenburg—Jewel on the Romantic Road

Lecture 2

Rothenburg is perhaps the most well-preserved medieval town in Germany, having been discovered in the 19th century by the Romantic movement, which celebrated the traditions, art, and architecture of the Middle Ages. Although the city sustained significant damage during World War II, its restoration was exacting, and it remains the most popular stop on the so-called Romantic Road through southern Germany. Some observers have argued that the result of the restoration is a Disneyland town, but Rothenburg is, in fact, a real town, not a theme park. Tourism has supplanted the production of the fields and mills, but Rothenburg remains an effective entrée to understanding urban life of the Middle Ages in Germany.

History of Rothenburg

- Rothenburg is an old city, first mentioned in 804, when Charlemagne ruled as the first Holy Roman Emperor. Its name derives from the red-tiled roofs (German *rot* = “red”), and it still sits securely within its circuit of walls, although a modern area with some high-technology companies has grown beyond the fortifications.
- The word *burg* in German means “castle” or “fortress.” The town itself developed from a castle, a fortress, and an administrative center that was first built around the year 1000 above the Tauber River by the counts of Comburg-Rothenburg. This location explains Rothenburg’s full name: Rothenburg ob der Tauber, or “Rothenburg above the Tauber River.”
- A massive earthquake in 1356 destroyed the castle, which was never rebuilt. But at the turn of the 15th century, some of the salvaged architectural material was used by Mayor Heinrich Toppler to create the small Chapel of St. Blaise in what are now the castle gardens.

Entering the City

- Visitors can enter Rothenburg through the castle gate. The gate bears the coat of arms of the city and the imperial eagle, reminding us that this was once a free city of the Holy Roman Empire. On the right is a memory of earlier rulers—the arms of the counts of Comburg-Rothenburg.
- Inside the first gate are the doors to the customs houses, which are circular buildings with characteristically conical roofs, and the remnants of an old drawbridge. The terrifying mask above the gate served as an opening for dropping boiling pitch or water on any enemy who dared to assault the town.
- Just through the gates, the large, imposing mansions of the city's former elite come into view. The owners of these grand residences are recognized in the street name: Herrngasse. *Herr* in German means “lord” or “master,” while *gasse* means “lane” or “roadway.”
 - Herrngasse is close to the castle gate because the families that originally occupied these timber, brick, and stucco houses either did business with the castle or were high officials of the count who ruled the town. Later, their descendants—rich merchants—closely controlled the city council.
 - The houses are extremely vertical and close together because space within the security of the city walls was expensive.
 - One of the most interesting of these houses is the Von Staudt mansion, where Emperor Charles V lived in the 16th century and King Gustavus Adolfus of Sweden lived during the Thirty Years' War.
- The first church we encounter in the city is a Franciscan one. Every medieval town had a Franciscan and Dominican church almost from the beginning of the orders. The Franciscans were in Rothenburg from 1281, and their church was in operation by 1309. With the advent of Lutheranism, the monks were expelled in 1544, and the cloisters and dormitories were later pulled down.

Market Square and Town Hall

- Continuing toward the market square, we pass the first of many fountains. The reliable supply of fresh water was always a major challenge for a medieval town, including Rothenburg.
 - The sources of water supplying such fountains tended to be well-kept secrets to ensure that the information would not be leaked to an enemy. But the outward celebration of safe water was usually a very public and highly decorated site, such as a grand fountain.
 - Rothenburg's solution to securing water was ingenious. Because the geology beneath the town made deep wells impossible, a great cistern, fed by mountain streams through hydraulic pressure, was built into the upper Klinging Tower.
- The large building on the corner of the market square is the town hall (*Rathaus*). This structure was needed because in 1172, Rothenburg was granted a charter, enabling it to organize and levy taxes for major public works. In 1274, it was named a free imperial city.
- The town hall looks like two different buildings attached to each other. The one with the white stucco exterior is the original Gothic structure, begun in 1250. Its tall gable and tower are adjoined by a Renaissance addition, which was begun in 1572, 70 years after much of the original town hall had burned down.
- The portico attached to the Renaissance façade dates from the 1680s and is decorated with the coats of arms of the prince electors. These were the seven German princes who had the right to elect the Holy Roman Emperor. Inside, a spiral stairway that leads to the foyer of the Imperial Hall displays the carved wooden docks from the medieval law courts.
- The *Kaisersaal*, found in the medieval part of the building, is one of the most splendid Gothic spaces in Germany. The sheer volume of the room is amazing, as is the carving of the Last Judgment from the 14th century.

- At right angles to the town hall portico is the Councillors' Tavern. Here, politicians conducted deals, and the town scales for official weights were kept. High up on the gable are the original town clock of the 17th century and the *Meisertrunck* (dating to 1910). This is a mechanical clock that repeats the famous feat of Burgermeister Nusch, who saved the councilors from execution in 1631.
- The most magnificent of the town fountains is one dedicated to St. George. The town's central fountain had been on this site since 1446, although the current example is only four centuries old. It was expected to provide water not only for drinking and washing but also for protection in case of fire—always a danger in a town largely built of wood.
- The area around the fountain in the market square was also the site of the city's gibbet, cage, and pillory. These instruments of justice were set up during court sessions. They can still be seen in the Medieval Crime Museum located in the former Priory of the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem (the Knights of Malta).
- Medieval timbered houses surround the market square. On the southern side of the square is the Meat and Dance Hall. In the Middle Ages, the ground floor and cellars of this building were used by butchers to sell meat, and the second story was used for official festivities, often including dancing.

Rothenburg Mansions

- Attached to the Meat and Dance Hall is the Jagstheimer House, an elegant mansion commissioned by a mayor of the city in 1488. Its proximity to the town hall, market square, and other civic buildings, as well as its elegance, made it the lodging of choice for important guests to the town, including the emperor Maximilian in 1413.
- Nearby is the beautiful Master Builder's House. Built by the mason of the new town hall, Leonhard Weidmann, in 1596, it has, on the upper elevations of the façade, the seven virtues and seven vices paired in interesting ways.



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The town of Rothenburg was restored after World War II using traditional building techniques; it now hosts a medieval fair in the summer and a Christmas market in winter.

- Attached to the Master Builder's House is the mansion of Mayor Toppler, the politician who built the Chapel of St. Blaise. He was successful in extending the territory of Rothenburg, but his ambition led to his arrest for treason in 1408; he died shortly afterward in prison.

Church of St. James

- The Church of St. James (or St. Jakob) was begun in 1311 but not completed until 1484. It was a pilgrimage church built under the patronage of the Teutonic Order of Knights. Pilgrims were a significant source of revenue and a stimulus to the expansion of religious buildings and hospices. The most important of the pilgrimage routes linked Germany to the road that led to the shrine of St. James of Compostela in Spain, hence the name St. Jakob's.
- St. Jakob's is a treasury of German medieval and early Renaissance art. The altar sculpture of the Crowning of the Virgin (c. 1520) was

probably done by Tilman Riemenschneider of Wurzburg and his workshop. Even this masterpiece is surpassed by the altar of the Twelve Apostles, carved by Friedrich Herlin in 1466.

- St. Jakob's also has beautiful stained-glass windows and an altarpiece showing St. Francis receiving the stigmata, also by Riemenschneider, that was originally in Rothenburg's Franciscan church. The Altar of the Sacred Blood in the Pilgrimage Chapel is a breathtaking example of medieval German woodcarving.

Outside the City

- Important parts of the first ring of city walls (dating to 1172) survive today in the Roder Arch and the Markus and White Towers, all of which are now within the town. But the city continued to grow. Almost as soon as the original fortifications were complete, it became apparent that they were too small; thus, in 1204, another circuit of walls was begun. The Siebers Tower, Roder Arch, Wurzburg Gate, Kobolzheimer Gate, and Klingen Gate resulted from this extension of the walls, which tripled the territory of the town.
- Outside the Kobolzheimer Gate is the Horse Mill (*Rossmuhle*), a large structure and an important example of civic prudence. The mill was owned by the town and powered by horses to counter the threat of capture of mills located in the river valley and the risk of low water in the Tauber that might not provide sufficient power for the valley mills.
- The unusual double bridge over the Tauber River permitted the city to expand to include the Spital area. Its name is derived from the word "hospital," and it was here, fittingly, that the hospital and almshouse areas were developed. The Hospital of the Holy Ghost was founded in 1280 and grew to a complex of infirmary and hospice buildings. The building in the center of the hospital courtyard is the Hegereiterhaus, once the hospital kitchen and administrators' offices.

- The expansion in the size of the town meant the need for even more fortifications. The almost circular Spital Bastion was erected in the 16th century, as well as the impressive Spital Gate. We can still see there, written in Latin, a warm message for visitors: “*Pax intransibus, salus exeuntibus*”—“Peace to those who enter, good health to those who leave.”

Suggested Reading

Hagen, *Preservation, Tourism and Nationalism*.

Jeep, ed., *Medieval Germany*.

Questions to Consider

1. After disasters, such as war and earthquakes, should cities be restored to their original appearance? And if so, to what period?
2. Do you think it's a good idea for city councils to require citizens to be prepared with adequate food supplies in case of war or famine?

Insider Tips

Entering Rothenburg through the castle gate affords lovely views of the Tauber valley and remnants of the once-plentiful mills. Remember, though, that in the Middle Ages, there were few mills. Rather, the fields and terraces were planted with vines to produce that famous Franconian wine, an industry that is, happily, beginning to return.

Shepherds danced once a year around the fountain in the Markt Platz in order to keep away disease. The shepherds' dance is another continuing tradition, although now more for tourists than for the immunization of men and animals. Its genesis lies in the importance of the cloth trade. By the later 15th century, the production of woolen cloth was an important commodity in Rothenburg. Consequently, the economic importance of this product has been celebrated since 1517, the year in which the city council gave the shepherds' guild permission to perform an annual dance and designated St. Wolfgang's as the Shepherds' Church.

Many interesting objects from the medieval city are on display in the former Knights of Malta's priory. Besides instruments of torture, justice, and execution, note the bakers' dunking stool in the courtyard. It was used to punish bakers whose loaves were underweight. Note, too, the measurement rods. These were the official measurements for feet, yards, rods, and furlongs. All private and commercial measures had to conform to these lengths. While you're on the site, try your foot in the iron sole to see if your shoe is a standard foot in length.

Mdina—The Silent City

Lecture 3

When you think of a medieval city, you probably do not instantly reference Malta, but this amazing island is home to one of Europe's most interesting medieval survivals: the old capital of Mdina/Rabat. In the 16th century, this capital moved to the purpose-built city of Valletta, on the coast of the island. Consequently, time stood still in Mdina, which became a wonderfully preserved time capsule. The din of administration and commerce shifted to Valletta but the Maltese nobility refused to follow, making Mdina a city that abounds in aristocratic palaces, churches, and memories.

An Ancient City

- The island of Malta has a rich and layered history, one to which many civilizations have contributed over time. In fact, the oldest freestanding manmade structures on earth are found on Malta, dating back to 3500 B.C.E.
- Mdina is near the center of the island, situated on a plateau that allowed it to be easily defended from attacks and to be fed by the surrounding territory. As a result, this site has been inhabited since earliest times, and every occupier has left traces of its culture and civilization.
 - For example, the city is entered by crossing an ancient stone bridge over a deep moat. These structures are memories of the long Arab rule of the island (870–1090), when the ancient capital was divided by the emir by means of a large defensive ditch.
 - The more densely inhabited citadel area then became “the city”—Mdina in Arabic—and the slightly more distant extension became “the suburb,” or Rabat. Mdina and Rabat are, in reality, one town, separated only by a short walk, but we will look at them in two lectures.



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The inland location of Mdina provided security from pirates, brigands, and invaders who prowled the coast.

- The moat was made deeper and wider by the Normans, who defeated the Arabs in 1090. The outline of the original Norman drawbridge is still present, but it was replaced in 1724 by a gate through the fortifications.
- Mdina remains a walled city, probably first fortified as a citadel by the Phoenicians in the 7th century B.C. but later expanded by the Romans and Arabs. New fortifications were constructed by the Normans and renewed up until the 16th century. The dramatic figures carved on the city gate are the patron saints of Mdina. The gates were designed to provide part of the stage set for the *possesso*, or ceremonial entry, of a newly elected grand master of the Knights of Malta.

The Knights Hospitallers

- Mdina remains a beautifully preserved city primarily because the Knights Hospitallers of St. John of Jerusalem (or of Malta) did not want their administrative and military capital to be located inland.
- The order was founded in 1113 to protect pilgrims in the Holy Land during the Crusades. The knights had to be of the highest aristocratic birth and became monk-soldiers who took vows of celibacy. They were also to share their wealth, with all their possessions passing to the order on their deaths; hence, the order grew fabulously wealthy and influential.
- The capture of Acre by the Muslims in 1291 drove the knights first to Cyprus and then to Rhodes, but Rhodes, too, fell, in 1522 to the Turks. In 1530, the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V granted the knights the island of Malta in exchange for the rent of one falcon (hence, *The Maltese Falcon* of Humphrey Bogart fame).
- By that time, the knights had become a seafaring order, dependent on their galleys as much as on their military skills; thus, it was necessary that they stay near their ships in order to protect Malta and the southern coasts of Sicily and Italy from both the Turks and Muslim pirates. After the siege of 1565, the order constructed a planned and well-fortified city on the coast, some six miles away from Mdina. The knights named this city Valletta after their grand master and commander during the siege.
- The new city of Valetta leached away both power and wealth from the old capital of Mdina. The Maltese nobility naturally resented the emperor's gift of the islands to a military order; thus, they stayed in Mdina, and it became a monument to them.
- The clatter of horses, armor, government, and commerce largely ceased in Mdina, which became known as the "silent city." Its other popular name was *citta' notabile*—descriptive of a city dominated by aristocrats who felt most comfortable behind the ancient, silent walls of their Mdina palaces, leaving the knights to rule in Valletta.

Inside Mdina

- Immediately inside the gate on St. Publius Square are the famous dungeons of the city, located beneath the 18th-century Vilhena Palace. For some years, this underground space has been occupied by a torture- and prison-themed exhibition.
- The Vilhena Palace (now the Museum of Natural History) was constructed for a Portuguese grand master of the knights by a French architect in the 1730s. It was built on the site of the medieval *universita*'. This was not a university but, rather, the governing body of the old nobility and law courts before the arrival of the knights in 1530. The original building was destroyed by an earthquake in 1693, but the dungeons beneath the *universita*' remained.
- On the opposite side of St. Publius Square is the Tower of the Standard, a 16th-century watchtower for the city and once part of a complex signal system to warn the entire island of attack.
- The main thoroughfare of Mdina has always been the Triq Villegaignon, named after a celebrated 16th-century knight. The noble houses of the Maltese aristocracy can still be seen along this street, including the 18th-century Testaferrata Palace, which stands at the corner of the Triq Villegaignon and Mesquita Street.
- Just off the street is the Banca Giuratale (municipal offices). The *giurati* (or those sworn to an oath) were four magistrates who constituted an advisory committee before Malta was given to the Order of St. John. Afterwards, these officers had only a ceremonial role in the installation of a new grand master. The somewhat pompous Banca Giuratale was designed by the same French architect who created the Vilhena Palace.
- Directly across the street is the small but elegant house of the notary Bezzina. Here, in 1798, the commanding general of the Napoleonic army occupying Mdina was thrown to his death from a balcony by a furious mob. The citizens had been angered by the French republicans' despoiling of the city's churches. This event sparked

the popular uprising against the French that led to the coming of the British to Malta.

- Santa Sofia Palace is, by tradition, known as the oldest building in Mdina. Constructed in 1233, it is a wonderful example of Sicilian Romanesque-Gothic architecture. Of note are its rather austere walls, the few small windows on the ground floor, and the more spacious openings on the second story, with gently pointed arches. This palace was probably the first in the city in which the windows faced outward to the street rather than inward to a walled courtyard and garden, as was the Arab tradition.

Cathedral of Ss. Peter and Paul

- Halfway along the Triq Villegaignon from the main gate is St. Paul's Square, dominated by the baroque Cathedral of Ss. Peter and Paul, begun in the last years of the 17th century. The original early Christian church here was closed and allowed to decay by the Arabs; the Normans reconstructed it, dedicating it to St. Paul, and in 1419, it was substantially enlarged.
- The earthquake in 1693 almost completely destroyed the church. What remains are parts of the choir, with wonderful carvings and paintings. We see, for example, a lovely 15th-century relief of the Madonna and child, as well as frescoes that tell the story of the shipwreck of St. Paul. The doors to the original church also survived the earthquake; interestingly, scientists have determined that these doors were carved from Irish bog oak!
- The sumptuous baroque church that is standing today was designed by Lorenzo Gafà. Its dome not only dominates Mdina but can be seen from every point on the island. The floor is covered with elegant marble slabs, marking the tombs of the ancient noble families of Mdina. Attached to the cathedral is a museum containing antiquities, liturgical objects, and paintings.

Falzon Palace

- The Falzon Palace dates to the 14th century, although sections of the ground floor may have been part of a 13th-century single-story courtyard house. Today, the palace is a museum of the Mdina aristocracy.
- It is also a splendid example of a patrician dwelling, clearly illustrating the typical design. It consists of two stories, irregular in shape, that surround a central courtyard. The owner's living space and reception rooms would be on the *piano nobile*. Also included would be a working area of storerooms and stables across the courtyard. The medieval Chapel of St. Angelo is part of the palace and has recently been restored.
- The collections in the palace were largely amassed by its last owner, Captain Olof Gollcher, who was a scholar, a merchant, a soldier, and even an underwater archeologist. Gollcher lived in the palace from the 1920s until his death in 1962.
- Although the home is old, it has undergone so many restorations and reconstructions that we can only imagine which parts are original. However, the double-light windows are a reminder of traditional Mdina medieval architecture, a design probably adopted from Sicily by the Normans.

Bastion Square and Magazine Street

- The Triq Villegaignon ends in Bastion Square, appropriately named because the fortifications give a commanding view of the entire island. On a clear day, you can see Valletta and the sea, Mosta and the huge Mosta dome church, and to the north, Mount Etna on Sicily.
- Bastion Square was traditionally the military parade ground and mustering station. The so-called hole in the wall at Magazine Street is a steep gate that provides a dramatic view from the high promontory of the plateau. The defensive moat is also on this side of the city.

- Bastion Square is about 100 feet away from Magazine Street, which is, obviously, where munitions and gunpowder used to be stored. At the end of Magazine Street is the Greeks' Gate, the secondary gate through the walls of the city.
 - This gate marks the continuation of a Greek community of merchants and residents, centered on St. Nicholas Square.
 - It also commemorates the importance of slavery on an island protected by galleys that relied on oars, as well as wind power. The Knights of Malta used slaves as rowers, and these slaves were not permitted to enter the city through the main gate. They had to use this gate, on the opposite side of the city from the prisons where those who rebelled against their masters were held.

Suggested Reading

Bradford, *The Great Siege*.

England and Thake, *Mdina: Citadel of Memory*.

Manduca, ed., *Mdina: The Old City of Malta*.

Questions to Consider

1. Was it wise of the traditional Maltese nobility to sulk in Mdina rather than to engage with the Knights of St. John in Valetta?
2. Was Charles V's decision to give Malta to the Knights of St. John fair and just?

Insider Tips

To really capture the medieval flavor of Mdina, you must get off the Triq Villegaignon and explore the narrow streets and alleys that flank it on both sides. Here, the Arab quality of the twisting lanes confounds the façades of the noble townhouses of those families not able to afford grand space on the main thoroughfare. These lanes are the original Moorish street plan—deliberately narrow to keep the houses cool and save space in the citadel town (Mdina). They are winding rather than straight, it is said, to impede the scirocco, the hot wind from North Africa blowing across the Mediterranean.

At Bastion Square, look for the “hole in the wall at Magazine Street,” which is really a steep gate that provides a dramatic view from the high promontory of the plateau. Look, too, for the defensive moat on this side of the city. Just beyond, you will see the old railway station that linked Mdina with Valletta. No longer a train station, it is now a trendy restaurant.

Mdina and Rabat—In the Steps of St. Paul

Lecture 4

Mdina embodies many ironies. It was once a storied Roman capital called Melita and later developed into a citadel city designed for security and administration by the Arabs. After that, it became the splendid Norman capital of Malta. Today, it is mostly a tourist town, with a population of under 1,000, while Rabat—the Arab “suburb”—now has about 11,000 inhabitants. In this lecture, we will visit the larger and more vibrant town of Rabat, but before leaving Mdina, we’ll take a brief look at the lives of those who fell outside the privileged classes in this aristocratic compound.

The Jewish Community in Mdina

- Some scholars have suggested that in about 1450—before the arrival of the Spanish Inquisition at the end of the 15th century and the viciously anti-Jewish Knights of Malta in 1530—up to one-third of the population of Mdina was Jewish. At that time, the *universita*’ of the old nobility was fair and respectful of Jewish rights.
- There is evidence that the first Jews in Mdina arrived with the Phoenicians and stayed during the Roman, Arab, and Norman periods. The medieval façade of the Jewish silk market reflects the mercantile importance of this community. Nevertheless, Malta was a dependency of the Crown of Aragon in 1492; as a result, the Jews suffered, as they did in Spain and all other Spanish territories.
- The Order of the Knights of Malta certainly did not lessen this suffering but increased it. In a blatant scheme to extort money, the knights would capture Jews and sentence them to slavery. The sentence was revoked only if their coreligionists paid for the captives’ freedom. This frequent practice added significantly to the knights’ wealth but hardly to their reputation today.

St. Paul and the Romans in Malta

- We know from the Acts of the Apostles, reinforced by archeological and other evidence, that St. Paul was likely shipwrecked on Malta in 60 A.D. He had been en route to Rome for trial.
- It was because of Paul's residence and proselytization on the island that Malta became part of the significant geography of the medieval Christian world. What had been an isolated island, close to the Islamic world and endangered by pirates, became in part integrated into the European central worldview because of St. Paul. This belief may have provided some of the courage and energy displayed by the Christian defenders of the island in the face of the Ottoman siege of 1565.
- Paul was a Roman citizen, and Malta was part of the Roman world. Malta became a Roman territory as a result of the Second Punic War (218 B.C.E.); Roman control of the island weakened Carthaginian power in the Mediterranean. Once in charge of Malta, the Romans developed its agriculture and defenses; in time, Melita became a self-governing Roman *municipium* with significant local autonomy.
- It has been suggested that the name of Malta itself—and certainly the name of the Roman capital of Melita—came from the important product of honey for which Malta was famous. However, it is much more probable that the name is a Greek and Latin adoption of the Phoenician name for Malta, Malet, meaning “shelter.”
- The Roman occupation was a prosperous time for the city and its region: Elegant Roman villas were built by rich citizens, and Roman culture put down deep roots, fertilized by the maritime communications between Italy and Greece. Perhaps most significantly, Christianity began its deep penetration into Maltese culture as a consequence of this Romanization of the island. Some of the classical remains of the Roman occupation can be seen in the Museum of Roman Antiquities in Rabat.

- The museum is on the other side of the Howard Gardens, off Museum Road. On the first floor are exhibits of Roman archeological finds from the entire island; on the lower level are the remains of a splendid villa, probably from early imperial times, in a remarkable state of preservation.
- The size, elegance, and quality of this house—certainly once the home of a senior official or landowner—indicate the wealth and sophistication of the island about the time of Paul’s shipwreck. We can estimate the date because found in the villa was a bust of Octavia, the grandmother of Claudius, now prominently displayed in the museum. Also in the museum are some Arab tombs that were found during the excavation of the site.

Church of St. Paul

- The Church of St. Paul in Rabat is a lovely baroque building constructed partly over what was believed to be the Grotto of St. Paul. The story of Paul on Malta is important to the people of the island, even if much legend has developed around it.
 - The basic story is that Paul was shipwrecked on Malta and was brought inland to the capital of Melita to be investigated by the governor, a man named Publius, whose house was located where the Mdina cathedral now stands. Paul was imprisoned in a cave that is now St. Paul’s Grotto in Rabat, beneath the church. Paul was in only loose confinement, and he used his relative freedom during the three months he spent on Malta to convert many local inhabitants to Christianity.
 - Here, legend begins to creep into the historical narrative. One of Paul’s converts was said to be Publius himself. Paul named Publius the island’s first bishop, and his house became the foundation of the cathedral dedicated to the apostle Paul. Paul’s grotto can now be visited from the right aisle of the Church of St. Paul in Rabat.

- The grotto (and now chapel) of St. Paul became a popular place of Christian pilgrimage, and it remains so to the present day. Even the walls of the cave are considered holy: The very rock was believed to be able to cure disease and work miracles. Pilgrims have scraped the walls over the centuries to the point that they are smooth. Still, part of the miracle is that the grotto never changes size from the dimensions known to St. Paul.
- The grotto started to attract burials soon after Paul's residence there. As early as the 3rd century, Christians dug a labyrinth of catacombs—almost two miles long—close to the grotto to bury their dead in sacred ground and avoid the Roman law requiring cremation. (The catacombs begin about 200 feet from the church; the entry is from St. Agatha Street.)



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- These catacombs became, in effect, early Christian churches, places to hold *refrigeria*—the feasts at a tomb on the anniversary of a person's death. In the family crypt rooms, we find circular tables surrounded by semicircular benches. These large, high spaces were almost certainly used as churches. Altars appear to be built into niches in the walls.
- Part of the explanation for the dense population of the catacombs (more than 1,000 burials in St. Paul's catacombs alone) is that other Christians from around the Mediterranean fled to Malta during the period of persecution because the island offered comparative freedom.

Saint Agatha from Sicily also sought refuge in the catacombs in Rabat, and the place of her underground sanctuary became a holy site.

- The result is an interconnected series of chambers, many with chapels and paintings from the Middle Ages. Unfortunately, many of the earlier catacomb decorations were desecrated by the Arabs after their conquest of the island because the images contained human representations.
- Almost directly across St. Agatha Street from St. Paul's catacombs are the small catacombs of St. Cataldus, dating from the 2nd to the early 3rd century. The church over the site today is from the 18th century, replacing one that dated from the early 5th century. Beneath this church is an entrance to catacombs where small Christian tombs were carved out of what was originally a Phoenician burial shaft.

Aristocratic Sites in Rabat

- The Casa Bernard is a rare patrician palace not within the walls of Mdina. Built in the 16th century, the palace is still owned and occupied by the family that commissioned it. It has undergone significant restoration as a patrician house museum, but its original features have not been compromised. Period furnishings, decorations, and pictures can be seen throughout the palace.
- Just south of Rabat are the Buskett Gardens, originally laid out as the hunting preserve of the grand master of the Knights of Malta.
- The Verdala Palace was originally the summer residence of the grand master. Today, it is the summer home of the president of the Republic of Malta and a guest palace for visiting heads of state.

The Great Siege of 1565

- In May 1565, the Turkish sultan ordered the largest military force assembled since ancient times to capture Malta. About 200 ships and some 48,000 troops, later augmented by pirate fleets from North Africa, laid siege to the harbor at the foot of Mount Sciberras. The Knights of St. John anticipated an assault and had constructed fortresses on both sides of the harbor, which the Turks bombarded in the greatest discharge of canons up to that time.

- Together with some European foot soldiers and Maltese allies, the knights fought off the assault, driving the Turks to abandon the siege and inflicting the first major defeat on the Ottomans, who had been considered invincible. But about one-third of the defenders died, meaning that Malta lost a third of its total population.
- There is no doubt but that the grand master, Jean Parisot de la Valette, was a brilliant commander and extremely brave. Although 70 years old, he was always in full armor, sword in hand, in the midst of the most dangerous fighting, leading by example and refusing any offer of surrender. It is only fitting that Valletta, the city he built to ensure that the Turks would never challenge Malta again, is named for him.
- Valletta is a city with splendid late Renaissance and baroque churches, palatial communal residences, the palace of the grand master, and other spectacular structures. In what was the knights' monastic church, there are spectacular funerary monuments to knights and paintings by Caravaggio.
- But it is important to remember always that Valletta is so beautiful and rich because gifts and tributes flowed to the Knights Hospitallers of St. John of Jerusalem from all over Europe in recognition of the belief that they had saved Christianity and the continent. This feat was reenacted by a few defenders and simple citizens of Malta during the bombardment from fascist forces during World War II, when a repeat of that heroism earned the entire population the George Cross.

Suggested Reading

Bradford, *The Great Siege*.

England and Thake, *Mdina: Citadel of Memory*.

Manduca, ed., *Mdina: The Old City of Malta*.

Questions to Consider

1. Can you think of other examples where a suburb became more important than the original town?
2. St. Paul was a single man who had a dramatic impact on the course of Maltese history. Can you think of another individual who has had such an effect on the history of his or her city?

Insider Tips

There are several exhibitions, presentations, and other attractions in Mdina that help visitors explore the city's history. These are of varying quality, but most are located in old noble palaces or historic sites, and the admission is to both the show and the building, which can be the best part. A few to look into include the following:

“Tales of the Silent City.” This presentation is shown in the Gatto-Murina Palace, a patrician house dating from 1350 and once owned by one of the city's most prominent families.

“Knights of Malta.” This exhibition is housed in the Casa Magazzini, the original underground gunpowder chambers constructed by the knights. The presentation features life-sized figures who tell the story of the order from its beginnings until its expulsion at the end of the 18th century.

The Mdina Experience. This half-hour film is shown in a building on the Triq Villegaignon.

“Medieval Times.” This exhibition in the Costanzo Palace focuses on the working classes.

Medieval Mdina Festival. This festival is held in the streets of Mdina each year in April.

Palermo—A Mosaic of Cultures

Lecture 5

Palermo, the capital of the island of Sicily, is a complicated and culturally rich city, one that reflects the palimpsest that is the history of Sicily itself. Occupied in succession by the Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans, Carthaginians, Arabs, Normans, French, Spanish, Germans, and Italians, the city is one layer atop another. To understand this cacophony of history, we will begin our visit in the southern part of the city on the highest point of land. Today, it is dominated by the magnificent Norman Palace, which itself was built where there had previously been a Phoenician fort, a Roman castle, and the Arab Alcazar.

The Palazzo dei Normanni

- Few traces remain of Palermo's Phoenician origins, but at the Norman Palace, its Arab and Norman past is readily apparent; this was the seat of power in Sicily for more than 2,000 years. The palace was originally built by the Arabs in the 11th century on the site of an earlier fortification.
- The Arabs invaded Sicily in 827 and soon captured the island. Palermo became the dominant city and was said to rival Baghdad in splendor. Not surprisingly, Islam became the dominant religion, but freedom of worship was allowed to Christians and Jews.
 - This religious tolerance is explained in part by the fact that the Arabs were occupiers, not colonizers; they interfered little in the traditions of the subject population and left a relatively shallow presence.
 - Still, many non-Arabic inhabitants converted to Islam in this period to ensure their social or economic advancement. These conversions, together with the practice of polygamy, as sanctioned by Arabic culture, resulted in a significant increase in the Muslim population.

- By about the 11th century, an equal number of Muslims and Christians inhabited the island; thus, the Arabic influence was increasingly felt indirectly, especially in the blending of decorative and architectural styles and in the local language.
- Vestigial traces of the Arab Alcazar (“fortress”) can still be seen in the foundations and cellars of the Norman Palace. The structure was enlarged by the Normans, the imperial Swabians—the family of Frederick II—and restored by the Spanish. Today, it houses the Regional Assembly of Sicily.

The Palatine Chapel

- Inside the palace, a staircase leads to the Palatine Chapel. At the entrance is a stone in a glass case with an inscription in Latin, Greek, and Arabic, recording the commissioning of a water clock by the Norman king Roger II in 1132. This inscription reminds us clearly of the Norman presence in this remarkable building.
- The Palatine Chapel is one of Europe’s most beautiful rooms. It was built by Roger II between 1130 and 1140 as the royal palace church. The stunning golden mosaics in the chapel depict Christian Bible stories, but the Arab, Byzantine, and even northern European influence in the chapel’s decoration is clear.

- There are three apses and a small dome containing the image of Christ Pantocrator—the symbolic pose of Christ as ruler of the universe.



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- The arches separating the nave

Visitors can walk around the Palatine Chapel and “read” the narrative of Bible stories depicted in stunning gold mosaics.

and side aisle are ogival; that is, they curve to a point in a seemingly perfect blend of Norman and Arabic style. The marble paneling around the walls adds to the sense of hypnotic richness, as does the mosaic floor.

- One of the most beautiful and oldest Romanesque objects to survive from the period of the chapel's construction is the medieval candelabra, carved from a single piece of marble.
- The ceiling of the nave is in the Arab tradition. It features carved and painted wooden stalactites (*muqarnas*), almost certainly made by Arabic craftsmen. The central apse holds a mosaic of Christ in blessing, surrounded by a circular border in Greek with a text from the prophet Isaiah.
- Opposite the figure of Christ is the royal throne, suggesting a parallel between Christ and the Norman king, one ruling in heaven and the other, in Palermo.

Other Attractions in the Palace

- The Hall of King Roger, in the royal apartments of the Norman Palace, saw one of the earliest parliaments in Europe: a representative assembly summoned by Roger in 1131. The rooms in this part of the palace are now used by the Sicilian parliament.
- The Tower of the Winds is the square tower that can be seen from the exterior of the palace. The tower is not a defensive structure but a medieval air conditioning system. The openings at the top in all four walls allowed wind to blow across a fountain that was intended to cool the air.
- The bedchamber of Roger II features chivalric and feudal mosaics, with classical images of centaurs and trees. More than any of the other decorative programs we have seen, the ornamentation of this room reflects the blending of cultures for which Norman Palermo was celebrated.

- In the palace prison can be seen some interesting graffiti, in some instances dating from Norman times.
- Below the prisons—and, sadly, not open to the public—are the original Phoenician foundations of the fortress, dating from the 8th century B.C.

History of the Normans

- The Normans (“Northmen”) were violent mercenaries, originally Vikings from Scandinavia. They fought either for or against the Byzantines but usually for the Roman papacy. The schism between the Roman Latin and Byzantine Orthodox Churches in 1054 galvanized Pope Nicholas II, a Frenchman, to use the Normans to add Sicily to the Latin confession. He was equally consumed by a desire to drive out the Muslims.
- The Normans were promised title to whatever they could capture on the condition that they reorient the Byzantine Church toward Rome and, at the same time, convert or expel the Arabs.
 - Roger de Hauteville, leading a relatively small army of Norman knights and adventurers, landed at Messina in 1061 and defeated the Muslim garrison, taking control of the island with the capture of Palermo a decade later, in 1072.
 - Roger became both count and emir of Sicily and set about to rule the island, creating one of the most brilliant and cosmopolitan civilizations of the Middle Ages, with its capital at Palermo.
- Roger introduced feudalism and gave vast estates to his followers. Because he needed the Arab, Jewish, and Orthodox Christian scholars, clerics, and administrators already established on the island, Roger kept them in office, permitted freedom of religion, and encouraged all learning, regardless of its source. Sicily became a center for interfaith scholarship and knowledge.

- The Norman kingdom expanded to include much of southern Italy and even part of the North African coast. By the mid-12th century, under Roger II, Norman Sicily was identified as the richest and most well-governed state in the West.

Other Sites in Palermo

- San Giovanni degli Eremiti is a church founded by Roger of Sicily in 1132. There had been a church on this site from the 6th century, but after the Arab period, reconstruction was necessary. What emerged is another structure of mixed style, with red domes that make it look like an Arab building but with obvious Romanesque elements, especially in the squat, domed campanile, or bell tower.
- In the modern gardens of the Villa Bonanno, contained in the Piazza della Vittoria, is a monumental fountain celebrating the vast empire of Philip IV of Spain.
- Nearby stands Palermo's impressive cathedral. Begun in 1185 on the site of a much older basilica—which was used as a mosque in the 9th century—the building has been much changed and added to, as the many styles of the exterior suggest.
 - The entrance is through the 15th-century Catalan Gothic south porch, where there is a column, apparently reused from the mosque, bearing an inscription from the Koran in Arabic.
 - Two chapels in the cathedral contain six royal tombs, including the tomb of Roger II (d. 1154) and the emperor Frederick II (d. 1250). The tombs are made of porphyry, an Egyptian red granite that has been used since ancient times for royal and imperial statues and sarcophagi.
 - Preserved in the treasury of the cathedral is the golden and jewel-studded crown made for Costanza of Aragon, Frederick's empress.

The Harbor and Old Palermo

- During the Middle Ages, the Piazza Marina saw everything from tournaments of Norman and Angevin knights to religious processions, including the terrible public rites and punishments of the Inquisition. The large structures that edge the square bear witness to the powers that controlled Palermo in those years and the importance of the harbor.
- The neighborhood around this ancient part of the city is essentially Arab in structure, dating in its urban plan from about the 9th century. The streets here are winding and narrow; it is easy to get lost in the small lanes, and many of the buildings present an almost blind façade to the street. The sensation is very Middle Eastern rather than European. It was here that the foreign merchants and administrators had their warehouses and mercantile structures.
- The church of Santa Maria della Catena (Our Lady of the Chain) catered to a diverse population of sailors, merchants, and officials. The “chain” refers to the one that all medieval cities used to close their harbors, much like a gate that closed the city walls. One end of the chain was attached to the wall of this church. This building also reflects the complexity of Palermitan architecture; some local elements are mixed with Catalan Gothic and Renaissance design.
- On the opposite side of the Piazza Marina is La Gancia or, more formally, Santa Maria degli Angeli. The church was built in 1490 as part of a Franciscan monastic expansion into the harbor area. The complex was a *gancia*, that is, a hospice for sick travelers arriving in the city and a safe lodging for merchants. Its exterior is particularly evocative of the Catalan-Sicilian Gothic that adds such charm to the major medieval buildings of the city.
- Next to La Gancia is the Palazzo Abatellis, constructed in 1490–1495 for the wealthy and powerful harbormaster of Palermo. Its elegant loggia complements the rather austere design, and the entire effect is one of power and magnificence. The structure now houses the Regional Art Gallery of Sicily.

- On the nearby Piazza San Francesco is the Church of St. Francis of Assisi, built between 1255 and 1277. This is a splendid Gothic structure, with a rose window and a majestic central portal, dating from 1302.
- The Piazza Marina is, in many ways, the living memory of this city and its people because it is defined by the port, the square, the palaces, and churches of the Middle Ages and by the cosmopolitan history of this great seaport, a link between East and West. It has suffered from invasion and economic decline and, more recently, bombing during World War II, but it has always risen anew and, in many ways, even more beautiful.

Suggested Reading

Alajmo, *Palermo*.

Norwich, *The Normans in the South, 1016–1130*.

———, *The Kingdom in the Sun, 1130–1194*.

Questions to Consider

1. Malta and Sicily are both islands in the Mediterranean. What impact did their geography have on their development?
2. The common people of Sicily developed their own unofficial legal and economic arrangements in response to insensitive authority. Was this an appropriate response?

Insider Tips

While visiting the Palatine Chapel, walk slowly around the perimeter and “read” the narrative of Bible stories with captions provided in Greek. Seldom will you see mosaics of this quality, especially in the transepts, where the stories from the Acts of the Apostles are told visually. It is only when you go just outside of the city to Monreale that that this quality of work is matched. The Greek text suggests that it was likely the product of Byzantine craftsmen.

From the simple interior of San Giovanni degli Eremiti, go into the cloisters and what remains of the monastic buildings just to experience the garden, which in its perfume and traditional planting takes visitors back to the age of the Normans or perhaps even to paradise itself. It is likely that this is an example of the Arabic tradition of fragrant, cool gardens being continued by the Normans.

Palermo—Celebrating Throne and Altar

Lecture 6

In this lecture, we continue our visit to Palermo, beginning with one of the most magnificent of the surviving medieval palaces of the city: Palazzo Chiaramonte, constructed in the 14th century. In just this one building, we can trace the story of decline and renewal in Palermo that we discussed at the end of the last lecture. Originally the palace of a magnate and a vice-regal residence, the structure also served as the prisons of the Inquisition and is today the headquarters of the celebrated University of Palermo. We will close our visit to Palermo with a look at the treasures of the cathedral of Monreale, considered the finest example of Norman ecclesiastical architecture in the world.

The Palazzo Chiaramonte

- Like all great medieval buildings, the Palazzo Chiaramonte has been seriously altered over time. On the castellated, rather bleak façade, an inscription tells us that in 1377, the powerful lord Manfred Chiaramonte ordered the palace of his family to be restored. Inside, it still retains decoration from this 1377 period of reconstruction.
- The wooden ceiling in the Great Hall of the palace is a masterpiece of medieval painting by Cecco di Naro and Simone da Corleone. The themes are those of the courtly culture of the Middle Ages, with tournaments and the celebration of beautiful ladies and the virtues of valiant knights.
- Only the king exceeded the wealth and power of the Chiaramonte family, whose members had legitimate reason to be proud of their ancestry; they were said to be descended from the emperor Charlemagne.
 - The cause of their spectacular fall, however, was the result of their support of King Frederick of Sicily against the Spanish Aragonese dynasty.

- Andrea Chiamonte was taken from his palace on June 1, 1392, and beheaded in the Piazza Marina. The Chiamonte property was seized, and the palace was considered sufficiently regal for the Spanish viceroy to move in.
- The Chiamonte Palace remained the residence of the Aragonese viceroys throughout the 15th century and then served as the customs house. In 1600, the palace became the prison and tribunal of the Inquisition.
 - During the recent restructuring of the palace for use by the University of Palermo, secret passages were found leading from prisoners' cells to the interrogation rooms. Indentations on the walls and floor revealed where the cages of the prisoners once stood and confirmed where the heads of the nobles who had rebelled against the Crown were exposed.
 - Graffiti and drawings were uncovered from what had been cells. These sad, desperate testimonials record the terrible years of the all-powerful Spanish Inquisition in Sicily. They bear witness to the suffering of those who were tortured, incarcerated, and often paraded in humiliation before their punishment in the Piazza Marina, directly in front of the palace.
- The Chiamonte Palace today houses a well-known painting by one of Sicily's most famous contemporary artists and of one of Palermo's most beloved places: Renato Guttuso's *La Vucciria Palermo* (1974). The *vucciria* is the outdoor market in the city, located not far from Piazza Marina and begun, some say, as early as the 12th century. Guttuso captured the color, the movement, and even the noise of this market in his bright canvas.
- On leaving the area around the harbor and Piazza Marina, we pass by the splendid Fontana Pretoria. This Renaissance fountain was constructed between 1552 and 1555. It is located in the square dominated by the baroque city hall, the Palazzo del Municipio or Palace of the Eagles.



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The Fontana Pretoria is also known as the Fountain of Shame, in part because of the mannerist female nudes that decorate it.

- At the intersection of Via Maqueda and Corso Vittorio Emanuele (Cassaro), we see the remarkable corner sculptures and architecture of the Quattro Canti, constructed between 1608 and 1620. This “square” is octagonal and has four large, identical buildings on each side. Each building has a large fountain at its base with 12 statues, representing the four Spanish kings who ruled Sicily, the four female patron saints, and the four seasons.

Arrival of the Spaniards

- When the Norman line of Roger de Hauteville died out, the Crown was inherited by the imperial German house of Hohenstaufen. Palermo remained the capital of Sicily and, indeed, grew in stature when, in 1198, Frederick of Hohenstaufen became king of Sicily. He was also Holy Roman Emperor and, after his crusading victories, king of Jerusalem. Palermo became a major European capital.

- Under Frederick's rule, Palermo became increasingly Westernized. A great many Muslims converted to Latin Christianity, Orthodox Christians became Roman Catholics, and Latin emerged as the language of administration. European monastic orders, such as the Benedictines and Cistercians, took control of former Byzantine monasteries, bringing both their practices and their architecture to the kingdom.
- Unfortunately, Frederick's heirs could not sustain his power during the great medieval divide between Gueff and Ghibelline. The imperial, or Ghibelline, power of the Hohenstaufen was destroyed, and the Gueff leader from the junior branch of the royal house of France, Charles of Anjou, claimed the Sicilian Crown in 1266.
- Charles was a bigoted, vicious, and insensitive ruler. He brought in French officials, who treated both Sicilian nobles and peasants as defeated enemies. Traditions and practices were changed, and Charles and his administration were uniformly hated. After many years of what they saw as tyranny and humiliation, the Sicilian people finally revolted. In the revolt known as the Sicilian Vespers (1282), even those with French-sounding names were slaughtered throughout Sicily, especially in Palermo.
- The Sicilian nobles offered the Crown to King Peter of Aragon. He accepted, beginning 400 years of Spanish rule of the island. Although Peter had sworn to rule from Palermo, he seldom left Spain; thus, the island was governed by viceroys, usually incompetent, always harsh, reinforcing the Sicilian opposition to authority, and driving the poor to rely on criminal bands for justice.

Northern Palermo

- Close to the Piazza Pretoria is the church of La Martorana, one of the oldest and most interesting churches in Palermo and one with a wonderful history. It was built by a naval commander, George of Antioch, in honor of Eloisa della Martorana, who founded the church and the Benedictine monastery once attached to it in 1143.

- George was the commander of the fleets of the Norman king Roger II of Sicily and, hence, a man of great power and wealth. This wealth enabled George to build the original Greek cross church, which was famous even at the time for the wonderful cycle of exquisite mosaics.
- The image of Christ Pantocrator in the cupola represents the apex of the mosaicist's art. To experience this medieval Byzantine masterpiece is to return to the golden age of Norman Sicily, when Greeks, Normans, Arabs, and Sicilians collectively created a wonderful cosmopolitan culture.
- Next to the Martorana is another church, San Cataldo on Piazza Bellini. San Cataldo was built by the naval commander of William I of Sicily in the 12th century. Like San Giovanni degli Eremiti, it has a very Arabic quality, with three red cupolas and an austere exterior with Romanesque windows in otherwise blind arches. Passages from the Koran are present on the façade, indicating that the building was used as a mosque under the Saracen rule of the island.

Final Sites of Palermo

- The Zisa Castle, completed in 1167, was the summer retreat of the Norman kings and was once part of a large reserve with gardens, lakes, and streams to escape the intense heat of a Palermo summer. It was so wondrous when it was a royal residence that it was called by the Arabs *aziz*, “the splendid.”
 - The castle has been recently restored, and it is now possible to get an impression of how the Normans used Arab decoration and technology to enhance their pleasure.
 - The ceiling of the fountain hall is Arabic in design, and the engineering of the fountains allowed cool water to reduce the heat in the room by means of channels.
- La Cuba is a fortress-like summer palace built in 1180 by William II. It, too, is a mixture of Norman and Arabic architecture, design,

and decoration. This palace is the site one of the tales in Giovanni Boccaccio's *The Decameron*.

- On Monte Caputo, overlooking Palermo and its harbor, is Monreale (“royal mountain”). The Norman cathedral of Monreale was founded by William II in 1174.
 - A cycle of mosaics illustrating stories from the Old and New Testaments progresses around the interior of the entire structure of the cathedral. The mosaics cover more than 21,000 square feet in the nave, transepts, and side aisles and constitute one of Europe's greatest treasures.
 - In the transept are the tombs of William I and William II, kings of Norman Sicily, and members of their families. Also in this church are kept the internal organs and heart of the crusader king St. Louis IX of France.
- The reason the magnificent, huge, and richly decorated cathedral of Monreale was erected within sight of Palermo is a digest of the history of the island.
 - During the Arab domination of Sicily, the bishop of Palermo was required to leave the city; he took a small, insignificant church on top of Monte Caputo as his residence and chapel. There, he was close enough to do what he could to protect and encourage Christians in the capital while being far enough away to avoid running afoul of the Islamic emir's authority.
 - After the Norman conquest, the existence of another cathedral so close to the now restored duomo in the city allowed the Norman kings to play one powerful ecclesiastic against another, as Monreale had become a bishopric in its own right.
- Besides commissioning the cathedral, William II also constructed a Benedictine cloister. Here, we find about 22,000 square feet of enclosed garden. The lovely arcades feature pointed arches supported by 216 pairs of columns, many decorated with mosaics and topped by fabulous Romanesque carved capitals. The monks'

fountain in one corner, crafted by Arabs, is particularly remarkable, another example of the production of profound beauty through the complex interaction of cultures in Palermo.

Suggested Reading

Alajmo, *Palermo*.

Norwich, *The Normans in the South, 1016–1130*.

———, *The Kingdom in the Sun, 1130–1194*.

Questions to Consider

1. The Norman kings in Palermo were great patrons of art. How important is the patronage of art by government?
2. What can Palermo teach us about a dialogue among cultures?

Insider Tips

Palermo is a unique medieval city, but it requires patience and some prior preparation to completely embrace its treasures. It is a very walkable city, although some important sights are quite distant from one another. Driving requires steely courage. Red lights, stop signs, and other traffic signals are considered only opinions in Sicily, to be accepted or rejected by each driver, often on whim alone.

On Piazza Garibaldi is Europe's third-largest opera house, the Teatro Massimo Opera. It was begun in 1875 and completed in the remarkably short time of two years. It has only recently reopened after having been closed for a long time. Close by in the same neighborhood is the Teatro Politeama (the multi-genre theatre) for the production of plays and other theatricals.

If you find yourself in need of break in Palermo, look for a café, perhaps near Piazza Bellini or Piazza Marina, and enjoy a limoncello—the characteristic lemon liqueur of southern Italy—or a glass of excellent Sicilian wine. As a treat, order Sicilian *arrancini*. These are balls of rice, covered with breadcrumbs and deep fried. By tradition, they are Arab in origin, and this is likely true given that the recipe dates from at least the 10th century.

If you choose to stay for dinner, be sure to avoid embarrassment by arriving after 8:00 at the very earliest. Sicily was ruled so long by Spaniards that Sicilians have completely adopted the late-night dining traditions of Spain. And, as any Palermitano will tell you: Wait until well after dark to eat because it's cooler!

York—Wool and Prayer

Lecture 7

By 73 A.D., the city called Eboracum—York—was the Roman Empire’s capital of Britannia north. The Roman walls, built at the beginning of the 2nd century A.D., protected a city of about 5,000 legionaries and played an important role in European history. It was here in 306 that Constantine the Great was proclaimed emperor, beginning a career that would take him to Rome, the Milvian Bridge, and the Edict of Milan, which legitimized Christianity as the official religion of the empire. From the beginning, then, there has been a close connection between York and Christianity: It was, as we shall see, a city made rich by wool and prayer.

St. Mary’s Abbey

- The superb Gothic structures of St. Mary’s Abbey were constructed with wealth made in the wool trade. The wool in the north of England was much sought after and produced significant profits, both for lay landlords and for the abbots and monks of abbeys. The great religious houses of Yorkshire, such as Fountains and Rievaulx abbeys, whose ruins remain not far from York, serve as memories of the period when sheep and prayers characterized the economy of northern Yorkshire.
- The 13th-century ruins of St. Mary’s form the set for the modern replaying of the York Mystery Cycle, a series of plays originally performed by guilds in the Middle Ages to illustrate biblical stories.
- The complex of Benedictine monastic buildings that once occupied the site was constructed in the Gothic style, replacing the Romanesque structure that antedated it on property given by the Norman king William II. Because the land was then just outside the city walls, the abbey also had some responsibilities for defense, in effect extending the fortified perimeter of York. In fact, in the 14th century, battlements were added to the walls of this religious

complex, remnants of which are still visible along Bootham and Marygate up to the river.

- St. Mary's grew to be the richest house in the north and, consequently, an attractive target for Henry VIII's commissioners after the dissolution of the monasteries in 1539. The portals and walls left standing are beautiful Gothic ruins, and they survive in part because of their exquisite carving and tracery: The stones of the abbey were reused for other structures, but the window and portal walls had little immediate utility.
- Today, the ruins sit in a public garden and form part of the story of York told in the nearby Yorkshire Museum, in which archeological finds from the abbey are displayed.

King's Manor

- The 15th-century abbot's palace, now called King's Manor, backs on the ruins of the abbey and the surrounding gardens. The structure is indeed grand because the abbot was one of the most powerful men in northern England and the abbey, one of the greatest feudal landowners.
- King's Manor suffered significant changes after it became a royal property.
 - Henry VIII made this residence the headquarters of the Council of the North, an administrative body established to protect, govern, and encourage economic activity in the north of England.
 - Under Queen Elizabeth, King's Manor was expanded and decorated, with much of the material taken from the abandoned abbey buildings.
 - James I and Charles I stayed here often as a stop between Edinburgh and London, but Cromwell abolished the Council of the North in 1641, and the grand house began to decay.

- Part of the manor regained some of its elegant stature when it came into use for assemblies of the local gentry and nobility. The abbots' palace eventually became a school for the blind until it was given to the University of York.

York Minster

- York Minster is the largest Gothic church north of the Alps. The twin West Towers, completed by 1472, are immense and made to look even taller by the elegant decorated finials on top. The central lantern tower was rebuilt in 1480 to replace an earlier one that had collapsed in a storm.
- The decorated façades are just what an ideal Gothic cathedral should look like. The Great West Window is a riot of color from its stained glass, and the main portal is decorated with splendid miniature carvings of Adam and Eve. There are blind arcades, decorated pointed arches, and niches for statuary, although not all are filled. Gargoyles can be seen on the buttresses of the towers.
- The cathedral is huge—more than 500 feet long and 130 feet wide. It contains the largest collection of original stained glass in England—128 windows—dating mostly from the 14th century. The Great East Window is the largest expanse of stained glass from the Middle Ages in the entire United Kingdom.



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According to legend, one of the stained-glass craftsmen of York Minster acknowledged that the details of his art could not be appreciated from the floor of the cathedral but only by God.

- When Archbishop Walter de Grey began this enormous building in 1220, he intended it to rival Canterbury. The archbishop began with the transepts, which explains why they represent the earliest and simplest style of English Gothic. The north transept windows were made in the 1260s, and the south transept contains the tomb of Archbishop de Grey.
- The nave (began in the 1290s) is in the English perpendicular Gothic style, which explains the vaulting that carries the eye upward and the pointed arches. The choir is somewhat later and, hence, in the English decorated Gothic style. It was finished in 1360, but the lovely screen dates from the 15th century and contains figures of the kings of England from William the Conqueror to Henry VI.
- The octagonal Chapter House, dating from the 13th century, is one of the most beautiful rooms in England, with no central columns to divide the space but vaulting that carries the weight of the beautifully decorated stone roof. The room was used for meetings of the dean and chapter of the cathedral.
 - The 40 stall canopies are decorated with carved animals, grotesque caricatures, and natural images. The expressions, gestures, and physiognomies of the figures tell us that the sculptor was producing caricatures of real people. As in all medieval cathedrals, these decorations were originally painted, and indeed, traces of paint are still visible on some of the carvings.
 - In 1298, Edward I held Parliament in this room, connecting it with the tradition of parliamentary rule, consultative government, and the rule of law in the United Kingdom.
- The Minster's Visitors' Centre is also an important medieval structure associated with the cathedral. St. William's College was originally the collective dwelling of the 23 chantry priests of the church, all living together and presided over by a provost.
 - Chantry priests sang masses for the dead, paid for by bequests or gifts of land or money. The accumulation of property to

perpetuate these masses for the dead resulted in chantries becoming extremely wealthy.

- This large house suffered little damage even after the suppression of chantries during the Reformation, and its half-timbered façade gives a clear impression of the quality of life these leisured and privileged men enjoyed.

Historic York Center

- To understand the streetscape of the historic center of York, it is useful to recall that the cathedral was built on the site of the basilica within the enclosure of the ancient Roman fort reserved for the commander's administration, the *principia*. Petergate and Stonegate were the Roman streets that led from the *principia* and have retained their basic direction to the present day.
 - Note, too, that a "gate" is a street, from the Scandinavian word, a memory of the Vikings who lived here for more than two centuries. The role played by these streets in the Middle Ages is reflected in their names: Monkgate clearly led to a monastery; Swinegate, to the livestock market; Micklegate meant the major street; and Gillygate was a street that led to the church of St. Giles (now destroyed).
 - The street called the Shambles is one of the most well-preserved medieval streets in Europe; it is not far from the cathedral and easily accessible from Lower Petergate. The name probably comes from the Anglo-Saxon *fleshhammels*, or "meat shelves," where meat could be displayed, because this was the street of the butchers. The street is very narrow to keep the sun away from the meat stored on external shelves, some of which can still be seen today.
- One of the houses on the Shambles was that of Margaret Clitherow (number 35), whose husband was one of the butchers. In the 16th century, this committed Roman Catholic risked her life by smuggling priests into the house to say mass in secret for the few

professing Catholics of York, a capital offense. She was caught and executed by being crushed alive.

- From the Shambles, Swinegate leads us circuitously to Stonegate. In the later Middle Ages, this was the street of the printers, with the first press established in 1480. All printers had to be licensed, and York was only one of three centers outside London where printers could work legally. For this reason, York became the publication center of the north and generated a good deal of profit for its printers and, later, booksellers.
- Nearby Petergate was the main Roman street, running out from the cathedral (dedicated to St. Peter) between the two Roman gates. The church of St. Michael-le Belfrey is a late Gothic structure in Petergate, the last church built here before the Reformation. Guy Fawkes, one of the leaders of the 1605 Gunpowder Plot, was baptized in this church in 1570. His family home is around the corner in Stonegate.
- The Vikings are well represented in medieval street names, as well, with Coppergate having been the street of the metal workers from Viking times and Goodramgate celebrating the Viking chieftain Guthrum, who captured York in 867. Two of York's oldest still inhabited houses, dating from the early 14th century, are found on Goodramgate.
 - The overhangs we see on this street represent the beginning of a pattern that developed in almost every medieval town.
 - Property tax was paid based on the footprint of the dwelling, that is, the space occupied by the ground floor. By building the second story out over the street, the owner had a bigger house and paid less tax!
- The timbered building at the intersection of Goodramgate and College Street is the remnant of a covered bridge that connected the choral priests' dwelling, Bedern Hall, to the cathedral. The current

Bedern Hall was built in 1370 as the priests' communal dining hall. It is now the meeting place for modern city guilds.

- Holy Trinity Church, also on Goodramgate, was built in the 15th century; it has a splendid and unusual roof, lovely stained glass, and a resident ghost, Thomas Percy, another conspirator in the Gunpowder Plot. Percy can still be seen in Holy Trinity Church, searching for his lost head.

Suggested Reading

Conduit, *Historic Walks in and around York*.

Dean, *Medieval York*.

Nuttgens, *The History of York*.

Questions to Consider

1. The fortunes of York rose and fell because of political and economic change. Can falling fortunes ever be seen as a benefit to a city and its citizens?
2. York Minster is the largest church north of the Alps. Why do you think that the community invested so much of its wealth in the construction of this enormous and beautiful cathedral?

Insider Tips

The Lendal Bridge is a 19th-century iron bridge from which you can see lovely river walks on both sides of the Ouse; the neoclassical Yorkshire Museum; Riverside, part of the medieval fortifications of York; and the jetty for taking boat excursions in the summer.

If you want an excellent and extremely reasonable light lunch, go the refectory in King's Manor, which is a café for students and faculty. There is always a seat, and it is a lovely space—far cheaper than the posh restaurants on Micklegate.

York—Vikings and Merchants

Lecture 8

In this lecture, we return to York, starting at Micklegate, the major medieval thoroughfare into the city. From there, we'll explore another of York's medieval survivals and one that allows us to imagine the daily life of a 15th-century citizen of this city. These are the ginnels, narrow passageways between walls of buildings or fences, offering shortcuts around the town. Somewhat wider than ginnels were lanes, which sometimes end in yards, where we can still find medieval structures, such as the recently restored Barley Hall. We'll close our visit with a foray into Viking York and a look at Clifford's Tower, the site of one of the most tragic moments in the city's history.

Micklegate

- In the Middle Ages, important visitors to York, such as the king, would be met by city officials at the imposing gate of Micklegate Bar. This gate, built by the Normans, is actually older than the city walls. It was on this gate that the heads of criminals were displayed on pikes as a clear warning against wrongdoing.
- Having exposed heads nearby didn't affect property values or the attraction of the address. Because of its proximity to the London Road and the official role it played in the ceremonies of medieval city life, Micklegate contained some of the merchant elite's large townhouses from the 15th century onward. Indeed, the history of the street is a reflection of the determination of urban property values by events, changes in technology and fashion, and convenience.
 - Because it was the formal entry into the city and connected with the London Road, the street was wide, enabling wealthy merchants in the Middle Ages to build large half-timbered houses there.
 - The medieval houses were either replaced or refashioned in stone in the 18th century as townhouses for gentrified families

from the surrounding county. As the Victorian age began, these families moved into the suburbs, away from the density of the city and closer to the new railway station and tracks, typical of those that mushroomed across Europe in the 19th century. The large houses on Micklegate were then renovated, with the ground floors turned into storefronts and cheap lodging above.



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The two miles of city walls around York represent the largest surviving circuit in England; a walk around the walls allows you to see the gates of the city and the gardens of private homes.

- This change in demography had another unintended consequence: The neighborhood lost the base to support the three churches that had been on the street. But fashions and functions have changed again, and one of those churches, St. John the Evangelist, dating from 1194, having been deconsecrated, is now the trendiest wine bar in the city of York.
- A church that operates close to Micklegate is All Saints, North Street, dating from the 12th century, although most of what survives is from the 15th century. Its spire and wonderful hammer-beam ceiling of the 15th century are reasons enough to visit the building, and if you look closely at the 15th-century stained glass, you will see angels wearing spectacles.

Barley Hall

- Barley Hall was likely built in the 1350s, in what was at the time the red-light district of York. The mansion was originally the York townhouse of the priors of Nostell Priory. In the 1430s, the priory experienced a severe economic decline, and the prior was forced to vacate Barley Hall and offer it for rent. This led to a major rebuilding of the Great Hall and other reception rooms.
- In 1466, the hall was rented to a merchant named William Snawsell, a rich goldsmith, city official, and in 1468, Lord Mayor of York. This movement into the center of York society, however, did not ensure the continuing good upkeep of Barley Hall. The house declined when it was seized by the Crown with the dissolution of Nostell Priory. Over the next 400 years, it was made essentially invisible as a medieval building by additions and renovations.
- Only when the site was bought for redevelopment in 1984 was the original medieval mansion discovered underneath all the later additions. In 1987, the property was restored as a historical site. It has been returned to the years of the Snawsell family's occupation, that is, about 1460.

The Pavement and Merchant Adventurers' Hall

- The Pavement earned its name for being the first paved street in York. Here, we find the church of All Saints, Pavement. This church was one of the most attractive and socially significant in the city. Built in the 14th and 15th centuries, All Saints was the guild church of York, where the craft guilds celebrated religious services. As a result, it holds the tombs of no fewer than 34 Lord Mayors.
- Not far from the Pavement is the Merchant Adventurers' Hall, among the largest surviving guildhalls in England and the largest timbered medieval building in York. Finished in 1361, the size of the open hall is so great that not one tree could be found to span its volume.
- Like many medieval civic buildings, the Merchant Adventurers' Hall served multiple purposes. For example, its undercroft served

as an almshouse and hospital and today houses a fascinating exhibition of medical equipment, procedures, and practices.

- A model of the building found inside helps visitors understand more clearly the complexity and sophistication of the hall's design, especially its spectacular ceiling. The Merchant Adventurers had not only great wealth but great power, and this building symbolized it.

Viking York

- The disintegration of the Roman Empire in the 5th century left York (Eboracum) vulnerable to Saxon invaders, who called the city Eoforwic. It remained an important town, however, becoming the capital of the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Northumbria and an influential religious center.
 - In 867, the city was captured by the Vikings, who named it Jorvik. The Norsemen developed the city into an important Norse trading center from the 9th to the 11th centuries, until the last Danish chieftain, Eric Bloodaxe, was murdered.
 - The city and its territory of Northumbria—the land north of the Humber River—were conquered in 944 by King Edmund, who incorporated it into the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of England.
- Inside the Jorvik museum are archeological displays of material that has been found around Coppergate and elsewhere in the Viking part of the city.

Clifford's Tower

- As mentioned earlier, York grew wealthy as a result of wool and prayer, and the Church had enormous power and respect in this northern city.
 - There was a dark side to this medieval Christianity, however, one driven by prejudice, fear of “the other,” and a crusading environment in which the Anglo-Norman monarchy, Church, and nobility participated enthusiastically.

- This event was associated with the structures that were the oldest Norman fortifications of the city, built as a result of another threat: the indigenous Anglo-Saxon and even residual Norse elite who refused to capitulate to William the Conqueror after his victory at Hastings in 1066.
- William's victory at Hastings was actually facilitated by events near York. Just before William landed, the Anglo-Saxon King Harold had been forced into battle at Stamford Bridge, very close to York. Harold's army, weakened and exhausted, then marched from the north of England to the southern coast but could not withstand the Norman assault. As we know, Harold was killed in 1066.
- Afterward, the Normans moved north and built new fortifications, including two small motte-and-bailey castles on either side of the Ouse, structures that would become Clifford's Tower and Baile Hill. But a revolt against the Normans incited by Vikings caused William to ravage the city and burn the fields, villages, and towns. York's population fell to only 2,000, and the destruction of the crops and livestock depopulated the entire region.
- From this destruction, there arose a new York, built of stone and established as the ecclesiastical heart of northern England and the fortress of the north. William replaced the old cathedral he had burned with a larger Romanesque stone church that would be superseded in 1220 by the beginnings of the huge minster we saw earlier.
- King William's tower was built on an artificial hill, and the keep was made of timber, not stone. This structure witnessed a terrible event in 1190 during one of the many attacks on the Jews of York. The Jewish community first came to York because lending capital was needed for the expansion of the city and its growing trade, and Jews paid higher taxes, which meant they were valuable to the town corporation. However, the calling of the Crusades in 1095 turned many European Christians against the Jews, who were identified with the Muslims as infidels.

- Riots in York were precipitated in part by the preaching of a hermit against the Jews, who fled to the tower and, once inside, barred the doors. The townspeople of York gathered siege equipment and other weapons and attempted to dislodge the Jews. But in the end, many of the Jews committed suicide inside the tower, and others died when the tower was burned to the ground.
- The stone tower we see today was built by Henry III as a defense against the Scots in 1245. It was never called upon to defend York but suffered from several fires and the natural subsidence of the artificial hill into the moat. In the 16th century, it was used for building materials, and during the civil wars, it was occupied by both sides but was made useless as a fort by artillery and another serious fire. Like so many other medieval stone buildings, it afterwards functioned as a prison.
- Originally, the tower formed part of the castle complex and was part of the defensive bulwark of the city. In the 18th century, the other structures that had once been York Castle were turned into administrative offices and law courts; later, they, too, became prisons. Today, the space houses the York Castle Museum.
- No one knows why the remaining medieval tower is called Clifford's Tower. There are two theories: One is that the northern magnate Roger de Clifford was executed there in 1322 for treason against Edward II; the other is that the Cliffords claimed hereditary authority over this sad place. Today, it is the property of English Heritage and is open to the public.

Suggested Reading

Conduit, *Historic Walks in and around York*.

Dean, *Medieval York*.

Nuttgens, *The History of York*.

Questions to Consider

1. Medieval buildings of York exist because they were continually repurposed. Why do so many modern cities destroy and build new rather than repurpose?
2. The street names of York reveal the type of commercial activity practiced in each area. How typical is it of modern towns that merchants and artisans cluster together on single streets or in the same area?

Insider Tips

Barley Hall now offers a window into the life of a wealthy 15th-century merchant, displaying the kinds of furnishings, fabrics, and kitchen utensils Mayor Snawsell would have owned and illustrating how the space would have been used by his family. It also has a large exhibition space that is used for traveling or locally inspired exhibits.

The Jorvik museum features dioramas and highly informative displays related to Viking York. Its highlight is a ride through Jorvik in a kind of bumper car from which you observe Norse dwellings, occupations, and costumes. The experience is actually highly enjoyable and informative, and the museum is well worth a visit, although do buy a York Museums Pass, which gives admission to all museums and the Minster for one price.

If the weather is pleasant and you have the energy, walk the two miles of surviving walls around York, the largest circuit in England. This will reorient you in the city and let you escape its narrow streets and ginnels. You will also see the gates of the city and the gardens of private houses and public buildings that are not visible from the street. There are several places to exit the walls, some close to a quiet or traditional café.

If you leave York by way of Lendal Bridge, stop in at the justly famous Betty's Café and Tea Rooms by Stonegate. From just after World War I, Betty's has provided comfort to the citizens of and visitors to York.

Avignon—The Babylonian Captivity

Lecture 9

Avignon today is one of the loveliest and most historic cities in the south of France. We naturally associate it with the French Midi, but as we will see, it only became part of that region at the end of the 18th century, during the French Revolution. Before that, it had been a feudal holding of, first, the Angevins of Naples (a French dynasty—the house of Anjou) and, then, of the papacy, resulting in its being the seat of the popes between 1309 and 1377. This was the period of the Babylonian Captivity, that is, the Avignonese papacy, the period in which Avignon became the center of medieval Christendom.

The Site of Avignon

- In ancient times, the site of Avignon was as a hill fort of the Cavares, a Celtic tribe who built their village on the rocky heights of the Rocher des Doms, overlooking the Rhône River. In 121 B.C., this site became the Roman settlement of Avenio, a major transportation link in the Roman provincial system of Gaul. The famous Pont Saint-Bénézet (or Pont d'Avignon), begun in 1171 and finished in 1185, is a monument to that trade.
- According to legend, the bridge was built by a shepherd boy, Bénézet, after he had a vision of the Virgin, asking him to build it. When Bénézet told the authorities of his vision, they scoffed. Undaunted, the boy set about the task, miraculously lifting a massive stone unaided and carefully laying it in place. This heroic feat encouraged others, who joined in to finish the enormous bridge.
- In recognition of his conversation with the Virgin Mary and his superhuman strength, Bénézet was made a saint and, later, buried in the chapel of St. Nicholas built directly on the bridge. However, because of floods, the bridge began crumbling into the river, and its perilous state compelled even priests to refuse to use the chapel. A



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For many years, the Pont Saint-Bénézet was the only large bridge between Lyons and the Mediterranean that spanned the Rhône; thus, it served as a major avenue of income and communication.

new chapel was built on solid ground by the city walls. Today, only 4 spans of the original 22 survive.

- The Ile de la Barthelasse is an island in the middle of the Rhône, indeed, the largest river island in all of Europe. The island, home to a nature preserve, can be reached by a free ferry shuttle from the base of the Pont Saint-Bénézet.

The Avignonese Papacy

- Visitors enter the city of Avignon by the Porte du Rocher, the gate that leads to the Rocher des Doms. This gate and the walls date from the period of the residence of the popes in Avignon and arose because of a series of events that befell the city in the Middle Ages.
- Tolls from the bridge across the river generated considerable profit for the communal government of Avignon. Consequently, the town grew in size and wealth until it was one of the largest cities

of Provence. In 1129, it was liberated from the feudal control of the local count and enjoyed the status of a free city. This attracted craftsmen and tradesmen who established workshops in Avignon to service the local notables and the bishop, a memory reflected in Avignon's street names.

- In 1226, the fraught environment of the Cathar heresy and the Albigensian Crusade would have disastrous results for the independence of Avignon. The Cathar heresy had spread widely in the south of France, parts of Spain, and northern Italy by the early 13th century. These heretics believed in a dual universe, in which all matter was the product of the devil and everything spiritual was the gift of God.
- Avignon was not a major Cathar fortress, but it was, at the time, technically a fief of the Holy Roman Empire, not the king of France. Thus, Avignon decided not to submit to the demands of the French. Because Avignon's confidence had grown with its size, it thought itself capable of resisting the French king, Louis VIII, when he arrived on his crusade against the Albigensians (who were centered at nearby Albi).
- To indicate its independence from France, the city refused entry to Louis. It was then besieged by the king's armies for three months before surrendering. The city walls were torn down, and the moat was filled in to symbolize the crushing of Avignonese freedom. The Comtat-Venaissin (the territory around Avignon) was ceded to the Church in 1229, a gift that would subsequently result in the city of Avignon becoming the seat of the Church itself.
- In 1251, Avignon was granted to the two brothers of the king of France. After the death of the last of these brothers, the count of Toulouse, in 1271, the territory was united with the French Crown, despite the fact that the count had bequeathed it to the pope. Further, the Comtat-Venaissin was granted by the king of France in 1290 to the cadet branch of his family—the house of Anjou, or the

Angevins—in the person of Charles, the count of Provence, who was also king of Naples, Sicily, and Jerusalem.

- In 1305, Clement V, a Frenchman, was elected pope. But because of the almost constant urban warfare among the great Roman families, the new pope believed that Rome was too dangerous a city in which to live. He chose not to leave his French diocese for Rome but, instead, moved to Avignon. By 1309, he had relocated the central offices of the Roman Church, effectively moving the papacy itself from Rome to Avignon.
- Initially, papal control was over only the Comtat-Venaissin, but in 1348, the city of Avignon was sold to the pope by the Angevin queen Joanna of Naples. The surrounding territory and the city were now linked and became the headquarters of the Roman Church until 1377.
- The period of papal residence in Avignon is known as the Babylonian Captivity, referring to the imprisonment of the Israelites in Babylon. The effect of moving the entire head office of the Roman confession to Avignon had an overwhelming impact and created the medieval city of Avignon as we see it today. It grew in size from about 6,000 inhabitants in 1309 to about 30,000 in 1377!
- This huge explosion of population required new fortifications. The construction of new walls was undertaken in 1355 under Pope Innocent VI. When finished, the walls were more than two miles long and enclosed a space of more than 70 acres. There were 35 feet high and had more than 50 shorter towers, gates, and drawbridges, supplemented by a 12-foot-deep moat.

Avignon Cathedral

- There had been a church on the site of the cathedral of Avignon from the earliest days of Roman Christianity, certainly by the 4th century. The church grew with the population, but it was destroyed by the Saracens in 731 during their invasion of southern Europe.

- In place of the earlier structure rose a great Romanesque cathedral, consecrated in 1111. The square tower dates from about 1150. The west front is austere in the Provençal Romanesque style. The plain façade is very spare and solid, but it has a commanding position on what appears to be a great podium.
- The walls of the church have few openings, a design that serves to keep the interior cool and allows the walls to withstand the weight of the vaulting. The simple pediment on the narthex is decorated only by two corner columns. But the huge square tower with its four windows rises dramatically above it, surmounted by the high gilded figure of the Virgin Mary, dating from the 19th century.
- Inside, the most dramatic view comes from the mixing of styles where the 1425 octagonal dome meets the Romanesque vaulting. Otherwise, the interior is a single-naved, rather gloomy church. But the original 6th-century altar was preserved and is now in the Chapel of St. Roch, the patron saint of plague sufferers.
- During the 14th century—the period when Avignon was the seat of the papacy—the church was enlarged with many side chapels, the most wonderful of which holds the splendid Gothic tomb of Pope John XXII and a papal throne. The church, like so much of Avignon, suffered greatly during the French Revolution, and the tomb of John XXII was particularly vandalized.
- The indignities inflicted on the papal tombs during the revolution were felt by the church altogether. Many of the original medieval decorations were stripped from the building. During the 19th century, however, the church was restored to its current grandeur, and the gilded figure of the Virgin was returned to its tower in 1859.

The Palace of the Popes and Petit Palais

- The cathedral is framed by two palaces, the Palace of the Popes and the Petit Palais, indicating the importance of the Roman Church in Avignon during the Babylonian Captivity.

- On the north side of the square before the papal palace stands the Petit Palais. It was built in 1317 around a cloister to house the bishop. This lovely crenellated structure, with its double row of windows, now holds a collection of medieval and Renaissance Italian paintings, including a *Virgin and Child* by Sandro Botticelli. After 2004, a civic museum tracing the complex history of the city of Avignon was installed.
- The palace square is close to 750 feet long and more than 150 feet wide, preparing us for the size of the papal residence. There were once some substantial buildings on this site, but they suffered from the struggles at the end of the Avignonese papacy and the Great Schism.
 - The last effective pope of the Avignonese line, the Spanish Benedict XIII (an antipope), was progressively abandoned by his supporters, including the kingdom of France at the end of the 14th century.
 - A French army attacked Avignon and besieged the papal palace from 1398 until the pope escaped in 1403. It was during that siege that all of the structures that could be used by the enemy were pulled down. This small piece of papal drama resulted in the magnificent square.
- The astounding Palais des Papes was begun on the site of the old bishops' palace by the third Avignon pope, Benedict XII, and completed just 20 years later by Clement VI. This building history results in two quite distinct moments in architectural style: the original simple palace and Clement's dramatic, flamboyant Gothic structure. Except for a few contemporary objects, this vast palace—enclosing some 45,000 square feet—is largely empty, stripped of its rich contents long ago by the revolutionaries.

Suggested Reading

Mullins, *Avignon of the Popes*.

———, *The Popes of Avignon*.

Underwood and Underwood, *Avignon (Walk and Eat)*.

Questions to Consider

1. With the arrival of the papacy, Avignon became, in effect, a company town. What are the benefits and perils of this kind of dependence?
2. Avignon is today essentially a museum town, dependent on tourism. Can you think of similar towns elsewhere?

Insider Tips

Today, the Rocher des Doms is a lovely botanical garden, laid out in 1842 and affording a wonderful view of the Rhône and the Pont D'Avignon. In the Middle Ages, the site was used for grazing sheep and, because of the mistral—that powerful wind from the north—it was also used for windmills. There are steps into the park close to the Rhône, and it is worth the climb, if just to admire the swans in the park, the statues of famous citizens, and the once-scandalous sculpture of *Venus and the Swallows* (1894). If the climb seems too intimidating, a train that leaves from the square of the Palace of the Popes delivers you to the gate. In fact, this little train is a useful way to get your overall bearings in the city. The circuit lasts about 45 minutes, and there is constant commentary on the headphones in English.

Recently, there has opened in the papal palace a new multimedia experience that transports you back into time and the era of the residence of the popes of Avignon. It is quite spectacular, with seven films in different rooms re-creating the decorations, such as fresco cycles, as well as furnishings and music. There is a very useful section on the building history of the palace; you can watch it rise over time into both what we see today and what was lost after the French Revolution. Available in English, as well as many other languages, the presentation provides an introduction to the site that is highly professional and entertaining.

Avignon—Papal Splendor

Lecture 10

We begin this lecture by standing before the towering face of the Palace of the Popes in Avignon. The front of this palace has the only door opening onto the ground floor, and the upper register of the façade is pierced with the smallest of windows. On the left, the battlements of the Tour de la Gâche establish the fortress-like nature of the building. The view to the right is even more forbidding. Only the charming gargoyles provide some measure of relief from this formidable exterior. In this lecture, we'll walk through the Palais des Papes and visit the second Jewish quarter of Avignon, an area that bears witness to the rich but complex story of the Jews in this papal city.

Palais Neuf

- Visitors enter the Palace of the Popes through the *porte des Champeaux*, which is actually the entry into the flamboyant Gothic palace of Clement VI, built in the 1340s.
 - Despite its age, it is known as the Palais Neuf (“New Palace”) because it wasn’t the first palace to be built here. It was predated by the palace constructed by Benedict XII, the so-called Palais Vieux (1334–1342), which features a much more sober style.
 - This entrance leads to the large courtyard (known as the Cour d’Honneur), which was, in papal times, the scene of outdoor festivities, as well as the main access point for the complex.
- Opposite the courtyard is the Tower of the Angels, containing the opulent private chambers of the popes.
 - The *chambre du pape* is where the pope slept and entertained his closest advisers. Only four ceiling beams are original to the construction, but the beautiful arabesques of the frescoes are as they were when painted in 1336–1337.

- The few pieces of furniture in the room all date from the 14th century but are not from the palace. We know from records that chests with the pope's clothing and important documents were kept here, as were birdcages with nightingales, to provide some musical distraction.
- Next to the Tower of the Angels in the five-story Wardrobe Tower is the Room of the Stag Hunt.
 - The tower itself is a private place; the pope's bathroom was on the ground floor and the papal wardrobe occupied the next two. The fifth floor was the private chapel of the pope, the Chapel of St. Michael.
 - On the fourth floor was Clement VI's study, still covered by the well-preserved 14th-century frescoes by the Siennese painter Matteo Giovanetti. The fresco cycle is superb, with scenes of fishing, hunting, and children playing.
 - This was the personal space for the pope, including his private library. The decorations on the ceiling and walls reflected Clement's aristocratic, feudal tastes. The reason the decorations survive so well is that when the palace was used as a military barracks in the 19th century, the surfaces were covered by thick government-issue paint that preserved them miraculously.
 - This part of the palace also contains the benediction window, through which the pope blessed the crowds assembled below, just as the pope does today from a window in St. Peter's in Rome.

Palais Vieux

- The Old Palace of Benedict XII exhibits a powerful change in style, despite the fact that the two palaces were conceived only a decade apart. The Palais Vieux of Benedict has squat, square towers, giving the building much more of a fortress-like appearance.

- Here are the grand public rooms of the papal court, adjacent to the cloister, which was also built by Pope Benedict. The cloister results from the meeting of four separate buildings, and the upper gallery provides access to them. The architecture is relatively simple and functional. The crenellations are a reminder that the palace was a fortress, as well.



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The façade of the Palais des Papes, with its twin pencil towers, is austere and almost menacing.

- The Banquet Hall and Consistory Chamber are located in the Consistory Wing, which was accessible from the private apartments of the pope. Just walking into the enormous Grand Tinel—a 150-foot-long banquet hall—lets us imagine the sumptuous feasts that were served to the entire court.
 - The wooden barrel vault of the ceiling is a reconstruction, because a fire in 1413 destroyed the amazing decorations of the room, including the frescoes and the original ceiling. The few tapestries on the walls today provide at least a suggestion of the elegance for which this room was celebrated.
 - Six windows provide light and overlook the gardens, which were reportedly splendid in the 14th century, though less so in the present.
- Beneath the Grand Tinel, on the ground floor off the eastern cloister, is the Hall of the Consistory, the center for official ecclesiastical

business and ceremony. It, too, is huge and was wonderfully decorated between 1346 and 1348 by Giovanetti. Today, Simone Martini's frescoes from the cathedral are also displayed in this room.

- Off the south cloister is the Hall of the Guests or Conclave Room. This is another vast space, broken into sections and used to house royal or imperial guests. This room is also where the conclaves to elect the Avignon popes were held in the 14th century.
- The western cloisters give onto the Rooms of the Familiars, spread over two stories. These were for the members of the pope's and cardinals' families. The "familiars" (Latin: *familiares*) were those members of the household who had the right to dine, live, and stable horses in the papal palace, usually at the expense of their masters.
- The northern cloisters are crowned by two bell towers. The small tower is of great liturgical and ceremonial importance because it contained the silver bell used for summoning cardinals to meetings of the consistory, meals, sittings of the Rota (the pope's law court), and the reception of important dignitaries and ambassadors. Also off this cloister is the Great Chapel, reconstructed by Benedict XII.
 - The Great Chapel is truly monumental—more than 150 feet long, 60 feet high, and 45 feet wide. It has seven bays with pointed Gothic ribbed vaulting and a great deal of natural light, originally made enchanting by a cycle of stained glass.
 - The altar was placed in the first bay and in the second sat the papal throne, covered with a golden canopy. It was in this room that all papal ceremonies of a religious nature were held, such as ceremonies for the canonization of saints, holy day festivities, and funerals and coronations of popes.
- In the South Wing is the enormous Great Audience Hall, which has almost the same volume as the chapel. This room has three naves, broken by columns to support the High Gothic vault. From 1336, this room is where the Rota met and where the pope had public audiences.

- In September 1791, the Constituent Assembly decreed the incorporation of Avignon into the French state, an act later recognized by treaty in 1797 and, in 1814—because he had no choice—accepted by the pope. An attempt to restore Avignon to the Papal States at the Congress of Vienna was fruitless: It was seen as an integral part of France, where it remains today.

The Decline of Avignon

- While the seat of the papacy was in Avignon, it became a large, cosmopolitan metropolis, with clerics, courtiers, and others flocking to the city to share papal largesse, seek employment, engage in diplomacy, or run the Church.
- Ironically, many Jews fled to Avignon because it was not French territory, and the kings of France were far less tolerant than the sophisticated popes of Avignon. The papacy recognized the value of having a substantial Jewish population in the city, even though Jews were required to wear distinguishing marks and be segregated from the Christian population.
- The Jews initially congregated into a rather closely knit and dense community on the lower portions of the Rocher des Doms, near the Rhône. This area was originally given a good deal of self-government. When the destruction of the walls by Louis VIII disrupted the Jewish quarter, the Jews were given a more secure and commodious area of the city near the Place de Jerusalem.
- The period of the residence of the popes was one of the most prosperous and liberal in the history of the Jews in Avignon, but this situation changed dramatically after the papacy left at the beginning of the 15th century.
 - Without the protection of the pope, Jews were subject to increasingly onerous restrictions as to what they could own, the merchandise they could sell, and the services they could perform. Taxes were raised, and persecutions were instigated by the cardinal legates or their officials.

- The removal of the economic engine of the papacy meant less work, less demand for capital, and more competition. Under these conditions, the marginalized—or the most easily victimized—suffered first.
- This unhappy situation fell heavily on the Jews but not on them alone; their Christian neighbors suffered, as well. The absence of the papal court and the loss of a large proportion of the population resulted in economic disaster for Avignon. The city, once so rich, sophisticated, and vibrant became again a provincial town.
 - It was still able to sustain itself because of its strategic position in the trade of southern Europe, and because, as papal territory, it did not suffer the degree of destruction inflicted on other states.
 - Nevertheless, the period of the Wars of Religion in France (1562–1598) affected this southern enclave of the kingdom, with both Protestants and Catholics engaging in atrocities in the name of religion.

Final Sites in Avignon

- The foundation of the Church of St. Agricola traces its roots back to St. Agricola himself, a 7th-century bishop of Avenio. It is charming to look at now, but it has often been rebuilt, particularly in the 1320s by Pope John XXII. In 1391, it was extended by incorporating the Chapel of La Fusteries. The lovely polychrome tympanum here dates from the 1480s.
- St. Didier, another parish church, was reconstructed from an earlier building through the bequest of Cardinal des Déaux and was consecrated in 1359. It is a lovely Gothic church, with a high nave with pointed arches and rib vaulting. The entrance has a charming image of the Virgin in the tympanum, and the altar decoration by Francesco Laurana is one of the first significant Renaissance-style reliefs now found in France.

- Between the two churches of St. Agricola and St. Pierre is a good place to end our tour of medieval Avignon: in the leafy and lovely Place de l'Horloge ("Clock Square") with its charming Jacquemart Tower. (A *jacquemart* is a painted wooden figure that sounds the hours on a clock.) The tower dates from 1447, and the wonderful clock was installed in 1471. Today, it is still part of the complex of Avignon, linking the medieval and modern cities.

Suggested Reading

Mullins, *Avignon of the Popes*.

———, *The Popes of Avignon*.

Underwood and Underwood, *Avignon (Walk and Eat)*.

Questions to Consider

1. Was it appropriate that so much of the wealth of the Church be spent on the papal palace and the court of the popes in Avignon?
2. What would it take today to house and feed more than 1,000 people in the palace of the pope? And can you suggest what was required to do this with only medieval technology?

Insider Tips

Before you end your stay in Avignon, walk through the Place de l'Horloge and down the major street that leads to the Porte de la République, the gate opposite the Porte du Rocher. This major thoroughfare, the Cours de la République (which changes its name mysteriously to Cours du General Leclerc) takes you to the exit through the 14th-century walls that leads directly to the railway station. But well before you reach the ramparts—in fact, just about where the street changes its name—at the Church of St. Martial, turn to the left and follow the Rue des Lices to the Rue des Teinturiers. This street is perhaps the prettiest cobbled one in the city and is lined with bright, cheerful, and inexpensive places to eat and drink in an atmosphere that celebrates the Avignon of today.

Carcassonne—Fortress of the Languedoc

Lecture 11

Carcassonne is a medieval walled city, so perfect as to look almost more like the set of a medieval romance than a real town. Yet real it is and the largest city in Europe still in possession of the full circuit of its walls, even if some are 19th-century reconstructions. It should not be forgotten, however, that this exquisite, romantic city looks the way it does because of one of the most terrible moments in the history of medieval Europe: the Albigensian Crusade. We'll investigate that crusade in the next lecture, but we begin here with an in-depth look at the defenses of Carcassonne and its Castle of the Counts.

The Walls and History of Carcassonne

- Carcassonne is really two towns. There is the medieval walled city on the escarpment, overlooking the River Aude, and there is the lower town, La Bastide. Until 1355, La Bastide was outside the walls but is now protected by its own fortifications. The various materials used in the walls clearly date from many different periods, back to the foundation of the city in Roman times, with some rebuilt by the Visigoths in the 5th century.
- The fortifications consist of two completely separate circuits of walls, an outer and inner defense system. The space in between was called *les lices* (“the lists”). It was the place where invaders were trapped or knights jousted in tournaments.
- The eastern entrance gate, the Narbonne Gate, is a monumental piece of military engineering, constructed at the time of King Philip the Bold of France (d. 1285). It is, in fact, more than one opening in the walls: It is part of a complex construction designed to ensure that only expected visitors were admitted.
 - The outer gate has on its right a semicircular barbican erected at the time of St. Louis IX. These outer walls are an outstanding example of medieval fortifications. They are

more than a mile long, with 19 circular towers and three barbicans. There was a fourth barbican that connected to the inner walls, but it is now lost.

- Along the expanse of the inner ramparts, areas where brick is occasionally mixed with stone represent the original Roman walls of the Colonia Julia Carcaso and its *castellum*, built from 43 to 30 B.C. Little remains of the ancient Roman fort, except for these walls and a splendid mosaic floor discovered beneath the Castle of the Counts. This indicates that the medieval fortress was likely built on top of the ancient Roman *praetorium*, the administrative center and residence of the commander.
- The strength of its position—on a rocky promontory overlooking the River Aude—kept the city prosperous and alive after the collapse of the Roman Empire. It sat on the trade routes between the Atlantic coast of Iberia and the Mediterranean. Consequently, it was a desirable place to secure.
 - The Visigoths from Spain captured Carcaso in 412 and managed to keep it until the Saracens arrived, again from Spain.
 - The Muslim armies conquered Carcassonne in 725 and were able to hold it even after their defeat by Charles Martel at Poitiers—again, because of the great strength of the position and the fortifications.
 - Thus, Carcaso became an Islamic outpost in southern Europe, cut off from Saracen Spain. Nevertheless, it sustained its Islamic allegiance and identified with the Spanish Moors.
- In about 750, the Franks, under Pepin the Short, expelled the Saracens. Pepin granted Carcassonne to one of his knights as a fief, beginning the tradition of the feudal counts and viscounts of Carcassonne. It was that Christian victory and the expulsion of the

Moors that generated the legend of how the city got its name and how it fell.

- According to the legend, the Frankish army besieged the city of Carcassonne for several years. The emir and his soldiers sallied out to try to break the siege, but the emir was killed, leaving his wife, named Carcas, to hold Carcassonne for Islam.

- Carcas was very cunning and managed to bluff the besiegers into believing that the city had more soldiers and food than it really possessed. Not wanting to prolong the siege for several more years, Pepin agreed to negotiate with Dame Carcas.



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- Pepin agreed to grant her and her descendants the fief of Carcassonne to rule in perpetuity, provided she convert to Christianity, which she did. Pepin even arranged the marriage of Dame Carcas to one of his knights, who became the first count of Carcassonne. The city received its name because the population celebrated the brilliant negotiations and the marriage by ringing the bells in her honor—hence, *Carcas sonne* (or “Dame Carcas rings”).

Dame Carcas set up dummies—clothes stuffed with straw—on the battlements of Carcassonne to fool the besiegers into believing that the city was well manned.

- Although fanciful in the extreme, this legend illustrates the complex history and mythology of this city. Today, Dame Carcas is celebrated in the large carved figure on a column in a charming neo-Gothic style close to the Narbonne Gate.

City Defenses

- Note the narrowness of the passageway through the gate—only about eight feet. This, too, is part of the strength of the city’s fortifications: This is not a door easily forced to allow an invading army to rush in. As attackers waited their turn to enter, they would be annihilated by fire from archers in the towers of the gate and elsewhere.
- Note, too, that the fronts of the Narbonne Gate towers are not completely rounded. Rather, they have beak-like projections that served two purposes: First, they made the use of battering rams and other siege equipment far more perilous, and second, they provided yet another perch for defenders to fire through slits in the walls.
- On the second floor of the tower is a large fireplace, used to boil oil or water to pour on the heads of enemies who got too close. “Murder holes”—heavily protected positions on the first floor—allowed defenders to literally rain death down on those unfortunate enough to be caught between the two sets of walls.
- The design of the Narbonne Gate was so ingenious and successful that it was employed in several of the other towers in the city built in the 13th and 14th centuries. Around the circuit of the walls, the Belshazaar, St. Martin, Moulin du Midi, and Mi Padre towers are all similar.
- The Treseau Tower was built by Philip the Bold in the 1270s and 1280s and forms part of the defensive works that include the Prison and Inquisition towers in the south and southwest. The tall, flat façade facing inward has two watchtowers. The covered wooden battlements (called *hourdes*) were walkable, and they were built around rather than through the tower to ensure that even if the enemy managed to penetrate, they faced what amounted to a small castle.

- The Saint-Nazaire Gate looks very different from the Narbonne Gate, because its blocks are square. Nevertheless, we again see those “beaks” to protect the inner walls and gate from any invaders who might break through the outer ring.
- The Tower of the Vade was constructed at the time of Louis IX to defend the eastern perimeter. It is a standalone structure, designed to be completely self-sufficient, to ensure that it would not fall simultaneously to a siege of the whole town. Thus, it was used as the headquarters of a special military company established by Louis to protect the city or die in its defense.

Castle of the Counts

- Why did the kings of France in the 13th and 14th centuries lavish so much military architecture and funds on what was—and is—a small town?
 - Primarily, the answer can be found in the need to protect the authority of the feudal French king in an area previously only loosely attached to the Crown, a region with its own language, traditions, particularist sentiments, and religion.
 - Carcassonne lies in the Languedoc. This territory was, from the time of Charles Martel and Pepin, a French royal fief, but its cultural and economic loyalties were more directly allied to the counts of Barcelona, whose Catalan traditions were much closer. Thus, ambitions from across the Pyrenees were always seen as a threat by the French Crown, especially after the unification of the Iberian Peninsula.
 - Regional, cultural, and linguistic tensions eventually focused on the Castle of the Counts of Carcassonne and the feudal lords of the city.
- The Castle of the Counts faces into the town on three sides—the east, north, and south— while the western wall is incorporated into the still-standing Roman walls of the city. This enormous structure was built largely between about 1130 and 1150.

- Until the time of St. Louis IX of France, there was only a narrow moat to protect the eastern façade of the castle. The king widened the moat and built the hemispherical barbican we see today to protect the urban entrance, now on the Place du Château.
- Note the five intimidating cylindrical towers, as well as the *hourdes*. These are 19th-century reconstructions of the covered wooden walkways running along the walls between the towers.
 - Keep in mind that these towers and fortifications, including the *hourdes*, were not designed individually but as part of an integrated network: They were constructed so that defenders were in a position to fire on attackers constantly, even if enemies made their way into the city.
 - The military engineers even allowed for the possibility of sappers digging beneath the walls. The walls are extremely thick, and the openings for archers to fire were not stacked vertically but offset so as not to weaken the structure. The original ancient Roman walls incorporated into the ramparts were also reinforced from below to ensure that they could not easily be mined.
- As we enter the castle, notice the double entry with two portcullises and wood and iron doors. To avoid treason from within, the two portcullises were operated from different points so that the two sets could not be opened in tandem.
- The interior of the castle has been reconstructed and repurposed so many times in the past 700 years that only the Round Room gives any sense of the grandeur of the powerful feudal lords who once lived here. The fragments of wall painting depict fighting between the Christians and Moors and indicate the former splendor of the space.
- Also in the castle is an exhibition space, which is, in effect, a museum of odd stone survivals from the castle, the town, and the district. Note in particular the decorative carving on the stone sarcophagus and the recumbent figure of a medieval knight. Who

that knight was will never be known: He may have been associated with the Trencavel, the feudal lords of the city, or he may have been a crusader, one of the army that ended the dynasty of the Trencavel.

Suggested Reading

Cowper, *Cathar Castles*.

Dunsany, *Carcassonne*.

O'Shea, *The Perfect Heresy*.

Park, *Cathar Country*.

Sumption, *The Albigensian Crusade*.

Questions to Consider

1. Carcassonne was always a fortress city. Are there modern examples where the military drives the location, design, and architecture of towns?
2. The curious name Languedoc came about from the language spoken in this region of southern France. How important is language in determining cultural loyalties?

Insider Tips

Before entering the Castle of the Counts, you might want to investigate the other towers on the opposite side of the castle. On the northern side, there is the relatively short Tower of the Steps, and on the west side, the medieval towers are built right into the ancient Roman walls, adding to their defensive strength. (This is also the only substantial part of the walls that can be walked.) The Pinte Tower, the tallest, on the western wall was where the sentries were always on lookout for any sign of an attack against the city; farther along are the Powder and Chapel Towers.

Carcassonne—Cathars and Crusaders

Lecture 12

The history of the great castle of Carcassonne is not in its surviving space and grand rooms. It is in the story of its owners, the Trencavel, who were the feudal lords of Carcassonne and Albi, and the Albigensian Crusade against the Cathars. In this lecture, we will first discuss the origins of the Cathars and learn how their fate became the fate of Carcassonne. We'll then tour the Inquisition Tower, where the horrifying aftermath of the crusade was carried out. We'll also explore the Cathedral of Saint-Nazaire and end with a walk through La Bastide, the “suburb” of Carcassonne, first established in 1247.

Origins of the Cathars

- The name Cathar comes from the Greek word for “pure,” *katharos*, which the followers of the heresy believed themselves to be. It likely began in the Byzantine Empire and spread through mercantile contact to various parts of Europe.
 - Theologically, Catharism had roots in Gnosticism and the old Manichaean dualism of good constantly fighting evil.
 - The Cathars, who referred to themselves as *bonhommes* (“good men”), saw all things material as, in essence, evil (the work of the devil) and all things spiritual as, in essence, good (the gift of God).
- Most significantly, the Cathars’ identification of evil included the structure and property of the established Church, because they saw these things as being of the material world, not the spiritual world.
- The sect rejected marriage and sex. They accepted suicide and recognized only one sacrament, the *consolamentum* (“consolation”), a ritual that was performed just before death to sanctify the purity of the believer. Through death, Cathars believed that the individual freed his or her spirit of all material burdens and, hence, all evil.

- Although the Cathars believed in the equality of souls, their church had a hierarchy of “perfect ones,” who were called bishops, deacons, and presbyters. Because their first bishopric was at Albi in 1165, they were known as Albigensians. Carcassonne also had a Cathar bishopric.
- Noble and wealthy merchant families gravitated toward this strange sect in the south of France for a number of reasons.
 - The heresy arose after the Gregorian Reform of the 11th century detached Church property and authority from lay lords. In order to establish its financial and legal independence, the Church subsequently often acted in an extortionate, high-handed manner. This gave the impression that it cared more for the material world than spiritual values. And the very argument that the Church had to be released from secular feudal control seemed to reinforce core Cathar beliefs.
 - Further, in the Languedoc, great local powers, such as the count of Toulouse and the Trencavel family of Carcassonne, felt threatened by the actions and policies of French kings. It was clear that the French Crown wished to centralize its power and reduce the authority of feudal magnates. Many of the Trencavel vassals and even members of the family itself had joined the Cathars; Raymond-Roger de Trencavel, vicomte de Carcassonne, felt both family and feudal obligations to protect them.

The Albigensian Crusade

- This intent to protect Cathar practice was not acceptable to the king of France or to the Church. The result was the calling of a crusade against the Cathar Albigensians in 1209.
- Thousands of knights and their attendants from the north of France joined the crusade as a feudal duty to the king and to expiate their own sins. Marching south, the crusaders reached the Trencavel city of Béziers, a stronghold of Cathar belief. After a successful

siege, the crusaders broke into the town and slaughtered all of its 20,000 inhabitants.

- Raymond-Roger de Trencavel, who does not appear to have been a Cathar, waited in Carcassonne for the arrival of the crusaders. The impregnable city was besieged and held out for a time.
 - Eventually, Trencavel chose to negotiate; under a safe conduct, he went to the camp of the crusader leader, Simon de Montfort, but Trencavel was imprisoned by the crusaders.
 - The city of Carcassonne surrendered in August of 1209, and Raymond-Roger died in November while still imprisoned. Simon de Montfort then became the new lord of Carcassonne.
- In 1217, Simon was killed while besieging Toulouse. His lands fell to his son, Amaury. But Amaury lacked his father's strength, and the towns and estates that had been granted to Simon were lost little by little, including Carcassonne in 1224. Raymond, the son of Raymond-Roger de Trencavel, was returned as lord of Carcassonne.

- But Amaury, having lost his father's territory, had ceded his authority to the king of France, and the king, Louis VIII, was intent on realizing this gift. Another crusade was called. Unwilling to continue fighting, Carcassonne opened its gates to Louis VIII in 1226. The protection of France and a return



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The construction of the walls at Carcassonne caused an employment boom, with workers arriving to build the fortifications and carters and bargemen bringing loads of materials every day.

to the orthodox Roman Church seemed a better alternative than ongoing war.

- Louis IX was determined that his authority in the south would never be challenged again, either by local feudal magnates or by Aragon or Barcelona. Thus, he began constructing the incredible circuit of walls and towers we have seen. For 50 years, an army of masons, carpenters, and military engineers worked ceaselessly on these fortifications, and Carcassonne became a medieval boom town.

Coming of the Inquisition

- The power of the state in the person of the French king was satisfied, but what about the religious powers of the Catholic Church? The Church decided that orthodox Roman Catholicism must be strictly imposed in Carcassonne. As a result, the city became the headquarters of an inquisition, operated by the newly founded Dominicans.
- From the point of view of the Church, the infection had spread everywhere, and examples had to be made of everyone even suspected of Catharism—or any other form of confessional heterodoxy or belief. The intended and unintended consequences were vicious. Jews, for example, who had enjoyed a large degree of freedom in Carcassonne, found themselves persecuted.
- The high level of literacy in the Languedoc was identified as part of the problem in the spread of heresy; therefore, education was actively discouraged. For the most part, the Dominican inquisitors had little or no connection to the region and its traditions; they rode roughshod over all established practices, hierarchy, and local customs, both ecclesiastical and secular.

The Inquisition Tower

- The Inquisition Tower is where suspected Cathars were questioned and tortured before sentencing. The fireplace in the Judges' Room was used to heat the instruments of torture, many of which can be seen in the Museum of Torture in Carcassonne.

- The inquisition trials might have one of several outcomes. Those suspects who confessed, abjured, and swore allegiance to the Roman Church were forced to wear a costume with a large yellow cross on it for the rest of their lives. Suspects who were deemed more serious heretics were sent to the cells below the tower, from which few ever emerged.
- Those who were considered obviously guilty were often walled alive in the prison to endure a lingering death by starvation. Not even death could prevent the work of the inquisition, however, because the corpses of important Cathar leaders were exhumed and tried postmortem. Their conviction after death meant that the Church had the legal right to take the property of their heirs.

Cathedral of Saint-Nazaire

- The large Romanesque-Gothic church in Carcassonne is dedicated to two saints, Nazaire and Celse. There had probably been a church on this site from the time of the Visigoths, who built an Arian cathedral within the walls but on the opposite end of the town from the old Roman *praetorium*. Later, the Carolingians constructed a new church in the same place. In 1096, the foundation stones were blessed by Pope Urban II, who had just preached the First Crusade at Clermont.
- St. Louis IX, after taking the city, encouraged a Gothic choir and transept to be built in 1269. These additions were not completed until the 1330s and are wonderful examples of Gothic architecture, with elegant tracery and glorious stained-glass windows. The transepts each have three chapels, illuminated with stained glass.
- The rose window in the south transept has glass and a decorative program that dates from the time of Bishop Pierre de Rochefort, who commissioned the work and whose tomb is in the chapel below. The center of the rose window depicts Christ in majesty. The choir has five huge stained-glass windows that date from the 14th to 16th centuries and 22 statues of saints, the Virgin, Christ, and the Apostles.

- The Gothic tombs are not to be missed. The oldest is that of Bishop William Radulphe, who died in 1266. The carving is wonderful, especially the figure of the bishop himself in the niche, with his good works commemorated on the sarcophagus. Between the nave and the northern arm of the transept is the chapel and tomb of Bishop Pierre de Rochefort. The carved, gabled tripartite niche depicts the bishop with two of his officials.
- On the west wall of the transept is the famous siege stone, dating from the 13th century. This carving of a city under siege may be all that remains of the tomb of Simon de Montfort. In the same transept is a stained-glass representation of the Tree of Jesse, fashioned in the late 13th and early 14th centuries. This narrative in glass traces the genealogy of Christ and the spread of the Christian nation.

La Bastide

- In the district known as La Bastide is the so-called Seneschal's House, an urban mansion dating from the 14th century. The seneschal was the king's governor, but this important figure probably did not live here. Regardless of who inhabited it, the house is a lovely medieval structure with Renaissance additions.
- Two churches, St. Michael's and St. Vincent's, link this first "suburb" of Carcassonne to the ancient fortress on the escarpment above. St. Michael's has preserved some of its original design, with its wide central nave and circular windows at the base of the vaulted ceiling. But after an attack in 1355, during the Hundred Years' War, the new city walls were constructed by backing onto the church, thus restricting its design.
- St. Vincent's is much grander, with an imposing octagonal tower and a carillon of 47 bells. At the front entrance were four Gothic statues of saints, including one of St. Louis, whose gift may have made this decoration possible. These statues were sculpted in the 14th century and are now displayed inside for preservation.

- The elegant Place Carnot was designed as the main market square from the first establishment of La Bastide in 1247. Although the elegant buildings around the square mostly date to the 19th century, some older structures still exist here to provide a link to the past.

Suggested Reading

Cowper, *Cathar Castles*.

Dunsany, *Carcassonne*.

O'Shea, *The Perfect Heresy*.

Park, *Cathar Country*.

Sumption, *The Albigensian Crusade*.

Questions to Consider

1. What do you find most disturbing and, conversely, most sympathetic about the Cathars' belief system?
2. Was the Trencavel viscount of Carcassonne right to support his family and vassals over the demands of the Church and the king?
3. When is a crusade justified?

Insider Tips

Markets are still held in the Place Carnot three days a week (Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays), and the square as a whole is a pleasant place to escape the summer throngs of tourists that are always found in Carcassonne. There are cafés and restaurants where you can sit and enjoy the scene—and dispel the horror of the terrible events that took place just steps away from this quiet and lovely place, when the inquisition silenced the Albigenians. Enjoying a *pastis* (the traditional anise-flavored aperitif) in the Place Carnot proves that civilization triumphed in the end.

Jousting demonstrations and mock tournaments are held every summer in *les lices*, the area between the two circuits of walls. One side always represents the knights loyal to the Trencavel, while their opponents mostly identify with royal knights from outside the Languedoc. The locals cheer for the Trencavel. These events are truly worth seeing, because many centuries ago, real medieval knights trained in the same place, although the combat at that time was more dangerous.

Bastille Day is celebrated on the banks of the River Aude with Carcassonne as the backdrop for a remarkable display of fireworks. Some say these are the most spectacular fireworks in celebration of Bastille Day outside of Paris.

Barcelona—The Gothic Quarter

Lecture 13

The central pedestrian boulevard in Barcelona, the Ramblas, represents what we think of when we dream of Barcelona as it is today: a dynamic nightlife, flowing *cava* (the Spanish answer to champagne), all-night parties on the roofs of buildings, and of course, Antoni Gaudí and his almost hallucinogenic architecture and design. But there is much more to this ancient city, whose development over time has changed its personality often and in many ways. There are memories to be found of a rich medieval past in Barcelona, particularly in its Barri Gòtic (Gothic Quarter), among the best preserved medieval centers in Europe.

The Barri Gòtic

- The Romans established a fortified town named Barcino on the site of Barcelona in 15 B.C. The area was occupied by the Lacetani people, an Iberian tribe that became absorbed into Roman Hispania. Many remnants of the Roman settlement survive in the gate and parts of the 4th-century walls that once circled the city.
- The Barri Gòtic is the oldest part of the city, where Roman Barcino was originally established and where you can still see remnants of Roman survivals. More of the ancient foundation can be seen beneath the nearby Royal Palace. The most extensive subterranean Roman remains in the city were discovered accidentally in 1930 when moving the Casa Clariana-Padellàs. This 15th-century Gothic merchant's palace was relocated and serves as part of the museum of the city; it now also forms the entrance to the archeological site.
- The ancient center has always been in what is now St. James Square. This is evident from the four remaining columns of the ancient temple to Augustus that stand nearby the square. The buildings facing St. James Square are the seats of regional and local administration.

- The imposing Palace of the Generalitat enjoys a lovely Renaissance appearance dating from 1598. This rather austere, late Renaissance façade announces the first entry of this architectural style in Catalonia. But behind such façades are older buildings. In fact, the Generalitat is the oldest building in Europe still used for the purpose for which it was built.
- Beside the Generalitat runs the Calle Bisbe (Bishop’s Street), where we find the Bridge of Sighs. Although not medieval, the bridge skillfully blends the vocabulary of medieval architecture into a new structure that is both beautiful and functional.
- Similar alterations can be seen in the Canons’ House (Casa dels Canonges), which also faces onto St. James’ Square. This site was occupied between 935 and 1369 by Augustinian monks. In 1400, the current structure was erected for a charity, the House of Pious Alms. It subsequently became the communal residence of the canons of the cathedral. The back wall of the structure formed



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The Palace of the Generalitat is still in use for the autonomous regional government of Catalunya (Catalonia).

part of a tower of the Roman fortifications. It now houses the Diocesan Museum.

Barcelona Cathedral

- Barcelona's cathedral is an impressive Catalan Gothic monument begun in 1298 on the foundations of a Roman temple and a Christian church that was destroyed in 985 by the Moors. The cathedral was not completely finished until 1913, when the neo-Gothic façade was added, following some original plans for a façade that was first proposed in 1408. The twin octagonal towers, with their characteristic flat tops, date from 1393.

- When we imagine Gothic architecture, we usually think of such great cathedrals as Chartres or York. But these are located much farther north, where the intent was to bring in as much light as possible. In Barcelona, there is no need for large windows to light the interiors, and in fact, small ones were desirable to keep the interiors cool. Consequently, there are no soaring stained-glass windows along the nave and in the choir; instead, there are small windows with little original colored glass.
 - Small windows also meant that there was no need for flying buttresses or pointed towers. Rather, the towers had flat tops and were not very high. There were also flat roofs on the churches themselves because there was no snow to accumulate dangerously in the winter. A flat roof permitted the side aisles and nave to be of equal height.

 - We don't see here the riot of decoration that is present in the north. There are examples of tracery and ogival windows, but often, the tracery is simple and the windows are only subtly pointed or even round arches. The effect is one of elegance and beautiful proportions, all determined by the climate and sunlight of the Mediterranean.

- The cathedral interior is a High Gothic design of a central nave with two side aisles. The relative lack of decoration contributes to a great sense of calm and dignity.

- The marble choir stalls depict the martyrdom of the city's patron saint, St. Eulalia, whose sarcophagus is to be found in the crypt. The striking alabaster tomb was likely carved by sculptors from Pisa. The narrative portrays the martyrdom of Eulalia and the translation of her relics to this spot.
- A door leads from the southwestern transept into the Gothic cloisters, which are among the most serene and welcoming in the city. Here, the fountain gives the impression of quiet peace, broken only by the cackle of the 13 resident geese; a similar flock has inhabited the cloister since the 15th century.
- The cathedral has a plaque commemorating the 1493 baptism of six Native Americans brought to the city by Columbus.

Sites near the Cathedral

- Opposite the cathedral on Calle Santa Lucia is the Casa de l'Ardiaca, once the archdeacon's residence. It was originally built in the 12th century but reconstructed into its present form in the 15th. Notice the letterbox on the façade, with its fanciful carvings of birds, leaves, and a turtle. More so than some other of the medieval cities we are visiting, Barcelona delights the eye and imagination in such small elements of decoration.
- Close by the cathedral, in the Plaza Nova, the remains of an ancient Roman aqueduct can still be seen. It is one of two that brought fresh water to the Roman town in the 1st century.
- Also visible is the 16th-century palace of the Spanish viceroy, the Palace of the Lieutenant, later the site of the Inquisition. This structure actually formed part of the medieval royal palace, which is still wonderfully preserved on Palace Square.

Origins of the Count-Kings

- The end of Roman power in Iberia left a vacuum. In 415, the Visigoths conquered the town and established their first capital here. The Visigoths practiced Aryan Christianity, which was considered

heretical to the Latins, and brought their own tribal social structure, laws, and customs, adding another layer of diversity to this onetime outpost of the Roman Empire.

- Soon spreading across the Iberian Peninsula, the Visigoths moved their capital to present-day Toledo, and Barcelona once more became a marginalized settlement. Nevertheless, we can still see survivals of Visigothic Barcelona, such as public cold-water baths dating from the 6th century.
- Beginning in 711, Muslim invaders from North Africa crossed the Straits of Gibraltar and, capitalizing on disarray in the Visigothic kingdom, captured large territories.
 - Barcelona surrendered to the Moors but was accorded limited autonomy in exchange for recognition of Moorish sovereignty and the payment of tribute. Conversion to Islam was not required, although Islamic influence affected social customs, language, and dress. The cathedral was pulled down to accommodate a mosque on the site.
 - Little remains of the Moorish occupation in terms of structures, but to a large extent, Barcelona's unique architecture and vocabulary of decoration never lost the memory of this occupation.
- The expansion of Moorish territory in Iberia drove the Franks to halt their advance, culminating in the victory of Charles Martel over the Moors in 732. Louis the Pious (Charlemagne's son) captured Barcelona and its territory in 801 and established a buffer region along the Pyrenees, called the Spanish Marches, to protect Christendom.
- Barcelona and its territory were entrusted to local counts, according to Frankish practice. It was one of these border counts, Wilfred the Hairy, who united Catalonia in 878. Thus began a dynasty of counts of Barcelona that would rule Catalonia for the next 500 years, until the extinction of the line in 1410.

- Catalonia declared its independence from the Carolingians after Barcelona was again sacked by the Moors in 985. The count requested aid from the Frankish king, but when none came, he repudiated his feudal vassalage, and Catalonia became an independent state. It also began the tradition of Catalonian freedom and constitutionalism, leading Europe in establishing the rights of citizens.
- The year 1137 marked a momentous dynastic union, bringing together the county of Barcelona with the kingdom of Aragon through the marriage of Ramon Berenguer IV and Petronila of Aragon. The count became the first count-king, a title that recognized that only the royal family was shared—the two states were separate. Able now to attack the Moors to the south, the count-kings set the platform for a major Christian state on the Iberian Peninsula.
- During the rule of Jaume I the Conqueror, the maritime expansion of Barcelona began. Between the 13th and 15th centuries, Barcelona added the kingdom of Valencia, the Balearic Islands, Sicily, and Sardinia to its territories. Catalonia was a significant maritime power, even managing the gold trade with North Africa. The old Roman walls were extended to enclose an area 10 times that previously occupied by the city.
- The power and wealth of Barcelona was made manifest in ambitious new construction, some of which survives as testimony to the power of the count-kings: The mercantile exchange, La Llotja; the Gothic cathedral of the Holy Cross and St. Eulalia; the churches of Santa Maria del Mar and Santa Maria del Pi; the royal Chapel of St. Agata; and the palace's Saló del Tinell were built in this period of prosperity.
- In 1410, the last of Wilfred the Hairy's dynasty died without issue, resulting in a period of instability. In 1479, Ferdinand II (the Catholic) of Catalonia-Aragon married Isabella of Castile, a union

that would eventually shift the now-united Spanish Peninsula away from the Mediterranean and toward the Atlantic seacoast.

- The crusade against the Moors and their expulsion also resulted from the unification of the peninsula. But the expulsion of the Jews in 1492 damaged Barcelona, because this community was of ancient lineage in the city and had contributed much economic and cultural activity to the city and Catalonia.
- The establishment of the Inquisition destroyed much of the vigor of the community. The long period of warfare that resulted from the Habsburg acquisition of the Crown of Spain in 1516 by the future emperor Charles V, the inflation that resulted from the import of gold and silver from the New World, and the eventual bankruptcy of the Spanish Crown in the 17th century reduced Barcelona to a small, provincial backwater.
 - However, it was this decline that preserved the historical part of the city, the Gothic Quarter, near the once-vibrant seaport.
 - The revival of Catalan culture in the later 19th and early 20th centuries meant that the new construction—the wonderful buildings of Antoni Gaudí, for example—took place mostly in the newer parts of town, and the old was not sacrificed. Thus, it is still possible to walk through much of medieval Barcelona to see what this rich history has left us.

Suggested Reading

Eaude, *Catalonia: A Cultural History*.

Hughes, *Barcelona*.

Tree, *Barcelona, Catalonia*.

Questions to Consider

1. How did the climate and culture affect the development of Catalanian architecture? Can you think of other architectural styles that have been similarly affected?
2. There is a strong separatist movement today to make Catalonia an independent country. Can you suggest historical reasons why this might be the case?

Insider Tips

Just looking at the exterior of the Palace of the Generalitat generates a strong desire to go inside, but the Generalitat is open to the public on only two days a year, in April and September. Still, if you should walk past and the large main doors are open, do peek in at the courtyard, the Pati dels Tarongers, planted with orange trees. If the doors are closed because it is after sunset, there is some compensation: Look up through the windows on the second floor to see the sumptuous decoration of the Saló de Sant Jordi, illuminated by huge chandeliers. Both the courtyard and this magnificent formal hall date from the 1530s.

Barcelona—Imagination and Inspiration

Lecture 14

After our first lecture on Barcelona, we know who built and lived in the complex of royal medieval buildings known collectively as the Royal Palace. Although some parts of this complex date from as early as the 10th century, it was, from the 13th century, the residence of the city's count-kings of Catalonia. In this lecture, we'll look at this remarkable complex, and we'll explore Barcelona's former Jewish quarter, as well as El Raval, its sometime red-light district. We'll close with some sites in modern Barcelona, including the Church of the Holy Family and the Parc Güell, both designed by the brilliant architect Antoni Gaudí.

Jewish Community Survivals

- The Saló del Tinell in the Royal Palace was the banqueting hall, built in the 14th century and a fine example of High Gothic style. It was here by tradition that King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella first heard Christopher Columbus's account of his discoveries in the New World. This large space was also used by the tribunal of the Inquisition for its trials.
- As the site of these trials, the Saló del Tinell saw the forced abjuration or punishment of many of Barcelona's Jews after the expulsion of 1492. Before this unjust and evil act, Barcelona had an ancient and dynamic Jewish population. El Call is Barcelona's former Jewish quarter; it was the center of a flourishing Jewish community until an attack in 1391 and before Ferdinand and Isabella began their persecutions.
- Prior to that, under the city's autonomous rule, Jews had lived for centuries alongside Christian citizens; in fact, in the 13th century, the Jewish population of Barcelona was 15 percent of the city.
 - The level of respect afforded Jews in the city is illustrated by the famous Disputation of Barcelona. In 1264, King Jaume I requested that the most famous rabbinical scholar in Spain,

Moses ben Nahman, dispute religion with a Jewish convert and Dominican priest, Paul Christiani.

- So fearlessly did Rabbi Moses take on his opponent that King Jaume congratulated him, gave him a gift of money, and attended a service in the synagogue.
- This official recognition of and respect for the Jews of Barcelona changed by the end of the next century, when hostility to Muslims and Hebrews in Spain began to boil into physical attacks on these communities. The worst assault was in 1391, when a Christian mob invaded El Call and killed at least 200 Jews. Out of fear, many converted; others went underground. But horrible as that event had been, worse was yet to come with the 1492 expulsion. As a result of these events, El Call has few remaining vestiges of its Jewish past.

Lesser-Known Sites and Collections

- The Museu Frederic Marès is housed in a part of the Royal Palace that was occupied in the 13th century by bishops, in the 14th century by counts, and in the 15th century by judges. The city administration in the last century allowed Marès, an eccentric collector, to use the old palace with the understanding that his collections would, on his death, pass to the city. The museum contains Romanesque and Gothic religious art, Roman and Visigothic architectural fragments, and a strange assortment of ephemera, crucifixes, and clocks.
- One of the most delightful squares in the Barri Gòtic is located in front of the church of Santa Maria del Pi (14th–16th centuries), built in the Catalan Gothic style. The curious name of the church, Our Lady of the Pine Tree, results from a legend concerning a fisherman who discovered an image of the Virgin Mary in a tree as he was searching for wood to build a boat.
- Not far away is the Església de Sants Just i Pastor (Church of Ss. Justus and Pastor), built in the 14th century on the site of Barcelona's oldest parish church by Louis the Pious. This Catalan Gothic single-nave church, complete with stained-glass window, is

mostly forgotten today. However, the 1367 fountain in the square in front of the church has been carefully restored, and its architectural design and three-headed water source remind us that this was once an aristocratic quarter of the city.

El Raval

- El Raval is Barcelona's colorful sometime red-light district, right next to the Barri Gòtic. Until the city walls were pulled down, this area was densely populated, mostly by poorer citizens. In part because it was never a fashionable district, much medieval building survives.
- This quarter is the site of the Catalan Gothic 15th-century Antic Hospital de la Santa Creu (Old Hospital of the Holy Cross).
 - The hospital has been restored and now serves as a library, containing the most complete collection of documents relating to Catalonia's history. In the Middle Ages, it was considered one of the best and most progressive hospitals in Europe. The large complex of buildings was founded by Martin the Humanist, Wilfred the Hairy's last descendant, and was considered an innovation in 1401.
 - Martin's idea was to centralize all hospital and hospice—and some orphanage—functions into one building, with its own kitchens, laundry, medical center, and convalescent space. It treated both the mentally and the physically ill and cared for the indigent who were unable to work.
 - Inside, the wards containing the beds of the infirm were large, open spaces, allowing for light and air to circulate. It was so successful that it remained Barcelona's main hospital until 1929.
- Not far away is perhaps the best preserved of the Romanesque churches in the city: Sant Pau del Camp (St. Paul in the Fields). Founded in the 9th century as a monastic retreat well outside the old town, it survived to see both the religious foundation and the city expand.

- The entrance contains one of the rare memories of Visigothic decoration on the capitals of two columns. The church itself is a Greek cross structure (in other words, the nave and transepts are of equal length), and the interior is barrel vaulted.
- Of greatest interest, perhaps, are the cloisters, where dynamic figures of animals and vegetables, monstrous creatures, and biblical narratives decorate the capitals of the columns.
- Also in El Raval is the splendid Museu Marítim (Maritime Museum), built on the site of Barcelona's medieval shipyards. When completed in 1378, these shipyards were some of the greatest in Europe; they could hold up to 30 galleys at one time, and the dry docks sloped directly into the water to facilitate launching the huge Catalan ships.
 - Like the Venetians, the Catalans used galleys because of their value as cargo vessels. The shallow drafts and broad beams of these ships made them ideal for sailing the rather calm and gentle waters of the Mediterranean. To compensate for the many periods of calm, these ships had oars for power, as well as sails. Moreover, they could quickly be transformed into fortresses on water, full of archers and soldiers.
 - One of the most engaging exhibits in the museum is the full-size replica of a galley that fought at the famous Battle of Lepanto in 1571, when the combined Christian fleets defeated the Turks. Visitors can see the places for the 359 galley slaves or prisoners used to make this remarkable vessel move and maneuver.
 - Apart from the replica of the galley, the museum's collection also includes fishing vessels, navigation charts, dioramas of Barcelona's waterfront, and an audiovisual display that recreates the experience of those slaves and prisoners who were forced to row the massive ships.
- Santa Maria del Mar is Barcelona's church of the working people of the city and was built by them with their own labor.

- During its period of construction, the city's porters, for example, spent a day each week carrying stones from the royal quarries on their backs for its construction. As a result of this devotion, Santa Maria del Mar was erected in just 55 years, resulting in a remarkable unity of both internal and external style.
- Because it was a church of the working classes, it was never very extravagantly decorated, letting the fine Gothic architecture speak dramatically without embellishment.
- The Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya offers a full survey of Catalonian art over 1,000 years and includes a magnificent collection of 12th-century frescoes and Romanesque art.

Modern Barcelona

- The Palau de la Música Catalana was built in 1908 by the architect Domènech i Montaner in the Sant Pere district of Barcelona, a short walk from the cathedral and Royal Palace. It is one of the most famous modernist structures in the world. Although it enjoys many of the lines and decorative attributes of art nouveau, it is a unique vision. The interior of the hall is a riot of stained-glass color in the ceiling, and above the stage are 18 images of the muses created from mosaic and statuary.
- The architect Antoni Gaudí and Barcelona have become synonymous. Gaudí was born in 1852 and died tragically early in his beloved city in 1926. His mystical belief in the redemptive power of Catholicism, art, and architecture links him to earlier Catalan mystics, such as Ramon Llull, with whom he has been compared.
 - A devout and traditional Catholic, Gaudí focused his entire energy for almost 20 years on the construction of a new cathedral church, the Church of the Holy Family (Sagrada Família) in the Eixample neighborhood above the Barri Gòtic.
 - His inspirations were the Moorish tiles that connected him to Barcelona's past, hence his covering of huge surfaces



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Gaudí's love and appreciation for natural forms inspired much of his work, visible particularly in the Parc Güell, where nature and human structures are fused.

with shards of brightly colored ceramics. His modernist belief in form brought lithe curves to every feature of the building, in both horizontal and vertical lines. And his fervid imagination inspired architectural fantasies, with the palette of a kaleidoscope.

- Gaudí died from injuries sustained after he stepped into the path of a tram. His funeral attracted almost the entire population of the city, because in many ways, Gaudí had become the symbol of Barcelona—at once a medieval city and an inspiration for the modern imagination.

Suggested Reading

Eaude, *Catalonia: A Cultural History*.

Hughes, *Barcelona*.

Tree, *Barcelona, Catalonia*.

Questions to Consider

1. Barcelona thrived on the trade of the Mediterranean and declined when European trade moved to the Atlantic coast. Can you see this pattern of economic rise and fall in cities or regions of the modern world?
2. It is often said that Gaudí's modern architecture had its roots in the medieval traditions of Barcelona. Are you aware of other instances in which the modern has sprung from the medieval?

Insider Tips

There has been an attempt to make the El Raval neighborhood, right next to the harbor, a little less seedy, especially at night. As a result, the area now features some trendy art galleries and studios, but visitors should still be wary of pickpockets.

The Carrer Montcada, behind Santa Maria del Mar, features both medieval urban palace architecture and trendy shops, bars, and restaurants. This narrow street is lined with elegant medieval mansions, but that is not the reason that most travelers seek it out. It is the site of the Picasso Museum, which occupies five of the sumptuous palaces on the street.

For a real experience of the Barri Gòtic, walk the narrow, often arched lanes and narrow streets of the neighborhood. The stone buildings, whether nobleman's palace, merchants' mansions, or craftsmen's shop fronts, are still immediately recognizable, as are the spaces for the *mezuzahs* on former Jewish houses and other memories of the counts of Barcelona before the coming of Ferdinand and Isabella and Christopher Columbus. The streets and squares around the cathedral and the Generalitat offer an opportunity to return to the medieval urban experience in a way few other European cities afford.

Dubrovnik—Pearl of the Adriatic

Lecture 15

Dubrovnik is one of the most beautiful cities in Croatia, known for its perfectly preserved medieval city walls, its elegant public buildings, and its palaces and churches, as well as its glorious harbor. In many ways, it looks very Venetian, although it was only briefly part of the Venetian Republic's maritime empire. Of all the major centers on the Dalmatian coast of what is now Croatia, only Dubrovnik—then named the Republic of Ragusa—maintained its independence. Indeed, the city even challenged great Venice itself in the Adriatic trade, with a fleet once numbering more than 600 ships and so famous for maritime commerce that the word “argosy” comes from the name Ragusa.

A Maritime Fortress

- As we approach Dubrovnik, or Ragusa, our first impression of the city is as a maritime fortress, dominated by its vast circuit of walls. The earliest fortifications were constructed in the 10th century but extended and elaborated in the 13th.
- Well-located forts along the walls, such as Fort St. John and the freestanding Lovrjenac bastion, which was begun in the 14th century, allowed for concentrated defense from both the sea and land.
- A tradition of freedom and republicanism results from Dubrovnik's early and medieval history. In Roman times, this was a prosperous colony, Epidaurum, with a population of about 40,000. After the fall of Rome, the Dalmatian coast was invaded by barbarian tribes, resulting in the destruction of the Greco-Roman city; the survivors were driven to nearby Laus, a rocky island, on which they founded the city Ragusium.
- In the 7th century, Slavic Croatian tribes reached the coast and established a settlement across the narrow, marshy channel from

Laus, which they called Dubrovnik. Ragusium and Dubrovnik eventually merged into one town by the 11th century.

- Dubrovnik enjoyed the protection of the Byzantine Empire until the 13th century. But by then, the city was rich from trade; it began to institute self-government and to elect its own rector. Venice took control of Ragusa from 1205 to 1358. After that, Ragusa was briefly incorporated into the kingdom of Hungary, but in reality, the city thrived as a free republic from 1358 until it was captured by Napoleon at the beginning of the 19th century.
- In 1815, the Congress of Vienna awarded the territory to Austria, and after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1918, it became part of what would be known as Yugoslavia. Following the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the so-called Homeland War was fought from 1991 to 1992. In the aftermath, Dubrovnik secured its independence and is today a major city of the Republic of Croatia.

Entering the City

- There are two main gates through the ramparts: the eastern, smaller Ploče Gate and the western Pile Gate, which is the main entrance to the old town. Because the Ploče Gate (dating from the 15th century) was the access gate to the harbor, it enjoys some of the most effective of the medieval fortifications. The revelin that protects the Ploče Gate was constructed in 1462 in anticipation of an attack by the Turks, but it was later strengthened in 1538 out fear of the Venetians.
 - A revelin is a fort built across from a gate to protect the weak point in the walls. The revelin that protects the Ploče Gate is freestanding and consists of four asymmetrical walls, with the sea wall stretching into the harbor and the landward sides protected by a ditch.
 - Because the revelin was the most secure site in town, meetings of the Great Council were held here. It also became the treasury of both the city and cathedral. This civic function was extended to the population at large after an earthquake in 1667;

the revelin held the private property of citizens whose homes had been destroyed.

- The defensive complex is completed by the Fortress of St. John, now housing the maritime museum and an aquarium. The huge building we see today is another fortress of the 16th century, replacing earlier forts that were needed to guard the harbor.
- In the Middle Ages, these stone structures were augmented by a great harbor chain, used to close the harbor in times of danger. One end of the Dubrovnik harbor chain was fixed to the Fortress of St. John, then carried across the harbor entrance to the island immediately in front and then back again to the St. Luke Tower, another bastion on the walls.
- Outside the Ploče Gate, we can see the *lazaretto* (quarantine station). Beside it is the ancient church of St. Lazarus, which was once associated with the first lepers' hospice (1306). The buildings



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A massive metal chain was used to close the harbor of Ragusa against enemy ships, pirates, and smugglers; only those with legitimate business could sail into port.

standing today date from the 16th century and after. Eventually, the main buildings of the *lazaretto* developed from a lepers' hospice into a hospice for quarantining sick merchants or sailors who had arrived by sea.

- The older inner gate is sometimes called St. Luke's Gate in reference to the small church nearby. This was also known as the Passing Church, because its bells tolled whenever a citizen of the town died. Romanesque in design, with a rounded arch entry, the inner gate is austere and narrow. Above it is a statue of St. Blaise, the patron saint of the city.

The Dominican Monastery

- Just past the Ploče Gate in the city is the huge Dominican monastery, originally built in 1315. It has been renovated a number of times, including after the 1667 earthquake and in the early 19th century after it was taken over by Napoleon's troops for a barracks and stable. The size and wealth of this foundation in the Middle Ages were such that the expansion of the monastery required the walls to be extended to permit the growth of the monastic community.
- The monastic church is one of the largest Gothic churches in Dalmatia. Visitors enter through the original carved doorway by Bonino of Milan (1419) and pass a Romanesque statue of the order's founder, St. Dominic.
 - The church is a single-naved structure with a pointed Gothic arch leading to the apse. Suspended from the arch above the altar is a wonderful crucifix, painted in 1394 by Paolo Veneziano.
 - Most of the great medieval preaching churches of the mendicant orders of Franciscans and Dominicans are single naved. The intent was for the faithful to enjoy clear sightlines and hear the celebrated preachers who came to encourage the local population in the faith.
- The Gothic cloisters of the church were constructed between 1456 and 1483. Their perfect quatrefoil tracery and Gothic arches create

a tranquil environment. The rooms around the cloister are no longer the cells and meeting spaces for the monks but have been repurposed as the Diocesan Museum, which holds an interesting collection of Croatian medieval religious art.

Luža Square

- Luža Square dominates the eastern end of the city. It was once the city market but now houses a concentration of the most important civic structures in the city. One side of the square contains the cathedral, now a completely baroque church dedicated to St. Blaise. Above the altar still stands the Gothic 15th-century image of St. Blaise that somehow survived the 1667 earthquake and a later fire.
- The connection of the city with St. Blaise is odd and refers more to the Ragusan fear of Venice than anything else. St. Blaise was an Armenian physician who was martyred in 316. According to legend, in 971, he appeared to a canon of the cathedral in Ragusa, warning of an impending attack by the Venetians. The canon, in turn, warned the governor, who managed to ensure the safety of the city.
- In front of the cathedral is the famous Roland Column, carved in 1418 by Bonino of Milan. This elegant late Gothic structure is, in reality, a flagpole: The banner of the republic flew from its summit for almost 400 years.
 - The column, decorated with an image of the heroic knight Roland, is also highly symbolic. It stimulates memories of the defeat of the Saracens at Roncesvalles and the protection and victory of Christianity against Islam, as told in the medieval epic *La Chanson de Roland*.
 - The Roland Column's original orientation was to the east, intentionally facing the Turks. It was reoriented, however, in the 19th century, to face north—toward France and Austria, from which the new threat to Dalmatian independence was seen to emerge!

- The building opposite the cathedral is the elegant Renaissance-Gothic Sponza Palace, completed in 1522, on the north side of Luža Square. It miraculously survived the 1667 earthquake and, thus, gives an indication of how other large public and private palaces must have looked in the Middle Ages. The palace was one of the most important public structures in the city, containing the customs office and warehouse, the mint, and the bank and state treasury.
- Almost at right angles to the Sponza Palace on the Luža is the Rector's Palace, one of the most important and splendid medieval buildings in Dalmatia.
 - Ironically, the government of the Republic of Ragusa was modeled on the Venetian Republic, even if the equivalent of the doge—the rector—held office for only one month, rather than for life, as in Venice. In Ragusa, too, the Great Council functioned as the collective voice and authority of the property-owning mercantile elite. Indeed, parallels with Venice can be found in many places, both constitutional and built.
 - When Ragusa was reconstructed after its terrible earthquakes, it was meant to rival Venice in beauty, as well, with the finest Italian craftsmen brought to build Italian-style palaces and churches and construct the fortifications. Dubrovnik was also protected and flourished because of its civic freedom and its enlightened government and economic policies.

The Island of Lokrum

- About 2,000 feet off the coast of Dubrovnik is the small island of Lokrum. This island is not only part of the city's romantic history, but it has a powerful medieval connection, as well.
- The medieval inhabitants of the island were Benedictine monks, who arrived in 1023 and began the cultivation of orchards and gardens. The most famous visitor to the island in the Middle Ages was King Richard the Lionheart of England, who was shipwrecked here in 1192.

- When the French under Napoleon suppressed the Republic of Ragusa and incorporated it into the kingdom of Illyria, the island suffered along with the city. The anticlerical French closed the ancient Benedictine monastery and drove out the monks, in part so that they could erect a fort to protect the coast. The last act of the exiled monks was to curse anyone who took possession of their sacred land.
- Today, the island boasts a beautiful botanical garden and an elegant restaurant in what was once the medieval Benedictine abbey.

Suggested Reading

Harris, *Dubrovnik: A History*.

Letcher, *Dubrovnik*.

Villari, *The Republic of Ragusa*.

Questions to Consider

1. Dubrovnik, or the Republic of Ragusa, grew rich and powerful by maintaining the political and economic freedom of its mercantile elite. Is economic and political liberty always at the root of such successful cities and nations?
2. Like many European cities, Dubrovnik has strict codes regarding the appearance of both public and private structures. Are such restrictions ever justified?

Insider Tips

The Diocesan Museum in Dubrovnik houses Venetian panels, liturgical objects and sculpture, a work by Titian, and an important collection of paintings by local medieval artists from Ragusa. These Ragusan school panels and canvases, dating up the 16th century, reflect the sophistication and wealth of the republic and the cosmopolitan character of the city. In particular, look closely at a triptych by Nicholas Bozidarevic, painted in the 16th century. It shows St. Blaise cradling an image of Ragusa in his arms. This is what the city looked like before the 1667 earthquake.

Dubrovnik—City of Seven Flags

Lecture 16

Although Ragusa-Dubrovnik paid tribute to the Turkish sultan in Constantinople, in reality, the republic was ruled by its own merchant elite, a nobility celebrated for its diplomacy, education, and culture. The sons of the leading patrician families were expected to travel to Spain, France, England, Germany, and Italy for their higher education. The experience abroad would benefit both them and their city when they became diplomats and international merchants. Indeed, the city lived by trade and commerce, and knowledge of the world was a requirement for success. Its schooling in international affairs and its outward perspective meant that the Republic of Ragusa lasted longer than so many other mercantile republics—until the time of Napoleon.

Enlightened Government

- The Republic of Ragusa had an astonishingly enlightened system of government and social policy for its time. In 1317, it had a public pharmacy; in 1416, slavery was abolished; and it boasted one of the first orphanages in Europe.
- Unlike Venice, which was constantly at war with the Turks, Ragusa-Dubrovnik made its peace with the Turkish sultan, and some Ragusans even converted to Islam. It was thought that it was better to ally with a more powerful enemy than to bleed to death through constant war. Further, Ragusa usually feared the Venetians far more than it feared the Turks.
- Because of this often-complex bartering of loyalty, Dubrovnik was known as the Town of Seven Flags. In fact, the city sent warships to both Turkish and Christian fleets in the naval battles of the Adriatic, depending on which power offered the greatest protection.
 - This flexible policy was hardly seen as unprincipled, in fact, quite the opposite: The fundamental goal of the republic was to

preserve its independence and maintain a balance of power in a dangerous and disputed territory.

- Liberty was the city's most prized possession, and it was able to maintain its freedom through clever diplomacy, as well as the strategic and mercantile advantages it could bring to other states. The republic was Venice's major maritime rival in the Adriatic, and as such, it was a sought-after ally to balance the ambitious and aggressive Venetians.
- This policy worked brilliantly; not only the powers of Europe but even those of Islam saw the attraction of an independent Ragusa.
- Ragusa's connection to the Turks, as well as economic competition, made the Venetians distrust and dislike the small but powerful republic. As protection against Venice, Ragusa gave the Turks small territories around the city so that any Venetian attack would be a direct assault on the Ottoman Empire. This brilliant diplomatic maneuver helped sustain Ragusan independence until 1808, when Napoleon annexed the state into the largely fictional kingdom of Illyria.

The Rector's Palace

- The Rector's Palace is the cradle of one of Europe's most successful political systems. Note, however, that because of the long history of Ragusa-Dubrovnik and the effects of a series of natural disasters, the palace has changed considerably over time. This is reflected in the exhibitions in its rooms today, which take us from the Middle Ages to the last days of the republic in the late 18th century.
- Originally, there had been a fortress here, dating to at least the 13th century, but by the mid-14th century, documents also speak of a "palace" associated with the site. It is thought that part of the old defensive building was being used as the seat of government.

- Because the fortress had been seriously compromised by a series of fires and explosions of gunpowder, it was decided in 1435 to rebuild the structure completely.
- The architect/engineer chosen to carry out the task was the same Neapolitan, Onofrio della Cava, who had built the aqueduct and the fountain that bears his name.
- No expense was spared in the 1435 reconstruction. Four original late Gothic capital carvings survive from this time at the southern corner of the porch, but unfortunately, another fire in 1463 led to another reconstruction of the Rector's Palace. This effort was entrusted to an Italian architect, who added large windows on the southern and western façades and used new Renaissance designs on the capitals in the atrium and porch.
- The earthquakes of 1520 and 1667 did a great deal of damage to the building. Consequently, much of what we see today is baroque. But the prison cells, façade, arcade, and other major elements of the building remain still perfect in their late Gothic style.

In and around Luža Square

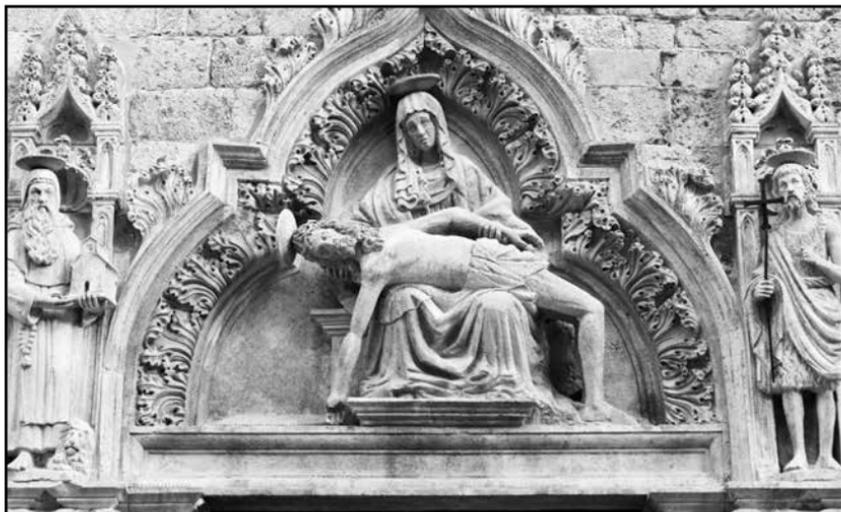
- The Palace of the Major Council, built in the 14th century and restructured in 1487 by the same architect who designed the Sponza Palace, probably had a façade very similar to that building. The façade was decorated with important sculptures, and there was direct access to the Rector's Palace.
- The Palace of the Major Council was destroyed by fire in 1816 and was rebuilt much later in the 19th century in the same neo-Gothic taste as the city hall. Similarly, the Palace of the Main Guard was built as a Gothic structure to house the military commander of the Republic of Ragusa. It was completely rebuilt in the 18th century, redesigned according to baroque tastes.
- Close by is the Little Onofrio Fountain, the smaller of the public sources of fresh water constructed by the architect, engineer, and

sculptor Onofrio della Cava. Originally, this fountain was to supply water to the market square. The fountain was built in 1438, and its sculptural elements and decorative frieze are by the Milanese sculptor Pietro di Martino.

- This fountain also made a major statement about the nature of citizenship and inclusion in the republic, in that only Christians could drink from it. The Jews of Dubrovnik had to use another very simple fountain reserved for them alone.
- The proximity of the two fountains was later seen as a problem, and the fountain for Jews was moved to the western end of town, just outside the Pile Gate. Water was highly symbolic, and as in many other medieval cities, Jews were considered to be in the community but not of it.
- Although the Jewish population of Ragusa was small and restricted in what it was permitted to do, the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492 led to a resurgence of this community.
- Many Jews sought refuge from Christian persecution, ironically, in Turkey, where the sultan and his regime were far more enlightened than the Christians of Europe. Because many ships en route to Constantinople stopped at Ragusa, a number of Jewish refugees got off and stayed.
- The Jews had to live in a small ghetto around what is still called Jewry Street, where the second-oldest functioning synagogue in Europe still stands.
- The tallest structure among the civic buildings of Luža Square is the bell tower, which rises to a height of almost 100 feet. The tower was constructed in 1444 to house the bells of the republic, as well as the official clock. The clock has two wooden “greenies” (*zelenci*)—carved figures that sound the hours—dating from about 1476.

The Stradun

- Dubrovnik's main street, the Stradun, or Placa, runs between eastern Luža Square and the Pile Gate. This pedestrian corridor was created in the 11th century by covering the channel that once separated the ancient Roman and Slavic settlements. It was paved in 1468, and the polished marble pavers today give the city a sense of brightness and cleanliness.
- At the western end of the Stradun is the convent of the Poor Clares and Church of St. Clare. This complex was run by the female followers of St. Francis and dates from the late 13th to early 14th centuries. It was once the refuge for girls from the most prominent families and, hence, wealthy enough to establish one of Europe's first orphanages by 1434.
- Opposite the convent is the large Franciscan monastery, begun in 1317. The huge monastic complex begins just inside the Pile Gate and continues along one side of the Stradun.



The exquisite Gothic portal carved in the late 15th century gives us a glimpse into the wonderful sights that must have continually engaged the eye before the earthquake that devastated Ragusa.

- The interior of the church is baroque; it was completely reconstructed after the 1667 earthquake. The cloisters date from the 1360s and survive almost as they were when first made. The columns have capitals carved with birds, animals, human heads, and mythical beasts.
- The monastery pharmacy was established in 1317, making it the third oldest in the world and the oldest surviving pharmacy in Europe. In many cities of medieval Europe, monks were the cultivators of medicinal plants and, hence, the pharmacists.
- At the end of the Stradun, near the Pile Gate, is the large Onofrio's Fountain, made in 1438 by the builder of the smaller one we saw earlier. The fountain was originally designed to parallel the appearance of the Romanesque baptistery attached to the cathedral. Sadly, this medieval baptistery was destroyed in the 1667 earthquake.
 - The water, which emerges from the fountain's 16 carved heads, comes from a spring more than seven miles away. It is delivered by an aqueduct from a well. The hydraulic engineering employed by Onofrio is extremely sophisticated for the 15th century because the water supply not only serviced this large fountain but also the Little Onofrio Fountain, the Rector's Palace, the Franciscan monastery, the fish market, and the Jewish fountain and even powered water mills on its journey into the city.
 - Sadly, the heads are all that remain from the original fountain. The surrounding structure of the fountain had to be largely rebuilt because it, too, was badly damaged by the 1667 earthquake and again in the 1991–1992 siege. However, the fountain continued to function during the siege and was one of the few sources of fresh water for the town.

The Pile Gate

- The Pile Gate has always been the main entry to the city. There is an inner gate dating from 1460 that leads to a later outer gate. The

elegant rounded structure, with its Renaissance arch, was completed in its current form in 1537. As does the Ploče Gate, the Pile also displays a carved figure of St. Blaise cradling his city, surrounded by a classically inspired frame with Corinthian columns above the lintel.

- The stone bridge across the deep defensive moat, now dry, that circles the landward perimeter of the town, was completed by a drawbridge. Every evening at nightfall, a spectacular ceremony was held to life the drawbridge in the presence of the rector, who was entrusted with the key to the city.
 - The bridge would be kept up and the gate locked until first light, when Dubrovnik would again be accessible to outsiders.
 - Highly symbolic of the need for constant vigilance and the role of civic authority in the lives of the citizens, the ceremony reminds us of the need to protect forever this beautiful city.

Suggested Reading

Harris, *Dubrovnik: A History*.

Letcher, *Dubrovnik*.

Villari, *The Republic of Ragusa*.

Questions to Consider

1. The Republic of Ragusa maintained its freedom by wily diplomacy and shifting allegiances. Is it acceptable to compromise principles in order to maintain freedom?
2. The gift of a small territory near Dubrovnik to the Ottoman Empire might have protected Dubrovnik in the past but is now causing great difficulties for the European Union. Can you think of other examples where a clever move in the past resulted in trouble for the present?

Insider Tips

The Stradun is more than a street: It is the stage set where the theater of Dubrovnik's life occurs, day and night. Lined today by elegant stores, cafés, ice cream stands—and tourist souvenir shops—it is the main business thoroughfare of the city and the route of the evening promenade and religious processions, such as the one honoring St. Blaise in February.

The street's wonderful regularity and consistency is unusual in a medieval city but no accident in Dubrovnik. Previously, the street was lined with unconnected urban palaces, shops, and religious buildings. But after the 1667 earthquake, the republic decreed that all reconstructed buildings on the Stradun must have a uniform design and height and must allow for shops at ground level. In this demand for elegance and beauty, as well as efficiency, the powerful burghers of Dubrovnik were far ahead of much of the rest of Europe.

Kraków—The Royal Way

Lecture 17

Kraków is now the second city of Poland, but before the court moved to Warsaw in the 17th century, it was the center of Polish political, economic, and cultural life. Wawel Hill, a promontory overlooking the Vistula River, became the site of a hill fort from the earliest times. It has been inhabited for at least 1,000 years and has been the seat of Polish kings since about the year 1000. The Wawel Royal castle was the legendary home of the wise and good—if mythical—King Krak. The legend of Wawel Hill reinforces the mixture of myth and history that characterizes Kraków. It also reinforces that powerful sense of religious obligation that has always distinguished the Polish nation.

Wawel Hill and Castle

- On Wawel Hill stands a sculpted figure of a great dragon, created by Bronislaw Chromy. This sculpture commemorates a legend associating the early history of Kraków with this site.
 - According to the legend, a dragon living in a cave was terrorizing the region, killing off lambs and children. King Krak called on his most valiant knights to slay the dragon, but none returned from the cave.
 - Finally, a simple shoemaker's apprentice managed to slay the dragon; he married the princess and himself became a good and wise ruler and the ancestor of Polish kings.
- Beneath Wawel Castle is Lost Wawel, an underground archeological site where visitors can see the remains of the original castle. The castle was built at the end of the 11th and the beginning of the 12th centuries in a solid Romanesque style, with round towers and small slit windows.
 - The remains of parts of the 10th-century Church of the Blessed Virgin are visible in Lost Wawel, as are objects found during excavation, such as keys, shoes, and ceramics.

- This earliest foundation is only vestigial because the castle was rebuilt in the 14th century into one of the grandest royal residences east of the Rhine. Models of the original buildings show how the complex has changed over time.
- The elegantly proportioned Renaissance courtyard of the castle has an early-16th-century colonnade, with remnants of frescoes on the upper galleries. This courtyard is partly the work of Italian architects who rebuilt the castle in the 16th century.
 - The regular arches, with their geometric precision and elegant columns and capitals, attest to the connection between Poland and Italy in the Renaissance.
 - In 1518, the daughter of the duke of Milan, Bona Sforza, married Sigismund the Old, the king who was responsible for much of the rebuilding of the castle. As queen, she introduced the style of Italian models into her adopted country, where they were soon grafted onto the rich traditional practices of Polish building and culture.
- Memories of the Gothic structure of the castle, however, are still visible, characterized by the use of brick construction, pointed arches, and blind arcades. Notice the Kurza Stopa (Hen's Foot) Tower, with its expansive balcony and bays, as well as the Sandomierski Tower (1460), the prison for criminals of high birth and status.
- The interior of the castle has suffered greatly because of the turbulent history of the country, which was even wiped off the map by the last partitions of the 18th century until 1918. The decoration and furnishings date from the 17th to the 19th centuries, including tapestries, pictures, furniture, and porcelain.
- Displayed in the Crown Treasury and Armory are small memories of the medieval state regalia, especially the coronation sword of Polish kings, used from the 14th century until the end of the 18th century.

- In the Room of the Envoys, 30 heads (originally 194), carved in the 16th century, decorate the coffering on the ceiling. They represent citizens of Poland from every social group and constituted a kind of silent witness to the important state events that took place in this room.

Wawel Cathedral

- A cathedral has stood on the site of the current one almost from the beginnings of Polish Christianity, certainly by about 1000 A.D. The current building dates from the 14th century and is dedicated to Saints Wenceslaus and Stanislaus.

- It is worth the climb to see the Sigismund Bell in the tower named after it. It is the largest bell in Poland and was cast for King Sigismund in 1520. Touching the bell with your left hand guarantees good fortune.



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- The royal effigies in the crypts below and distributed around the nave and ambulatory are splendid works of art. Some of the most interesting are in the church itself, such as the 14th-century Gothic tomb of Casimir the Great. Also attached to the cathedral is the Renaissance St. Sigismund Chapel (begun in 1519), which holds the tomb effigy of Sigismund Augustus, carved by the Italian Santi Gucci.

Polish kings were crowned in Wawel Cathedral, and their bodies remain here in the ambulatory and royal crypt.

The Old Town

- Kanonicza Street is a beautiful medieval and early Renaissance street and was once home to the canons of the cathedral. In fact,

before the town expanded to connect the city and the castle, this was a separate village, Okól.

- The Museum of the Archdiocese at 19–21 Kanonicza holds many medieval objects and a special collection dedicated to Pope John Paul II, who was once archbishop of Kraków.
- Number 17 Kanonicza is also worth a brief stop; it is the Bishop Erasmus Ciolek Palace, now part of the national museum of Kraków. The building was first constructed in the 14th century but was renovated and enlarged in 1505. Inside are wonderful examples of Polish sculpture and painting from the 13th to the 18th centuries.
 - Such buildings and collections give us a powerful sense of the sophistication and rich culture of medieval Poland. Kraków was, after all, a crossroads of Europe, with trading links to the east, west, north, and south. It also had strong dynastic and religious connections with western and southern Europe, as well as with the German states that were as often partners as enemies.
 - The common language of Catholic Christianity superseded the difficulty of the vernacular and the often-frontier elements of the countryside. In Kraków, we see a European city with a distinctly Polish character.
- Also within sight of Wawel Hill is the Gothic Church of St. Giles, at the corner of Grodzka Street, which connects the castle to the market square. The church dates from the 14th century and is small but possesses a simple Gothic elegance.

Route to the Market Square

- The fortress Church of St. Andrew was the main church of Okól, built originally in the 11th century. The then-stout Romanesque church was both a place of worship and a refuge in the 1241 attacks of the Mongols.
- Further along toward the market square is the huge mass of the former Carmelite monastery on the Planty. This was the 17th-

century site of the Discalced Carmelite, or Barefoot Carmelite, house, which was turned into a prison in the 19th century. After World War II, it became the Museum of Archeology, with exhibits from Egyptian antiquity through the early finds relating to the Slavs in Poland, as well as Greco-Roman objects.

- The Planty is a park that encircles the city, occupying the space once taken by the city walls and moat, which were demolished in the early 19th century to permit better traffic flow and integrate the old walled town with its suburbs.
- The Franciscan church, dating from the 1260s, is a wonderful example of Polish Gothic style. The mid-13th-century frieze on the façade is characterized by an architectural arcade that is pure decoration rather than a structure for windows or to carry weight, a common element of Polish Gothic design.
 - This church witnessed some of the great moments in Polish history and contains many artifacts from them. For example, it holds the tomb of Prince Boleslaw, who laid out the boundaries of the town during its rebuilding after the Mongol raids of 1241.
 - The church was also the place of the baptism into Christianity of Prince Ladislas Jagiello in 1385. His marriage with the Polish queen Jadwiga united Poland and Lithuania and made Poland a huge and powerful kingdom.
- One of the oldest and most distinguished universities in east-central Europe is the Jagiellonian University of Kraków. Like all large universities, the Jagiellonian consists of several buildings, such as the 19th-century neo-Gothic Collegium Novum. In front of another university building, the Collegium Physicum, is a bronze statue of Nicolaus Copernicus, the Polish astronomer and priest, shown as a young student.
- The heart of the ancient university is the Collegium Maius (Great College). The university was founded in 1364 by King

Casimir the Great and assumed quarters in a structure on this site not long afterward.

- On the façade, note the beautiful oriel window (c. 1430)—a bay window support by corbels or brackets to permit it to project without support from the ground. Note, too, the stepped Polish gables with inset windows to the left of the archway, which date from the later 14th and 15th centuries.
- The courtyard retains its late Gothic elegance, with a covered arcade that runs around the ground story and stairs that lead to a walkway above the arcade that originally connected directly to the various rooms of the old university.
- At the top of the stairs is a gilded Gothic door of 1494, the Porta Aurea (Golden Door), which leads to the library. Although much has changed in its furnishings and decoration, the painted, vaulted Gothic hall is still visible.
- In the treasury are three ceremonial maces. The oldest, from 1405, was a gift of Queen Jadwiga; the second dates from 1464, and the third, from 1495. All are still used for ceremonies of the university.
- The Jagiellonian Globe, probably made in France around the turn of the 16th century, was the first armillary sphere to record—somewhat imperfectly—the New World just discovered by Columbus.
- The Aula Magna (Great Hall) sits in the oldest part of the building and is where the university received the kings of Poland. It was originally the lecture theater of the faculty of theology but is now used for formal university events.

Suggested Reading

Zamoyski, *Poland: A History*.

Zygulski, *Cracow: An Illustrated History*.

Questions to Consider

1. Kraków—and Poland in general—has suffered greatly over the centuries because of its position surrounded by more powerful states. Can you identify modern countries that face a comparable “threat from geography”?
2. The Royal Way in Kraków is the formal ceremonial route through the city. Do all major cities have such ritual thoroughfares, even those that were never ruled by sovereigns?

Insider Tips

As you’re walking through Kraków, stop briefly at the 15th-century house at the base of Wawel Hill, on the corner of Kanonicza Street. This was the home of Jan Dlugosz, the historian of medieval Poland (d. 1480). At number 18 is the so-called Gothic House. Number 21, the house of the dean of the chapter, was designed by the Italian who carved Sigismund Augustus’s tomb in the nave of the cathedral, Santi Gucci. If the doors are open, look into the courtyards of these beautiful town mansions, which give an idea of the highly civilized life lived in Kraków in the late 15th and 16th centuries.

Kraków—Crossroads of Europe

Lecture 18

The market square of Kraków was the largest medieval square in Europe and is still the vital heart of the city. It was the transfer point of several medieval trade routes and represents the economic center of the rich Polish kingdom and the crossroads of east and west. In this lecture, we'll walk through the market square, visiting the Cloth Hall that dominates it and the 14th-century Church of St. Mary. We will then proceed down Floriańska Street to view the circuit of walls around Kraków. We'll close our tour with a visit to Kazimierz, the once-thriving Jewish quarter of the city.

Kraków's Market Square

- The size, location, and even, to a degree, function of Kraków's market square result from the charter of the city issued after the Mongol assault of 1241 by Prince Boleslaw in 1257. The square has a rational plan, with the side streets radiating outward. Except for the complications that resulted from the preexisting buildings at the edges, it is, in fact, an exact square.
- The Gothic 13th- and 14th-century town hall was pulled down around the same time as the walls of the city were demolished in the 19th century. The tower, however, remains as a memory of the building and a tribute to its elegant Polish Gothic design.
- Dominating the market square is the Cloth Hall, named for the stalls of cloth merchants who sold their fabrics inside. The production and sale of woolen cloth was extremely important to the economy of Kraków and attracted merchants from all over Europe. The hall we see today was built in 1555, replacing an earlier structure destroyed by fire.
- Underneath the Cloth Hall and market square is an engaging interactive experience of the Middle Ages in Kraków. Visitors can see sections of the original paving and the foundations of the buildings above. There are burial sites, illuminated maps tracing



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A cloth hall in the center of Kraków's market square was almost always part of the city plan; the first building was constructed by Casimir the Great in the 14th century.

the trade routes to and from Kraków in the Middle Ages, and early market stalls and re-creations of medieval shops.

- Also on the market square is a structure that predates the Mongol assault, the Church of St. Adalbert. The historian and canon of the cathedral Jan Długosz records that a church was built on the spot where St. Adalbert had preached in the town in the 11th century. This structure was then replaced during the early 12th century with a Romanesque church, which today forms the base of the building.

Church of St. Mary

- The 14th-century Church of St. Mary is the most important example of Polish Gothic architecture and the spiritual center of the Old Town of Kraków.

- There had been a Romanesque church on the site, and the current building used some of its foundations. The Mongol invasions, however, probably destroyed part or all of this building, which once had a tower attached to it. Because of its height, this was the watchtower of the city.
- The first—and most devastating—of the Mongol attacks came in 1241 and was first sighted from the tower. According to the story, a sentry on duty saw the Mongols approach and sounded the alarm by playing his trumpet. The Mongols shot arrows to silence him, one of which pierced his throat and caused him to break off the alarm in mid-phrase. From at least the 14th century until today, a bugler on the hour replays the same medieval tune, stopping at the same point as that brave sentry.
- It is also said that the two Gothic towers represent the two parts of the Polish Republic: Poland and Lithuania, united by the marriage of Jadwiga and Jagiello. These two towers are what travelers to the city would see first as they approached.
- The interior of St. Mary's is both imposing and serene. It was decorated over a long period of time and, hence, reflects numerous styles. The church was the parish of the wealthiest merchant families, many of whom had their mansions around the square and competed in giving gifts to St. Mary's.
- The choir has 14th-century stained-glass windows and baroque choir stalls. The exterior of this narrow structure is a lovely example of decorated Gothic, with its finials, sculptured decorations, and height. In fact, it was suggested that the success of the choir drove Jadwiga and Jagiello, together with the wealthy citizens of the town, to rebuild the rest of the church in a more decorated Gothic form.
- The masterpiece of the church is the altarpiece by Veit Stoss. It has been called the finest example of late Gothic carving in Europe. Because the church is dedicated to the Virgin Mary, the huge sculpture depicts her life. It was commissioned by the city

councilors of Kraków and took Stoss almost 12 years to complete, from 1477 until 1489. Popular lore holds that Stoss used the people of Kraków, of all classes, as his models for the many heads in his masterpiece.

St. Barbara's and the Dominican Church

- The Gothic Church of St. Barbara probably owes its existence to the building and rebuilding of St. Mary's; it is generally accepted that the bricks used to construct it were surplus from the larger church. Inside St. Barbara's is an early-15th-century figure of Mary with the dead Christ.
 - The sculpture outside the entrance of Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane is likely the work of one of Veit Stoss's assistants on the altarpiece.
 - As with most churches, there was a cemetery on the site, but it was relocated outside the town. Some of the most elegant stones, however, were saved and attached to the walls as a reminder of what had been there.
- The Dominican church is one of the largest of the Gothic churches in Kraków, as is usual for this preaching order. First given to a group of Italian Dominicans who arrived in 1222, the small, preexisting Romanesque structure was rebuilt soon after and again following the Mongol assault of 1241. The church was continually enlarged and extended, and a monastery complex was added, creating one of the largest religious spaces in Poland.

Floriańska Street and the City Walls

- The fashionable buildings on both sides of Floriańska Street originally date from the 14th century but have been renovated repeatedly because this has always been a good neighborhood.
- Just off Floriańska is the Czartoryski Museum, established by a princess Czartoryski in the late 18th century in what began as the city arsenal. Its greatest treasure is Leonardo da Vinci's portrait of Cecilia Gallerani, known as the *Lady with an Ermine*.

- Continuing along the street, we arrive at the surviving sections of the once-mighty circuit of medieval walls. The first walls were of wood and earth, but after the Mongol destruction of the buildings outside Wawel Hill and the granting of the city charter in 1257, it was agreed that new, more powerful defenses should be constructed. These 14th-century double walls with a moat had 47 towers and gates and were strong enough to save the city from an assault by the king of Bohemia in 1345.
- The Tower of the Haberdashers and the Tower of the Joiners both date from the 14th century. The curious names result from the requirement of the city guilds to protect parts of the city by fortifying and defending towers. Inside the towers, visitors can still see the sentry's and soldiers' walkway built in wood to allow quick passage of the large circuit of fortifications.
- The only gate of the city to survive was that of St. Florian, the patron saint of Kraków. This gate marks the beginning or end of the Royal Way, linking the fortifications to Wawel Hill and the castle. The Florian Gate was built in 1307, although the depiction of St. Florian on the inside is baroque, and the Polish eagle on the outside is by Jan Matejko.
- Continuing beyond the gate toward the district of Kleparz, we see the final additions to the defensive network of medieval Kraków: the Barbican, built at the end of the 15th century.
 - This fortress was needed because of the danger of a Turkish attack. It was the latest technology in 1498–1499, circular in design with walls three meters thick to protect the defenders from cannon fire while allowing them to direct their fire from the many gun-slit windows. It was a marvel of military engineering.
 - To ensure easy communications with the main circuit of walls, a “neck” was built through the gate to permit reinforcements and supplies to reach the Barbican. The neck was demolished

with the city walls in the early 19th century for the creation of Planty Park.

Kazimierz: Kraków's Jewish District

- The huge equestrian bronze of King Ladislas Jagiello makes an appropriate transition to Kraków's Jewish quarter. This monument was erected in 1910 to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Polish victory under Jagiello over the Teutonic Knights at the Battle of Grunwald (Tannenberg), saving Polish independence from the Germans. During World War II, the Germans destroyed the monument, but it was restored after the war.
- The district of Kazimierz was once a separate town, cut off from Kraków by a part of the Vistula River now filled in and taking its name from King Casimir the Great, who chartered it in 1335. By the 15th century, it had its own walls and gates and had developed into a thriving market center; by the end of the century, Jews constituted a substantial proportion of the population.
- The Old Synagogue was built at the end of the 15th century and rebuilt after a fire in 1557. It was mostly destroyed by the Nazis, but some parts survived, and the building is now the Jewish Museum.
- Just down the street is the Remuh Synagogue, named for Rabbi Moses Remuh in the mid-16th century. The rabbi is buried in the attached cemetery, which displays a large collection of 16th- and early-17th-century Hebrew tombstones. These tombstones survived the Nazis because they had been buried in the 17th century to save them from desecration at the hands of another invader, the Swedes.
- On Szeroka Street is the Popper Synagogue, a temple built by a rich banker for his congregation. The entrance was once decorated with symbolic animals representing devotion: the leopard, lion, deer, and eagle. The banker, Wolf Popper, was portrayed as a stork.
- There are—or were—a great many other synagogues and Jewish cultural and fraternal organizations in Kazimierz, and Jewish

names and Hebrew inscriptions can still be read on houses and commercial buildings. In 1939, there were about 60,000 Jews in the district; today, after the Holocaust, there are fewer than 5,000. The neighborhood, however, has become a place both of pilgrimage and study, because there is a strong desire to retain or recover that lost part of Polish history.

Suggested Reading

Zamoyski, *Poland: A History*.

Zygulski, *Cracow: An Illustrated History*.

Questions to Consider

1. The medieval city of Kraków grew up around a castle built on a hilltop. How important are considerations of security in the location and development of modern cities?
2. Despite its rich indigenous culture, some of the most important artworks in Kraków were made by foreigners. Does this indicate a healthy outward-looking society or an insecure culture?

Insider Tips

Every day of the week except Sunday, at precisely 11:50 a.m., you can purchase a ticket and watch the panels of the altarpiece at St. Mary's being unfolded and opened. The experience is well worth the price of admission.

As you walk around the market square in Kraków, note the elegant and extremely varied architecture of the grand houses that face the square. These were the mansions of the merchant patricians and the nobility; now they are restaurants, hotels, and offices. Try to imagine this space as what it once was: one of the best addresses in Kraków, celebrated by the brightly painted façades of beautiful houses in which the rich cultural, political, and economic life of the city took place.

If you are looking for sites to visit close to Kraków, Auschwitz is a day trip and Schindler's Enamelware Factory is close by, the site of *Schindler's List*. Also nearby is Nowa Huta, the steelworks constructed by the Soviets in the aftermath of World War II. Its pollution damaged the city, and the smoke from the factories obscured the views. But now the furnaces and hammers are almost silent because the factories were not competitive with modern mills. Nowa Huta allows visitors to appreciate what Kraków escaped and celebrate the survival of one of Europe's great medieval cities.

Prague—Freedom of Mind and Spirit

Lecture 19

Prague has been called the most beautiful city in Europe. Its mixture of medieval, Renaissance, baroque, and art nouveau architecture and its haunting, almost magical atmosphere of narrow lanes, covered archways, and grand squares produces an effect like no other. Prague is a city of art and artists, of writers and musicians, and today, of bars and clubs that attract young people from all over the continent. It is a city that has been spared destruction in war but not the effects of the Nazi occupation and the Holocaust, nor modern-day pollution and a communist political regime that did not fully honor the diversity of its culture. Still, it has survived and remains one of the jewels of European civilization.

Along the Royal Road

- As in Kraków, the Royal Road in Prague was the route taken by the monarch at the time of ceremonial entries, such as coronations. We begin our walk along it at the Powder Tower, which was first built in 1475 and marks the ceremonial entry into the Old Town.
 - The tower was initially built as a gate and, in its original form, was designed as part of the defensive system of the city, protecting an important route used by merchants to and from eastern Bohemia.
 - The gate was never completely finished because it was originally attached to the building that housed the royal court. But in 1484, the seat of royal government was returned to the district of Hradčany. The incomplete gate was then repurposed as a magazine for gunpowder until the 17th century.
 - It languished in a state of decay until it was razed and replaced by this neo-Gothic structure in 1875–1886; some of the 15th-century statuary and decoration of the Powder Tower were incorporated into the new structure.

- Next to the Powder Tower is the Municipal House, built in 1905–1912 on the site of the old royal court building. At that time, Bohemia and its capital of Prague were part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. This building was erected to celebrate the minority Czech population and to house exhibits of Czech cultural activities in Prague. At the end of World War I, the new Republic of Czechoslovakia was proclaimed in this building.
- Celetná Street is one of the oldest streets in Prague. Many of the buildings here have baroque façades and have recently been restored, but behind some are the original, much earlier structures. This street also has two important modern sites: Number 2 is believed to be the house where Albert Einstein first revealed his theory of relativity, and number 3 is where the Kafka family lived from 1896 to 1907.
- Behind Celetná is the Church of Our Lady before Týn. This area was once the *týn*—the walled foreign merchants’ enclosure. In this space, long-distance traders, especially those from Germany, established their presence on the right bank of the Vistula, while the Slavic people—the Czechs—kept to the left bank.
- The Courtyard of the Merchants operated as a warehouse for goods from the 11th to the 18th centuries and had its own customs house. This enclosed space protected the merchandise brought to Prague by foreigners. It also provided them with a place to gather socially in the evenings, giving rise to its other name: Jolly Court.

Inside the Church of Our Lady

- There was an older church on the site of Our Lady before Týn from the 12th century, attached to the foreign merchant community and its hospice. The Gothic church we see today was begun in 1365. From its early days, it was associated with reformist preachers, in particular Utraquists, that is, those who argued that the laity, as well as priests, should be given wine at communion.

- The tall but asymmetrical towers of the church are 250 feet high and still dominate the Old Town. These towers were asymmetrical, it was said, to represent the masculine and feminine principles of the world.
- Inside the church are several important Gothic elements, such as the 1493 canopy that once covered the tomb of an Utraquist bishop and a splendid early-16th-century *Baptism of Christ*. The red marble stone on a column at the head of the south aisle marks the burial place of the great Danish astronomer and nobleman Tycho Brahe, who died in 1601.
- Because of its reforming and Utraquist traditions, the Church of Our Lady became a powerful religious symbol for the Hussites. These were followers of the Czech reformer and national hero Jan Hus (c. 1369–1415), who preached a religion not dissimilar to what Martin Luther would advocate in the 16th century: a religion promising a greater role for the laity, abolition of Church property, communion in both kinds, a married clergy, and the Bible in the vernacular.

Old Town Square

- The Old Town Square of Prague has a dramatic statue of Jan Hus, commissioned in the 1890s but not created until 1903–1915. During the 1968 Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia, the statue was draped in black, hiding the words that champion the freedom of the Czech nation.
- The Old Town Square is not fully symmetrical because it grew from the function of the central marketplace in the 12th century. The square was also the place of public execution, especially of those now recognized as martyrs for the Czech cause.
- The 18th-century baroque Kinský Palace dominates one side of the square. At number 13 is the medieval House at the Stone Bell. Beneath its baroque façade was discovered a 14th-century mansion that might well have been the house of two Holy Roman Emperors, including Charles IV. A palace chapel with superb 14th-century

frescoes was uncovered inside. This large space is now a concert hall and exhibition gallery.

- At number 20 is the House of the Golden Unicorn. The basic structure of this building was 12th century, but it was extended in the 13th and 15th centuries, and the elegant entry is part of that 1496 rebuilding.
- The focal point of the Old Town Square is the Old Town Hall. The nucleus of this structure dates from the granting of the charter to the Old Town in 1338 by King John of Luxemburg. It began as a large house that was acquired for a town hall; the tall tower was begun at that time, as well. The interior chapel was completed in 1381.
 - The Town Hall building has a Gothic portal with a lovely pointed arch and florid decoration that dates from the 15th century. The Gothic window beside it displays the arms of the city, the king of Bohemia, and the emperor.
 - Outside on the tower is the celebrated astronomical clock. The original was made in the first decade of the 15th century by clockmakers and an astronomer. It displays the transit of the sun and the moon, and of course, the sun revolves around the earth.
- At the northern end of the Old Town Square is the imposing Church of St. Nicholas. It was the foreign merchants' church before the construction of Our Lady before Týn, and it, too, had a reforming tradition, becoming a Utraquist church until the Habsburg Catholic victory at White Mountain in 1620.
 - After White Mountain, the church was handed over to the Benedictines and, in the 18th century, was completely rebuilt.
 - During the 19th century, it was the Russian Orthodox Church, then a concert hall. Now, fittingly, it has been rededicated to the Bohemian Hussite congregation.
- Behind the clock on the Old Town Square is the contiguous Small Square. This space was originally the center for French merchants

in the town. Number 12 is the oldest shop front in the city, the House at the Golden Lily, dating from the 14th century. It was also the shop of the chemist who supplied some conspirators against King Vladimir Jagiello with poison.

Karlova Street

- Number 4 on Karlova Street is the house where Johannes Kepler lived and worked from 1607 to 1612 and where some of his important discoveries on the elliptical movement of the planets were made.
- The large complex of buildings on the north side of the street is the Clementinum, once the Jesuit seminary and school. This was the center of Catholic orthodoxy in the Habsburg struggle to keep Prague and Bohemia loyal to the Roman Church. But, as in most of Europe, the Jesuits were expelled in 1773 and the buildings were given to Charles University. The complex now houses the National Library of the Czech Republic.
- The Knights of the Cross Square takes its name from the defenders of the original stone bridge, the Judith Bridge, that crossed the Vltava before it was replaced by the Charles Bridge. The 13th-century chapel of the knights was on the site but is now visible only in the crypt of the baroque Church of St. Salvator.

Charles Bridge

- The Old Town Bridge Tower, on one side of the Charles Bridge, dates from the late 14th century. The carving on the lower level of the tower is from the workshop of one of Prague's medieval geniuses, the sculptor Peter Parler.
- The 30 statues on the bridge are mostly baroque and are saints and heroes. Of all the statues on the bridge, the one to investigate most closely is that of St. John Nepomuk. It commemorates the place where, in 1393, King Wenceslas IV had the priest tightly bound and thrown from the bridge. It is said that Wenceslas had



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Charles Bridge, with its 30 statues of saints and heroes, is one of the symbols of Prague.

him killed because he refused to reveal what the queen had said during confession.

- At the end of the bridge is a gate that dates from 1410 and two towers. One was part of the Judith Bridge, dating from the 12th century, although rebuilt in the late 16th century. The other dates from 1466 and provides a symmetrical parallel to the Old Town Tower on the other side.

The Malá Strana

- The Malá Strana, or Little Quarter, has been, since 1257, the rather elegant residential part of the castle side of the Vltava, forming a neighborhood from what were once the outer defenses of Prague Castle.
- The Town Hall in Malá Strana Square has a significant history. In 1575, the leaders of the reformed religions (Utraquist, Lutheran, and Czech Brethren) challenged the Catholic Habsburgs, demanding some measure of confessional freedom. Almost to symbolize their

refusal to compromise on their Catholic religion, the Habsburgs later built the huge baroque Church of St. Nicholas that dominates the area.

- This entire neighborhood is populated by splendid baroque structures, such as the nearby Wallenstein Palace, built for a military entrepreneur and Habsburg general murdered at the command of the Habsburg emperor during the Thirty Years' War. History in Prague is complex and multilayered, and the great beauty of the city often masks a violent and tragic story.

Suggested Reading

Demetz, *Prague in Black and Gold*.

Panek and Tuma, *History of the Czech Lands*.

Ripellino, *Magic Prague*.

Questions to Consider

1. Prague has been called a city of artists and writers, not to mention musicians. This is known as being rich in “cultural capital.” How important do you think cultural capital is to a city, region, or country?
2. Czech freedom was lost because Bohemia became part of a larger, German-dominated Holy Roman Empire. Can a nationality ever maintain its liberty within a large, multi-ethnic state?

Insider Tips

Powder Gate was the usual meeting place of the novelist Max Brod with his friend Franz Kafka. Indeed, if you explore some of the lanes and narrow, dark, shadowy passages in the city, you can easily conjure up Kafka's novels and stories, such as *The Trial* or *The Castle*.

On the hour, join the crowd below the clock on the Old Town Square to watch the procession summoned by the skeleton on the upper right, holding an hourglass and tolling the bell for a funeral. A door opens and the procession begins, led by apostles but followed by representative figures of human folly and weakness. Note especially the miser. You can use his lesson as an excuse to enjoy a fine lunch at one of the expensive restaurants near the square.

Prague—Castle Hill

Lecture 20

In this lecture, we climb Hradčany Hill to Prague Castle and the Cathedral of St. Vitus. The cathedral is the religious symbol of the Czech people, closely associated with the political center of the castle, whose site it shares. Indeed, it is likely that it was the church that fixed the defensive space for the castle rather than vice versa. This resulted from a great gift: the relic of St. Vitus given to Prince Wenceslas by the Holy Roman Emperor Henry the Fowler in 925 and subsequently housed in a church on the highest point of Hradčany. In this lecture, we will explore the history and treasures of the cathedral in detail.

Prague Castle Courtyards

- All castles and palaces advertise their presence with substantial gates, but hardly anything can match the dramatic theatricality of the baroque western gates to the courtyard of Prague Castle. The 18th-century sculptures of fighting giants make an indelible statement indeed.
- Through these gates, we enter a large medieval complex, parts of which date back to the 9th century. In the first court, we see the celebrated palace guards. The second court resulted from blocking up the moat around an old section of walls in the 16th century.
 - The geometrically elegant Renaissance and theatrically imposing baroque structures that define the space are enhanced by the fountain in the center.
 - The rooms around this court constitute some of the most elegant and historic spaces in this part of the castle. The Throne Room is in the southern wing, and the 18th-century Habsburg Drawing Room showcases the portraits of the large family of the empress Maria Theresa.

- In the north wing, the most important space is the so-called Spanish Hall, a double-height room that has had several incarnations, including the safe storeroom for imperial collections and, curiously, an indoor hunting preserve.
- The central wing between the second and third courts contains some of the most interesting structures of the castle, especially the medieval White Tower. This high defensive tower once protected the western gate, before the baroque additions were made.
- The third court is the center of the palace and has enjoyed mystical status almost from the foundation of the town. It was obviously used for pre-Christian rites in a space that was, at the time, outside the protected enclosure that became the castle. There are still visible remnants of the old Romanesque castle structure. What dominates the third court is the Cathedral of St. Vitus.

Exterior of the Cathedral

- As mentioned earlier, the relic of St. Vitus given to Prince Wenceslas in 925 was subsequently housed in a church on Hradčany Hill. When Prague was raised to the dignity of an episcopal see in 973, this sacred space became the cathedral, and the bishops' palace was attached to it. But as the town continued to grow, the first church was replaced with a large Romanesque basilica, completed in 1096. Soon, this new cathedral became the place where Bohemian kings were crowned and where the connection between Church and state was realized.
- Again, success overtook even this large structure. When, under King Charles IV, Prague became an archbishopric, it was necessary to construct a church worthy of this dignity. The foundation stone of the new Gothic cathedral was laid in 1344. The massive size and complexity of the church required centuries of construction.
- Before entering the church, notice the flying buttresses, used to open the walls of the cathedral for stained glass. In the tympanum of the ceremonial southern entrance is a mosaic of the Last

Judgment from the 14th century. The exterior of the vestibule is a wonderful piece of Gothic architecture, with splendid rib vaulting of the 15th century. Also note the covered royal access from the castle to the cathedral.



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- Rising above all is the southern tower, placed somewhat off its symmetrical axis to mark the tomb of St. Wenceslas. It was begun in the late 14th century but not raised to its dramatic height of more than 300 feet until the 18th century. In the belfry is the great Sigismund Bell from the mid-16th century, the largest bell in the kingdom of Bohemia.

The Gothic gargoyles on the exterior of Prague Cathedral are wonderfully imaginative.

Interior of the Cathedral

- The interior of the cathedral is more than 410 feet long, 110 feet high, and 200 feet wide, with three naves. This size allows for large Gothic windows that make the huge expanse seem light and airy. The net vaulting in the choir is the first appearance of this style on the continent. The 16th-century mausoleum of the kings of Bohemia in the choir is a marvelous example of Renaissance sculpture and design. The stained glass, however, is 19th century.
- The Chapel of King Sigismund is 14th-century Gothic and was sculpted by Peter Parler. The Old Sacristy is also by Parler and dates from 1362. On the altar of the Chapel of St. Anne is the Trier Reliquary of the 13th century, holding relics of 43 martyrs.
- In the Chapel of the Virgin, begun by Charles IV, note again the work of Peter Parler and the tombs of early Czech princes.

Similarly, the Chapel of the Holy Relics by Parler contains the exquisite Gothic tombs of the kings of the Premysl dynasty. As in the Wawel Cathedral in Kraków, the opening of these tombs revealed early regalia, in this case, scepters and orbs, representing the oldest surviving examples from Bohemia.

- The Chapel of St. John Nepomuk contains the reliquary of the saint, a magnificent 18th-century silver casket. The canopy above was the gift of the empress Maria Theresa. Also in the chapel is the 1370 effigy of John Ock, the second archbishop of Prague. The reliquary of St. Vojtěch is above the altar.
- The cathedral vestibule is beside the Chapel of St. Mary Magdalene and is a lovely Gothic structure, with a 1410 crucifix. Above it is the late-15th-century royal oratory, accessible by the covered walkway from the castle. This space was built and decorated by King Vladislav Jagiello.
- The Chapel of the Holy Cross was completed by Peter Parler and has fragments of the original 14th-century wall painting. The crucifix over the altar is Italian Renaissance, made in the 15th century, and the tombstone visible in the chapel is that of Rudolf I, called the Weak because of his lack of hospitality on ceremonial occasions.
- The Chapel of St. Wenceslas is the spiritual and architectural heart of this great building.
 - On the lower register of the walls are a great many precious and semiprecious stones, as well as a Passion cycle from the 1370s, in which we can see the images of Charles IV and his queen.
 - On the second register is a cycle of 31 episodes from the life of St. Wenceslas. Under the window is his reliquary, dating from 1375, and the entrance to the coronation chamber, where the Bohemian crown jewels are kept.

The Old Palace

- The Old Palace dates from the 12th century, but little remains of the original structures. Partly, this was the result of the damage inflicted during the Hussite Wars. It was Vladislav Jagiello who decided to restore this space as part of the ceremonial center of Hradčany.
- The most important addition and one of the great spaces in the castle is the Vladislav Hall, which was constructed from 1492 to 1502. The decorative Gothic vaulting is among the most splendid in Bohemia, and it is the largest vaulted Gothic room in all of central Europe, measuring 190 by 50 feet.
- The Chancery Rooms were built by Vladislav's son Ludovic Jagiello. Inside the first are copies of the essential documents of Bohemian liberty, such as the document rejecting Habsburg rule in 1619 and, thus, beginning the Thirty Years' War. In fact, the first event of that horrific war—the second Defenestration of Prague—took place in the next room.
- The Church of All Saints was originally part of the Old Palace but was substantially rebuilt in the 16th century as the result of a fire. It is an elegant interior but a sad memory, as the vaulting that had been considered Parler's masterpiece was lost.
- The Land Rolls Office was where the decisions of the Diet (or Estates) regarding property were kept. The coats of arms on the walls are those of the clerks of the rolls up to the later 18th century, but note those that have been painted over. These were the arms of the nobles who led the revolt against the Habsburgs in 1619 and were executed in 1621.

Strahov Monastery

- The Strahov Monastery was founded by Vladislav II in 1140. It suffered during the Thirty Years' War and again under the communist regime. But after the fall of communism and the return of Czech freedom, it was rededicated, and the religious order was allowed to repopulate the huge complex of buildings.

- Passing through the baroque St. Norbert Gate, we find ourselves in a courtyard dominated by the early-17th-century Church of St. Roch, dedicated after an outbreak of plague in 1599 to this patron saint of plague sufferers.
- Further on, the Church of the Assumption is 12th century, although heavily rebuilt in a baroque style of the 18th century. Young Mozart played on the organ here!
- The Strahov Library is a great repository of Bohemian culture. The Philosophical Room of the 18th century and the Theological Hall of the 17th are exquisite in their decoration and proportions. The other buildings and gardens are almost uniformly baroque, although not uniform in style or decoration.

Josefov and Vyšehrad

- Josefov was the Jewish district of Prague, separated by a wall from the Christians in the Old Town. The neighborhood takes its name from the enlightened 18th-century Austrian emperor Joseph II, who granted the Jews full citizenship. In time, the walls and gates were removed, merging the neighborhood with the Old Town.
 - The Jewish cemetery, established in the early 15th century, is a place of particular interest. Before its existence, Jews had to be buried outside the walls. It grew in size until it held more than 20,000 surviving stones. The earliest grave is from 1439, and the last is from just before 1787, when Jews were freed from religious and civil restrictions.
 - The tombstones are also important works of art, in which the deceased are represented by family or professional symbols. Important individuals, such as learned or leading rabbis, have almost architectural tombs.
- Vyšehrad was the oldest seat of Bohemian kings; Vratislav, the first king, established his fortress on Vyšehrad Rock in 1061–1092. With the move to Hradčany, it was no longer the royal center, but Charles

IV fortified it with a wall and bastion, and in fact, it remained an operational military fort until 1911.

Suggested Reading

Demetz, *Prague in Black and Gold*.

Panek and Tuma, *History of the Czech Lands*.

Ripellino, *Magic Prague*.

Questions to Consider

1. Was the Hussite movement religious or nationalistic?
2. The survivals in Prague Castle and St. Vitus Cathedral constitute a history of the city in stone and decoration. Can you think of any other cities in which you can follow the historical development through the major public monuments?

Insider Tips

The Castle Stairs are the best way to ascend Prague's Hradčany Hill and reach the castle—largely because of the views—but be warned: There are 209 steps to the top. The pathway was first installed in the 13th century, and the steps were built two centuries later. The houses on either side are interesting, but look especially at the late-16th-century house with the decorated gables—the one that's accessible by a small covered bridge. This House of the Hradec Lords is now part of the Italian embassy, but from 1911 to 1928, it was the home of the popular painter Alphonse Mucha. If you prefer, you can take the continuation of the Royal Way to the castle (Nerudova Street) from the upper western quadrant of the Malá Strana Square. This street is lined with beautiful baroque palaces, now mostly embassies.

Other marvelous structures near the castle include the monastery of St. George in Jirské Square and the Chapel of St. Ludmila (grandmother of St. Wenceslas) inside. The northern quadrant of the castle is neighbor to Golden Lane, the narrow street where the royal goldsmiths practiced their trade and lived from at least the 16th century. These simple houses provide fascinating insight into the lives of those skilled craftsmen who did not inhabit palaces or castles but who served those who did.

If you are interested in the art nouveau style, make time to see the Church of Ss. Peter and Paul, which was founded in the 11th century but today is neo-Gothic with a lovely art nouveau interior.

In the New Town is the great equestrian monument to St. Wenceslas on the upper part of Wenceslas Square. It's really much more of a wide street than a square, anchored by the 19th-century National Museum. It was not set up on this site until 1913 and seemed to prefigure the creation of an independent, renewed Czech state in Czechoslovakia. It was here that the crowds gathered for the demonstrations that led to the Velvet Revolution, toppling the communist dictatorship that had oppressed the nation after 1948.

Bruges—Built on the Sea and Trade

Lecture 21

Bruuges is a medieval city frozen in time. Once it was one of the richest, most cosmopolitan mercantile centers in all of northern Europe. Indeed, Bruges was even a member of the famous Hanseatic League of the Baltic and North Sea commercial cities, which dominated that trade in the Middle Ages. Today, however, it is a small town of just 40,000 people. But its compact and diverse streetscape permits us easy access into the medieval world, while simultaneously affording us a visit to one of Europe's most lovely cities, another of our UNESCO Heritage sites.

The Bruges Markt

- The diversity of structures around the Bruges Market Square reflects the passage of time and changing styles, but there remains a remarkable sense of urban integrity in this large space. The square has been the commercial center of Bruges since the 10th century, and there is still a market held here every Wednesday.
- On the west side of the square is the 15th-century Boechoute House, which has a weathervane on its roof. Merchants would gather here to see the direction of the wind to determine when the ships carrying their merchandise would arrive at the Waterhalle, where merchandise was unloaded, sorted, and stored.
- The Waterhalle was, in many ways, the key to and the story of Bruges. The name of the city itself (Brugge in Flemish) comes from the Old Norse for “loading dock.” The Waterhalle, completed around 1295, was a huge structure; it stood until 1780, at which time the canal linking the site to the passage to the sea was filled in.
- Next door to the Boechoute House is the Craenenburg House, where Margaret of York watched from the balcony the tournaments held in the square to celebrate her marriage to Charles the Bold, duke of Burgundy, in 1468.

- In 1488, the citizens of Bruges, angry at imperial attempts to restrict their freedom, imprisoned the Habsburg heir to the Holy Roman Empire, Maximilian, in Craenburg House.
- In 1656–1657, King Charles II of England spent part of his exile in Bruges, in the period after the civil war and the execution of his father, Charles I. It is believed that he at first lived in either Craenburg House or Boechoute House.
- In the center of the Markt is a 19th-century bronze statue of two men who are local heroes to this day. Together, they fomented a revolt in support of liberty for Bruges that would lead to the Bruges Matins and the Battle of the Golden Spurs.
 - By the turn of the 14th century, Bruges had become a rich trading city, but the complications of international politics divided it internally and made its civic freedom precarious.
 - At the end of the 13th century, the king of France, Philip the Fair, was the nominal feudal overlord of the count of Flanders, ruler of the territory that included Bruges. But the count resented Philip's constant attempts to interfere in his territories. To assert his independence, he made an alliance with England, France's greatest enemy.
 - Not surprisingly, Philip felt the need to occupy Flanders to protect his territory. He sent a small army to Bruges, and the most powerful merchants in the city threw in their lot with the French, hoping to increase their wealth through royal patronage and to maintain their authority in the city.
 - The lesser guildsmen, however, were furious that the oligarchs had sided with the French. Consequently, two of these guildsmen, Jan Briedel and Pieter de Coninck, led a revolt of the population against the rich merchants and the French.
 - At the break of dawn on May 18, 1302, angry citizens, led by these two heroes, attacked the French garrison and killed 120

soldiers and some noblemen, declaring the city free. Furious at both the revolt and the death of his soldiers, Philip the Fair sent an army composed of his best knights to punish the city and return it to his rule.

- On July 11, 1302, the army of knights met the untrained citizen militia of Bruges, and against all odds, the militia won. Indeed, the French knights were so terrified by the citizens that they turned tail and used their spurs to drive their horses away as fast as possible. The golden spurs of the fallen knights were then collected as trophies of this unexpected victory, and the event became known as the Battle of the Golden Spurs.



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- The first market hall in Bruges was built in 1240 and had a short, stubby tower that was used as a watchtower, fire-watch station, and storeroom. This structure was destroyed by fire in 1280 but subsequently rebuilt.
 - Because of its prominence and because of civic pride, the height of the civic belfry, or Belfort, was increased, particularly in 1487. A tall wooden spire was added in 1501 but was hit by lightning in 1741 and never rebuilt. The result is what we see here today.
 - Still, the structure is impressive: It stands 250 feet high and requires scaling 366 steps to reach the top. Along the way,

There are 47 bells in the Belfort, dating from the 18th century, and the carillon mechanism is a marvel of 18th-century technology.

visitors can see the rooms where the strongboxes holding the charters of the city's freedom were kept.

- The House of the Province, the seat of government for West Flanders, is on the east side of the square. Although it seems to be another great medieval survival, it is a neo-Gothic building of the late 19th century.

The Burg

- If the Market Square is the commercial heart of Bruges, the Burg is its political and, at one time, its religious heart. Its name dates to the earliest years of this city's history; the *burg* was the fortress that once protected the town. Now, it is a cobblestoned, elegant square dominated by the magnificent 1376–1420 town hall, or Stadthuis.
 - Note the flamboyant Gothic façade of the Stadthuis, with its decorated finials and octagonal spires, and the six pointed, arched windows. This building stands on the site originally occupied by the castle built by the first count of Flanders in the 9th century.
 - The façade is decorated with carved figures of the counts and countesses of Flanders. Sadly, what we see are reproductions that date from the late 20th century because the originals were destroyed by the French during their occupation after the French Revolution.
 - The immense Gothic Hall was begun in 1385 and completed in 1400 as the council chamber, but it has been redecorated a number of times. The corbels supporting the ribs of the vaulted ceiling are masterpieces of Gothic carving, representing the seasons and the elements.
- Next door is the Old Recorder's House. This was the civic registry building, a Renaissance masterpiece that dates from the 1530s, with a neoclassical structure from the early 18th century attached. Inside is a small museum of the Bruges Liberty, a semiautonomous region dependent on Bruges.

- On the other side of the Burg is the former residence of the dean of St. Donat's, a baroque structure covering the medieval mansion that used to house the senior ecclesiastic. The cathedral's site is now a modern hotel, but we can imagine that space before 1799, when it was grandly occupied by the Church of St. Donat.
 - The original cathedral was the site of one of the most heinous assassinations of the Middle Ages: the murder of Charles the Good in 1127 by the chancellor and provost of the cathedral, Bertulf.
 - The people were so infuriated by the murder that they attacked Bertulf and his gang, driving them from the city. Because of this, the new count, William Clito, recognized the right of the citizens of Bruges to defend themselves, to build walls, and to enjoy a measure of communal self-government.
- The double Basilica (or Chapel) of the Holy Blood is one of the most interesting and beautiful structures in the Burg. The rich decoration of this façade reflects the importance of the relic of the Holy Blood to Bruges and, in fact, to all of Flanders. The relic attracted pilgrims and brought wealth to the town and was a protection for the community.
 - The chapel is a double church, with one on top of the other. On the lower level is the spare Chapel of St. Basel, a Romanesque space dating from the late 12th to the early 13th centuries.
 - Originally, the upper chapel was another Romanesque room where the relic of the Holy Blood was kept. The site was so important to the city that the chapel was reconstructed in the 15th century as a Gothic chapel, as we see it today, although the current structure and decoration date from its reconstruction in 1823, after the destruction of the French revolutionaries.
 - By tradition, the small crystal bottle containing some of the blood that was taken from Christ on the cross was acquired by a Flemish nobleman during the Second Crusade and brought home to Bruges. It is more likely, though, that the object arrived

in the middle of the 13th century from Constantinople, probably brought by European merchants trading in that city. The vial, which has never been opened, is still greatly venerated.

Bruges Museums

- The Groeninge Museum is the art gallery of Bruges. It is a treasury of Flemish painting, with splendid examples of the work of Hiëronymus Bosch, Jan van Eyck, Gerard David, and Hans Memling. Later artists, such as Rubens, are also represented, along with some 19th- and 20th-century pictures and sculpture.
- Almost right next to the Groeninge is the Arentshuis Museum, set in a lovely 18th-century mansion. Its ground floor is devoted to lace, one of the luxury products of Bruges, and the first floor is devoted to the paintings of a British painter, Frank Brangwyn, who died in 1956 and who happened to be born in Bruges.
- The Gruuthuse Museum is in a 15th-century mansion, begun in 1465. It was the home of the Lord of the Gruut, a necessary ingredient for making beer before the use of hops. The family that built the mansion had a monopoly on collecting taxes on *gruut* and became fabulously rich.
 - The man who built the house was Lodowick Gruuthuse, who was an aesthete and skilled diplomat. He was chamberlain to Charles the Bold and Philip the Good of Burgundy, an advisor to Edward IV of England, and a great collector of manuscripts and books.
 - The interior of the Gruuthuse has the original wooden ceilings, fireplaces, and architectural detail and houses a collection of domestic art and objects, such as ceramics, furniture, tapestries, and lace.
 - The 1472 chapel survives almost as Lodowick knew it, and its second floor overlooks the altar of the church next door.

Suggested Reading

Brown, *Civic Ceremony and Religion in Medieval Bruges, c. 1350–1520*.

Galbert of Bruges, *The Murder of Charles the Good*.

Geirnaert and Vandamme, *Bruges: Two Thousand Years of History*.

Murray, *Bruges: Cradle of Capitalism, 1280–1390*.

Nicholas, *Medieval Flanders*.

Questions to Consider

1. The Bruges Matins was the consequence of an elite making a self-serving deal with a foreign power at the expense of the city's liberty. Can you think of other examples where an elite class was willing to sacrifice the liberty of others for its own gain?
2. Bruges became a city frozen in time because of the silting of the Zwin estuary, robbing the city of its access to the sea. What other important cities or places today are threatened by natural changes?

Insider Tips

When climbing the stairs of the Belfort, you will pass close to the 18th-century carillon mechanism, so do reward yourself with a long and careful look at that remarkable machine. But if you should be in the Belfort on the hour, be prepared to cover your ears, especially when the great 11,000-pound bell sounds. There is a reason that you can hear it everywhere in Bruges.

The first Church of St. Donatus was modeled on the chapel of the Carolingian emperors at Aachen, with 16 sides and, later, a high tower. But by 1184, there was a new Romanesque church on the site. Sadly, that church is gone. During the occupation of Bruges by the French revolutionary armies of the late 18th century, the old cathedral on the Burg was destroyed. If you want to see any remnants of this famous church, it is now necessary to go into the cellars of the Crowne Plaza Hotel, across the square from the city hall, and view the foundations.

The Gruuthuse is in one of the leafy, very pleasant parts of the city, with a wide choice of restaurants for lunch or dinner nearby, including some overlooking canals.

Bruges—Commerce and Community

Lecture 22

In this lecture, our journey begins with a visit to the most magnificent church in Bruges, the Church of Our Lady, a structure that dwarfs the city's cathedral in beauty, decoration, and significance. From there, we will go to St. John's Hospital, founded in 1150 to serve the poor and sick, as well as pilgrims and commercial travelers. We will then visit Minnewater, now a quiet park but once the busy dock area of Bruges. We'll continue through the city to its northeast quadrant and beyond, to what remains of its medieval fortifications. Finally, we'll visit Our Lady of the Pottery, a hospital founded in 1276 to care for elderly women that still functions as a retirement home today.

The Church of Our Lady

- There had been a church on this site in Bruges since the 9th century, but the current High Gothic structure was begun between 1210 and 1230. The elegant flying buttresses of High Gothic design were built in the 1270s and 1280s to let light into the nave and the side aisles. The huge brick tower—a full 375 feet tall—is surmounted by a golden crown.
- The simple design in the nave, with its cross vaulting and the black-and-white checkerboard paving, makes the building appear austere. But there are five aisles in this enormous building, and its side chapels and chancel are heavily decorated, mostly in the baroque style.
- On the east end of the southern aisle is an 18th-century baroque altarpiece known as the Sacra Chapel. Within its baroque excess is a haunting figure of the Madonna and Child in plain white Carrara marble carved by Michelangelo in 1503–1505.
- The other marvels in the Church of Our Lady are the two grand tombs of Charles the Bold, duke of Burgundy, and his daughter, Mary of Burgundy, wife of the emperor Maximilian of Habsburg.

- Mary died at age 25 in 1482, having fallen from a horse. Her body was buried in the crypt below, and part of the floor has been opened and covered by glass to show the medieval frescoed walls of the burial chambers beneath. The tomb is just a monument, made by Jan Borman and completed at the turn of the 16th century.
- The other tomb is that of Charles the Bold, the duke who was killed in battle in 1477. His effigy is later, however, because the Habsburg emperor Charles V only returned his remains to Bruges in 1553. The recumbent effigy of the duke is dressed in contemporary costume.
- The private chapel of Lodowick of Gruuthuse was constructed in the Gothic style in 1482 and reflects the exquisite taste for which Lodowick was celebrated.

St. John's Hospital

- Almost across the street from the Church of Our Lady is St. John's Hospital. Founded in 1150, this large complex served the poor, the sick, pilgrims, and commercial travelers. Bruges was the point from which several roads to major pilgrimage routes merged. Because it could be reached by sea, pilgrims and commercial travelers from England and Scandinavia could begin their land journeys there. An interesting late-15th-century manuscript called the Bruges Itineraries plotted for pilgrims and merchants the various land routes from the city.
- The Hospital of St. John was run by a religious order and was the major city hospital until 1978! The attached church is used now as a museum devoted to the painting of Hans Memling. The vast lower and upper chambers of the hospital were once lined with beds. Today, this space is full of objects associated with the operation of the hospital and the religious order that served it.
- The largely empty second-floor hall has the original of the Gothic portal. In its time, there was also a bakery, a brewery, a garden, a

large convent, and a pharmacy attached to the hospital. In fact, the pharmacy operated until 1971.

- Also near the hospital is the current cathedral of the city, St. Saviour's, which began life in the 12th century as a simple, if large, parish church. It was enlarged until the 15th century to its current size. Because the French had destroyed the ancient Cathedral of St. Donatus, this church was chosen in 1834 as the new cathedral. Inside is a display of items that the faithful citizens of Bruges salvaged from the old cathedral.

Minnewater and the Begijnhof

- Today, Minnewater is a quiet, lovely park with a lake fed by canals. Centuries ago, however, this was the busy dock area, because the surrounding canals led to the Zwin estuary and the sea.
 - The silting up of the Zwin beginning in the 15th century marked the end of the wealth of Bruges, as it became increasingly difficult to get large and heavy goods to the Markt.
 - Several remedies were tried, including another small port at Damme, but it was to no avail. Trade moved to Antwerp, and Bruges descended into its medieval sleep.
- The swans in Minnewater are not late Romantic additions to the city but testaments to the loyalty and sadness of the emperor Maximilian of Habsburg. Imprisoned on the Market Square, he was forced to watch his friends and officers beheaded. When he became emperor, he ordered swans brought to this place as memorials to those loyal men.
- Just to the north of Minnewater is the Begijnhof. Beguines were an important religious phenomenon in the Low Countries beginning in 1245. These were lay women, often widows, who dressed as nuns and lived communally but did not take vows.
 - The small, tidy, whitewashed houses of the Begijnhof are simple but comfortable. And the green space in the center is an oasis of peace and calm in what can be a crowded and noisy city.

- The little church dates from the beginning of the 17th century, and the house that serves as a museum of beguine life is quite instructive.

Toward the Northeast Quadrant

- The 15th-century Jerusalem Church, on Jeruzalemstraat, was originally built as a private chapel by a family of Genoese patricians, the Adorno family, trading in Bruges.
 - One of the family members went on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and was so overwhelmed by the experience that he decided to construct a copy of the church of the Holy Sepulchre in Bruges.
 - This is very much a funerary church, as the skulls and bones on the altar indicate, and visitors can still see the black marble Adorno tomb in the church today.
- Next to the church is the Kantcentrum, the lacemaking exhibition and workshop where the ancient trade is still practiced. Bruges was one of the leading lacemaking centers of the 15th and 16th centuries. Appropriately, the Kantcentrum is located in a terrace of late-medieval almshouses, where poor women in times past labored at this task.
- Just a few steps beyond the Kantcentrum is the Volkskunde Museum, located in another terrace of almshouses, that is, tiny houses provided to the poor and infirm for little or no rent. The Volkskunde offers a fascinating visit to the daily world of 19th- and



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The Begijnhof was not a society of cloistered nuns, although the women lived in a self-sufficient community.

early-20th-century Belgium, with each interconnected almshouse turned into a shop or office.

Medieval Fortifications

- Nearby in this part of town is the green space where the city walls of the 14th century once stood. We know this was a defensive construction because the high earthworks are still present. The pulling down of the walls created a huge circular park that permits visitors to walk around the entire medieval town.
 - Visitors can also see the functioning windmills on the crest of the berm. Originally—from the 13th century—there were more than 20 windmills operating on the high ground. Most were not used to grind grain but to regulate water levels in the canals to ensure easy transportation and prevent flooding.
 - The Sint-Janhuismolen dates from 1770 but gives a good impression of how the engineers in the Low Countries perfected hydraulic regulation in an area with few natural resources except the wind and water.
- The Kruispoort Gate is the largest of the surviving medieval fortifications of the city. This imposing gate was built in 1402 and gives a sense of the power of the lost walls. This massive structure provided security to the city through the soldiers garrisoned within.
- The 14th-century walls of the city were not the first to be constructed. The earliest circuit of wooden and earthwork ramparts was built in the 9th century by Baldwin I to protect the settlement from Viking raids.

The Potterierei

- The Potterierei is a long and winding street that follows the canal. The name of the district comes from the potters who had their shops and kilns in the vicinity. Here, we find another hospital, Our Lady of the Pottery, founded in 1276 to care for elderly women, usually widows.

- The complex dates mostly from the 14th and 15th centuries and includes a cloister with the individual rooms of the women arranged around it. These are decorated and furnished to reflect how such widows would have lived. Like the almshouses, these rooms were usually funded through charity for widows without family to sustain them. In this case, the women were also cared for by monks and nuns.
- Wealthy families supported this institution, and many left their portraits as markers of their charity. Some, especially women, even chose to be buried in the church. It is always a pleasure to note the degree to which the community of the medieval city took responsibility for its poor and disabled or weakest citizens. Life in the past was indeed nasty, brutish, and short, but walking through the almshouses, hospitals, and other civic welfare establishments makes that distant, dangerous world seem a little gentler and more humane.
- The church attached to the Potterierei was redecorated in the baroque style, although elements of its Gothic nave and choir are still visible. Today, a good part of the complex is still a retirement home for the elderly. Its function has not changed in 850 years.

Suggested Reading

Brown, *Civic Ceremony and Religion in Medieval Bruges, c. 1350–1520*.

Galbert of Bruges, *The Murder of Charles the Good*.

Geirnaert and Vandamme, *Bruges: Two Thousand Years of History*.

Murray, *Bruges: Cradle of Capitalism, 1280–1390*.

Nicholas, *Medieval Flanders*.

Questions to Consider

1. The rich in Bruges helped poorer citizens through charity and patronage. Should governments or should individuals intervene to support the most vulnerable in society?
2. In the 19th century, Georges Rodenbach labeled Bruges “*la mort*”—“the dead.” Today, Bruges relies heavily on tourism. Would it still be reasonable to call it a “dead” city?

Insider Tips

It was in Bruges that the stock market was born and acquired its European name. This was a city where the Medici of Florence had an office, as did the silk merchants of Lucca. Not far from these buildings, there was a large house on the Vlamingstraat, near its junction with the Academiestraat. It was owned by a family of wealthy commodity traders in the 13th century named Van der Burse. The sign and coat of arms on the building was three purses, or *bourses* in French, a pun on the patrician family's name. The house was used as a meeting place for the traders of Bruges, and it was there, in 1309, that they first formalized the rules of stock trading, in effect creating Europe's first stock exchange.

If you want to experience Bruges in all of its medieval, Gothic splendor, take one of the canal boat cruises through the city. This is not only a wonderful excursion through the entire expanse of Bruges, but it will help orient you to what can be a confusing labyrinth of streets. This is how the medieval merchants moved their goods, using water as a fast and convenient means of urban transport and a connection to the ports of the Baltic and North Seas. Afterwards, walk the streets that follow the canals. This slow wandering will let you see the proximity of great patrician houses to warehouses, churches, and squares, all of which have enough charm to encourage you to stop and enjoy the beauty of the buildings and the sound of the bells, which seems to be everywhere.

Bruges is a city to be walked slowly, as every façade on almost every building has something to please the eye and activate the senses. Your reward for this exercise will be one of the famous Belgian beers from one of the many bars, such as the Craenburg, or that other indescribable pleasure of Bruges: chocolate. It is not an accident that Belgium is celebrated for its chocolate, and it is worth a pilgrimage to Bruges to savor it in the quiet and beauty of a medieval town.

Siena—Good Government

Lecture 23

Above the outer gate of Siena—the Porta Camollia—is written in Latin: “Siena opens its great heart to you.” We feel real warmth as we experience this perfectly preserved medieval town, but we must also consider the context of these huge gates. The Porta Camollia pierces a powerful set of urban fortifications. These walls are reflections of the insecurity of the medieval age and of the threats to Siena’s independence, particularly from ambitious, competing neighbors, such as Florence, its traditional enemy to the north. In this lecture, we’ll learn about both external and internal threats to Siena and visit the site of the city’s answer to them: the Palazzo Pubblico, the seat of Siena’s municipal administration.

Entering Siena

- The Via Francigena was the pilgrims’ route that took travelers from northern Europe to Rome or to the Holy Land. Remarkably, visitors can still see many of the sights those pilgrims would have recognized.
- For example, the former Templar church of San Pietro alla Magione dates from around the year 1000. This small Romanesque building was patronized by the crusading order of the Knights Templar to protect the pilgrims en route to the Holy Land. After the suppression of the Templars in 1312, this small church passed to the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem (the Knights of Malta), indicating that its role in protecting and servicing pilgrims was sustained.
- The Vicolo Malavolti preserves the name of one of the magnate families of the city, and the Rocca Salimbeni is a great fortified palace that served as the city residence of the Salimbeni family. During the Middle Ages, in addition to owning vast feudal estates in the countryside, such magnates constructed urban fortresses to protect their interests and celebrate their wealth and power.

- The Gothic fortress appearance of the Rocca Salimbeni, with few windows piercing its defensive battlements, also illustrates the civic instability and violence for which Siena was known. This violence eventually sapped the city's wealth and its ability to sustain its independence.
- Appropriately, the palace is now the headquarters of a bank, the Monte dei Paschi of Siena. Founded in 1472, the Monte dei Paschi is the oldest bank in the world still in operation.
- Siena is a living environment, a fact that is very apparent from the large palace immediately next to the Rocca Salimbeni, the Palazzo Spannocchi. This is perhaps the most beautiful surviving palace in Siena, although it was built by a Florentine architect. Note the large overhanging cornice. Here, the classicism that signaled the coming of the Renaissance is clearly visible. Heads of famous men—primarily Roman emperors—parade around the façade.
- The Tolomei Palace was heavily restored in the 19th century and is also now a bank. Originally, it, too, was a fortress and probably had a battlement with crenellations on the top. The façade dates from about 1270. On the side of the palace is a plaque with a verse from Dante: “My name is Pia, remember me. Siena made me, the Maremma took my life.” Dante poignantly tells the story of Pia, a beautiful young girl from the Tolomei family who was murdered by her jealous husband in his castle in the Maremma, a wild part of Tuscany.
- Across the Piazza Tolomei is a modest red brick church with a 16th-century façade. But this building, San Cristoforo (the Church of St. Christopher), is much older. Indeed, it is one of the sacred places of Sieneese history, connected with Siena's great victory at Montaperti.

Ghibellines versus Guelfs

- Siena was a Ghibelline city; that is, in the struggle for sovereignty in medieval Europe, Siena supported the authority of the Holy Roman Emperor. Florence, its enemy and competitor, was Guelf, a

supporter of the pope. The Florentines wanted to take control of the trade routes of the Via Francigena and, by extension, take control of Siennese mercantile and banking opportunities. Thus, the Florentines constructed great fortresses, such as Montalcino, to stop the Siennese and Ghibellines from having access to the roads to Rome.

- The rivalry came to a head on September 4, 1260. Florentine ambassadors met with Siennese officials in the Church of San Cristoforo and demanded that Siena surrender to Florence and the Guelfs. The Florentines had overwhelming force, and the Siennese were hugely outnumbered. But, led by heroic and courageous spokesmen, the citizens chose to defy the Florentines and raise an army as best they could.
- The Holy Roman Emperor had dispatched several hundred German cavalry to the city. Still, the German soldiers knew the odds were against them and were not keen to risk a suicide mission. A rich merchant patrician, Salimbeno Salimbeni, pledged the capital of his bank to give the German soldiers double wages if they would fight.
- The men of Siena gathered behind the church in the Castellare degli Ugurgieri, while the women of the city prayed to the Virgin Mary, protector of Siena. The small, ragged army marched out with the German horsemen to meet the overconfident Florentines at Montaperti. In this David-and-Goliath struggle, the result was a complete Siennese victory.
- To this day, there is a great mound at the site of Montaperti under which thousands of Florentines lie buried; perhaps as many as 30,000 Florentines and Guelfs were killed. Siena managed to maintain its independence from Florence for the next 300 years.
- In the Piazza Tolomei is a column surmounted by the figure of two babies suckled by a she-wolf. These are the sons of Remus, who fled to Siena after their father was killed by Romulus. They honored their father's nourishment from the wolf by stealing a sculpture of the *lupa*. This legend connects Siena to the mythical founding of

Rome and Virgil's *Aeneid*; even more important, it establishes the city as older than Florence.

The Palazzo Pubblico

- At the bottom of Banchi di Sopra (Upper Banks Street) is the intersection of three streets, dominated by the Loggia della Mercanzia. This elegant structure, now a private club, was once part of the mercantile center of the city and the merchants' tribunal. Built between 1417 and 1428, it illustrates the power of Gothic decoration in the city and the retrospective conservatism of Sieneese art and architecture. In fact, the great period of Sieneese art was the Gothic.

- Behind the Mercanzia is the most gracious square in all of Italy: the Piazza del Campo (Square of the Field). Until the late 13th century, it was, essentially, an open field. This is the place to experience some of the complex secular history of Siena during the Middle Ages.

- Medieval Siena was famous for its political instability and factionalism. Tensions between Guelfs and Ghibellines, feuding families, and merchants and nobles caused chaos.

- This was remedied in 1287 with the creation of the government of the Nine: nine elected officials who ran the state in the best interests of most of its citizens.



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Even today, the Piazza del Campo is not in the district of any of the city wards; rather, it is for all Sieneese citizens and belongs to no group, family, or faction.

- In 1297, the Nine commissioned the construction of the Palazzo Pubblico, the seat of Siena’s municipal administration. This huge building was built on vacant land so that no magnate family controlled the neighborhood in which it stood.
- Like most medieval communal palaces, the Palazzo Pubblico was the seat of collective authority. Within it are council chambers, meeting spaces, and even a chapel and the residential apartments where the Nine lived during their terms of office. This government was the most stable and probably the best republican government the city knew, lasting until 1355, when economic hardship occasioned by the catastrophe of the Black Death and renewed factionalism again ruined the republic.
- Besides constructing the palace itself, the commune added the exquisite Mangia Tower between 1325 and 1344. The artist Lippo Memmi designed the elegant stone crown. Even the clock dates from the 14th century and reflects, again, the importance of controlling time in the medieval city and the competition between the civic authorities and the ecclesiastical.
- The decoration of the Public Palace celebrated Siena’s particular relationship with the Virgin Mary after Montaperti. This is illustrated in the *Maestà* painted by the Sienese painter Simone Martini in 1315. This large picture of the Virgin Mary is positioned in what was once the Hall of the Council. The implication is that it is the Virgin who rules Siena and the magistrates in the Council Hall must always be cognizant of this fact.
 - This imposing room is now called the Hall of the World Map, or Sala del Mappamondo. Unfortunately, that particular map was mostly made of fabric and is now long gone. But the decorative program also recognizes the conquest of Siena’s subject territory.
 - We see this signaled by Simone Martini’s portrait of Guidoriccio da Fogliano, one of the most important mercenary captains hired by the Sienese to conquer neighboring territories.

This is perhaps one of the earliest portraits painted from life in Europe.

- The next large room is known as both the Room of the Nine and the Hall of Peace. It is famous for the astonishing frescoes painted by Ambrogio Lorenzetti between about 1338 and 1340. They are the first secular political allegories painted since antiquity—depictions of *Good and Bad Government*. Under the evil administration, the city suffers, and there is injustice; under the good government, we see cooperation and mutual respect among classes and citizens.

Other Palaces and Sites in the Campo

- In addition to the elegant mass of the Palazzo Pubblico, the steep Campo is home to many other palaces, private residences that speak to the history of the city, told through its leading citizens. The oldest private palace is the Palazzo d'Elci, the town palace of the counts of Elci and still occupied by the descendants of the family. Its austere crenelated façade seems hardly to have changed since the 13th century!
- Opposite the Palazzo d'Elci is the Palazzo Sansedoni, a palace whose curved façade traces the outline of the Campo. Although fully medieval in appearance, this palace was heavily restored in 1879. It is now mostly commercial space.
- Moving toward the Palazzo Pubblico from the Sansedoni Palace is the Palazzo Chigi, with an elegant stucco classical façade and still the home of the Chigi princes, the rich banking family that gave us Pope Alexander VII.
- Opposite the Palazzo Pubblico at the summit of the Campo is the Gaia Fountain, one of the most beautiful public fountains in Tuscany. It was sculpted by Jacopo della Quercia in 1419 and honors the goddess of the earth. The frieze along its perimeter portrays the Virgin Mary and her control over both the classical and Christian virtues. And there are figures of the she-wolves spouting water, linking Siena to the myth of the founding of Rome.

Suggested Reading

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Hook, *Siena: A City and Its History*.

Norman, *Siena and the Virgin*.

Waley, *Siena and the Sienese in the Thirteenth Century*.

Questions to Consider

1. Siena grew rich and powerful because it controlled the Via Francigena between northern Europe and Rome. What other cities grew wealthy because of control over an important transportation route?
2. In Siena, bankers became nobles and nobles became bankers. What does this say about hierarchy and power in a medieval city?

Insider Tips

The memory of Montaperti is an integral part of being a Sienese, and its spirit animates the city to this day. When Siena confronts Florence in a soccer match, the Sienese chant, “Montaperti, Montaperti.” And the two world-famous *palios*—the bareback horseraces around the Campo that are held every July and August—also celebrate Montaperti.

On your first visit to Siena, climb the Mangia Tower, which provides a splendid view over the city and the hills beyond. This will help you get your bearings in a very confusing urban plan, broken by green valleys and meandering streets.

Standing in the Piazza del Campo today, it is easy to forget the disasters and failures of the past. The Campo is the quintessential public space, where all are welcome and safe, where the pleasures of comfortable urban life—a gelato, a caffè, a glass of prosecco—attract citizens to share their city with one another and revel in the beauty of their built environment. The Campo has never ceased to amaze and delight!

Not only is the Gaia Fountain a splendid work of art, but it is also the outward sign of the complex system that provided Siena with fresh water for centuries, a system that can still be seen in miles of subterranean conduits, the Bottini. If you have time—and you aren’t claustrophobic—arrange for a guide and municipal permission to explore the Bottini. We know the Bottini still work because during World War II, the Germans destroyed the modern aqueducts that had made the Bottini superfluous. The citizens of Siena survived by returning to this medieval water supply.

Siena—The Gothic Dream

Lecture 24

We begin this lecture back in the Piazza del Campo, imagining the scene here on the days of the Palio in July and August of each year. The Palio is one of the most famous medieval festivals in Italy. More important, it is an authentic festival, not the result of nostalgic 19th-century medievalism or a commercial tourist attraction: It is by and for the Sieneese themselves, representing the entire city and celebrating its independence. In this lecture, we will also explore in detail another icon of Siena: its cathedral, whose façade and interior are among the wonders of Europe.

Along the Via Pellegrini

- Not far from the Campo is the façade of a large palace, graced with beautiful torch holders. This is the palace of Pandolfo Petrucci, Il Magnifico, whose tyranny both oppressed and protected Siena in dangerous times. A powerful and ruthless aristocrat, Pandolfo Petrucci became the dictator of the city in 1487 and ruled it until 1512.
 - Pandolfo was a tyrant, but one sufficiently astute to maintain the independence of Siena in the face of Spanish, French, papal, and Florentine aggression.
 - On his death, the circumstances in Siena deteriorated in tandem with the situation in Italy itself. The peninsula had become the battleground of the rival claims of the French house of Valois and the Spanish-imperial house of Habsburg.
- Just beyond the palace of the Magnifico is the baptistery, dedicated to St. John the Baptist. The baptistery was begun about 1310, and work on it continued throughout the 14th and 15th centuries. It is a beautiful fusion of Gothic structure and decoration with early Renaissance motifs.

- The façade incorporates statues and offers a visual feast, with its richly colored marbles. The pointed arches and tracery witness dramatically for its Gothic foundation.
- Inside, the huge font, commissioned about 1416, dominates the building. Sculpture by Jacopo della Quercia is also found inside, as is work by the Florentine Lorenzo Ghiberti.
- The baptistery was constructed beneath the last two bays of the massive cathedral above. Near the top of the stairs leading up to the cathedral, notice the medieval cross marking the spot where St. Catherine of Siena (1347–1380) swooned and fell. It has been suggested that her fainting spell was not only from overwork tending pilgrims in the hospital but also the effects of anorexia, as she was known to have starved herself to mortify her flesh.
- A strange tableau appears at the top of the stairs. It is a Gothic wall in the same design as the cathedral, but it supports nothing. A similar wall is now incorporated into the structure of the museum of the cathedral. These walls mark the unfinished nave of a cathedral that, if built, would have been one of the largest churches in the world, a monument to Sienese pride and wealth during the role of the Nine.
 - The enormous existing cathedral would have been just the transept, and the incomplete wall on the left would have been the façade of the new nave of the building.
 - But the Black Death arrived in 1348, and because Siena was a pilgrimage and trade route, the disease came with extreme force. More than half the population died, and the economy was devastated.
 - The plans for the new cathedral were finally abandoned in 1355, even though it was so far along. In that same year, the government of the Nine fell, leaving these odd remnants as a monument.

The Cathedral of Siena

- The cathedral of Siena has one of the most beautiful façades in all of Europe. There had been a church on this site since probably the 6th century, but the building standing today was begun, according to tradition, in 1179.
- The lower façade was built in the Gothic style between about 1284 and 1333, planned and overseen by Giovanni Pisano. The more flamboyant upper façade was constructed in the last quarter of the 14th century and designed by an anonymous genius.
- Before entering the cathedral, notice the campanile, or bell tower, begun in 1313. Note, too, the hexagonal dome over the crossing of the transept and nave. The lantern in gold is by Bernini.
- The interior of Siena's cathedral is one of the wonders of Europe. The height of the nave is dizzying and the effect hypnotic. It is decorated with the busts of 172 popes around the cornice. The magnificent rose window was designed in 1288 by Duccio da Buoninsegna, whose monumental *Maestà* once graced the altar but is now in the cathedral museum.
- The floor is the most amazing in Europe, although it is only completely uncovered a few days a year. Its narrative and symbolic decorations began to be installed in 1372, and work continued on



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The alternating black-and-white marble of the cathedral not only refers to the Siennese *balzana*—the city shield—but reflects Levantine architectural influence brought to Italy during the First Crusade.

these until the 16th century. Fifty-six panels in polychrome marble depict biblical, classical, and even Platonic and mystical images and stories.

- Around the walls, we see a figure of John the Baptist by the Florentine genius Donatello. A spectacular highlight is the pulpit by Niccolò Pisano—one of the greatest examples of medieval sculpture in the city.
 - Pisano fashioned this amazing object between 1265 and 1268 with the help of assistants. The pulpit has eight sides, representing the seven days of creation and the day of divine reconciliation after the Fall, a design traditionally applied to baptisteries.
 - The pulpit is a history of medieval thought. The central supporting column is decorated with the seven liberal arts, directed by Philosophy. The eight panels tell in narrative detail the story of Christ in a style that mixes Gothic images with the sculptural relief tradition of ancient Roman sarcophagi.
- On the left aisle is the Piccolomini Altar, graced with four sculptures by the young Michelangelo. Beside it is the narrow entry into the Piccolomini Library, which celebrates the life of Pius II (r. 1458–1464) through a cycle by the Umbrian painter Pinturicchio.
 - Beneath the frescoes are splendid medieval and Renaissance liturgical books, beautifully illustrated and decorated.
 - In the center of the room is a classical statue of the three graces, a reference to Pius's antiquarian interests.
- The Chigi Chapel was commissioned by the Siense pope Alexander VII Chigi. The older name for this chapel is the Chapel of the Madonna del Voto. By tradition, the 13th-century painted panel at the rear of this small chapel was the one to which the Siense prayed before the victory at Montaperti. Consequently, it holds an almost mystical power for the city.

- Siena has maintained the iconic duality of its cathedral. The medieval city had two clearly defined centers of power, one religious and one secular. The towers on the Palazzo Pubblico and of the cathedral are symbols of those authorities—both dominating the town but from different areas.
 - These dual centers of authority mirror the Guelf-Ghibelline divide, the struggle for independence from the bishop in the mid-12th century, and the importance of the Virgin Mary to both the political and spiritual welfare of Siena.
 - It is the Virgin Mary that unites both elements and, indeed, all citizens of Siena; this union and divine mediation is represented in the Palio horserace, but it is also made clear in the urban fabric of the medieval town: The power of the Church and the power of the state are discrete and separate, distanced by space, although a space over which the Virgin Mary presides.

Hospital of Santa Maria della Scala

- Across the Piazza del Duomo is the other institution devoted to the Virgin and one of the sources of Siena's medieval wealth and prominence: the Hospital of Santa Maria della Scala. This was a pilgrims' hospice, a place to rest and recover from the barefoot walk from France, England, or Germany en route to Rome or the Holy Land.
- The hospital was both a charitable institution and a wealthy foundation that benefited hugely from pious gifts. Its wealth is evident not only from the wonderful frescoes decorating the pilgrims' hall and the chapel but from the number of properties it owned. The symbol of a ladder surmounted by a cross above many doors in Siena indicates that the property was once owned by the hospital and rented to help in its work.
- Within the hospital is the cell used by St. Catherine of Siena, another of medieval Siena's famous citizens. Because of her role during the Babylonian Captivity in convincing the papacy to return

to Rome from Avignon in the 1370s, she has been named the patron saint of Europe.

The End of the Republic

- By the middle of the 16th century, having driven out a Spanish garrison, Siena adopted a French allegiance. An army under Marshal Blaise de Monluc was sent to defend the city. The Florentine Cosimo I de' Medici, however, having access to a Spanish Habsburg army, besieged the city. In 1555, despite a heroic defense, Siena fell.
- Monluc was permitted to lead his French soldiers from the city and, with him, went hundreds of Siennese patricians. These exiles took with them all the symbols of the republic, the machines for minting coins, and the documents and laws. They established themselves in the southern Tuscan town of Montalcino and declared the Republic of Siena at Montalcino. There, they waited, intent on returning when the Medici were expelled from Siena.
- That expulsion never happened. The Treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis in 1559 gave Siena to Florence, and French support for the republic ended. Thereafter, Siena was incorporated into the grand duchy of Tuscany, symbolized by the fortress Cosimo I de' Medici built to keep his subjects in check. This menacing building today holds a national wine center and a public park.
- The Medici fortress is an unsettling structure—a symbol of Florentine oppression—despite its current joyous functions. It serves as a memory and a reminder of that balance of good and bad, black and white. The Medici took away the freedom of Siena, but that freedom has returned. Thus, the fortress is a kind of warning to the Siennese that they must honor the Virgin by competing energetically in the Palio on her feast days in July and August.
- It is for this same reason that the Medici crown is kept on the façade of the Palazzo Pubblico. It is a reminder that freedom must never be taken for granted. Indeed, liberty, as well as the *balzana*, is the

symbol of the city, and the Latin word *libertas* is the motto of the republic and still celebrated in this living medieval town.

Suggested Reading

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Dundes and Falassi, *La Terra in Piazza*.

Hook, *Siena: A City and Its History*.

Norman, *Siena and the Virgin*.

Waley, *Siena and the Sieneese in the Thirteenth Century*.

Questions to Consider

1. The Palio is perhaps the most famous horserace in the world. Can you identify other sporting or cultural events that so completely define another city's history?
2. How important is the separation of secular and religious authority?

Insider Tips

St. Catherine's original family house at the far end of town has become the nucleus of a sanctuary dedicated to her. Go there to see the well from which she drank and the rooms in which she lived as a child. These are maintained and decorated with scenes from her life by later devotees. The Sanctuary of Santa Caterina is a living tribute to the Sienese saint.

Not far from St. Catherine's sanctuary is the enormous Dominican church of St. Dominic, which contains her head on display in her chapel. In another part of town is a Franciscan church, not far from where the men and boys of Siena gathered to march to Montaperti. It, too, is enormous, with a large open piazza in front to attract those who wanted to hear the famous preachers who came to the city. Today, in the early evenings, it is filled with families enjoying the space and eating the best gelato in Siena, which can be purchased nearby.

Siena is a city of churches. Many are beautifully decorated and still operate as parish churches. Every *contrada* has a church in which both the horse and jockey are blessed before the running of the Palio and near which all babies born to *contrada* are baptized into the *contrada*. Most of these *contrada* baptismal fonts are outside but are also close to the buildings in which the religious function of the *contrada* operates, thus revealing the almost secular religion of the *contrada*. Sienese citizens are baptized twice: once into the Christian faith and once into their *contrade*. The balance is always here. The *palios* won in the races over the centuries are displayed in the museum that each *contrada* incorporates into its meeting house.

Travel Photos

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Streets of Rothenburg



Cathedral of Ss. Peter and Paul, Mdina



Palazzo Pubblico, Siena



Palermo Cathedral



Church of St. John of the Hermit, Palermo



Coastal view, Dubrovnik



River Ouse, York



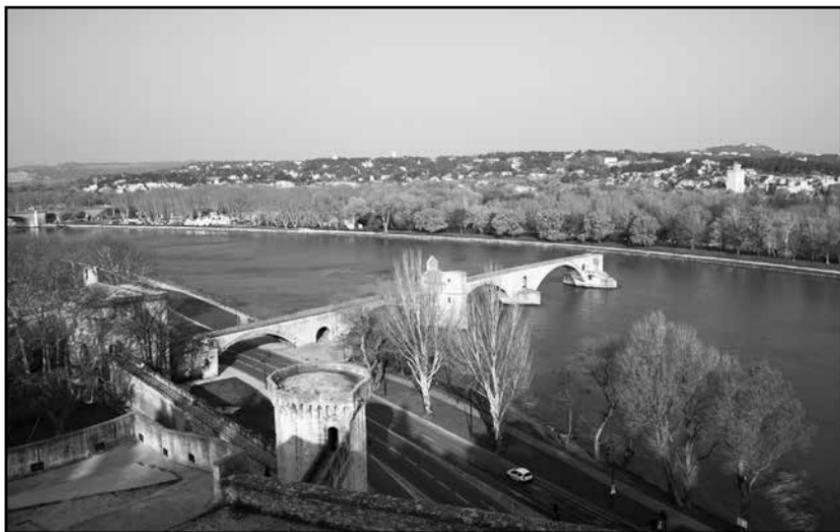
York Minster



Wawel Castle, Kraków



Dragon sculpture, Wawel Hill, Kraków



Pont d'Avignon



Street in Avignon



View from the fortifications, Carcassonne



Walls of Carcassonne



El Ravel, Romanesque Church of St. Paul del Camp, Barcelona



Palazzo Pubblico, Siena



Church of the Assumption, Prague



Charles Bridge Tower, Prague

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Zamoyski, Adam. *Poland: A History*. HarperPress, 2009. A fine history of the Polish people, from the earliest times, through the partition, to the refounding of the nation after World War I.

Zygulski, Zdzislaw. *Cracow: An Illustrated History*. Hippocrene Books, 2001. A splendidly illustrated brief history of the city from its mythical foundation to the present.

Prague

Demetz, Peter. *Prague in Black and Gold: The History of a City*. Penguin, 1998. Perhaps the best history of the city; written by someone who knows it and its culture well.

Panek, Jaroslav, and Oldrich Tuma. *History of the Czech Lands*. University of Chicago Press, 2009. A rather scholarly but comprehensive history of the Czech people and Bohemia by leading academics.

Ripellino, Angelo Maria. *Magic Prague*. Picador, 1995. This is a dense book that brings out Prague's dark side: the magical interests of Rudolf II and the role of alchemy. It is not a first book to read about Prague, but if you want to see this beautiful city from another perspective, you will enjoy the journey.

Bruges

Brown, Andrew. *Civic Ceremony and Religion in Medieval Bruges, c. 1350–1520*. Cambridge University Press, 2011. Bruges was a town rich in ceremony, both religious and civic. This book investigates the exercise of authority, status, and faith through formal ceremony and the role of guilds and the political and religious elite in celebrating their power and creating urban cohesion.

Galbert of Bruges. *The Murder of Charles the Good*. Translated by James Bruce Ross. Medieval Academy Reprints for Teaching, n.d. A contemporary account of the murder in St. Donat's cathedral of the count of Flanders.

Geirnaert, Noel, and Ludo Vandamme. *Bruges: Two Thousand Years of History*. Stichting Kunstboek, 1996. One of the best short histories

of Bruges; covers the entire range of the town's development from the earliest times.

Murray, James. *Bruges, Cradle of Capitalism, 1280–1390*. Cambridge University Press, 2009. Bruges became rich through the rise of long-distance maritime trade because of its ability to coordinate the activities of local and foreign merchants. It became a great brokerage center for trade and commerce. Murray discusses how this came about and the effect it had on the social and political organization of the city.

Nicholas, David. *Medieval Flanders: The Medieval World*. Addison-Wesley Longman Limited, 1992. Nicholas has provided a general economic, political, and social history of the region that includes Bruges during the medieval period. It is clearly written in a narrative style and puts the great success of Bruges in a wider context.

Siena

Civai, Mauro, and Enrico Toti. *Siena: The Gothic Dream*. Edizione Alsaba, 1992. More than a guidebook, *The Gothic Dream* is an invocation of the places, the history, and the legends that make Siena unique.

Dundes, Alan, and Alessandro Falassi. *La Terra in Piazza: An Interpretation of the Palio of Siena*. University of California Press, 1984. By far the most complex and in-depth study of the Palio by two cultural anthropologists (one Sienese, the other American). The ultimate guide to what is happening during the entire course of the event.

Hook, Judith. *Siena: A City and Its History*. Hamish Hamilton, 1979. Hook, a renowned medieval and Renaissance scholar, has written one of the best and most accessible short histories of the city.

Norman, Diana. *Siena and the Virgin: Art and Politics in a Late Medieval City State*. Yale University Press, 1999. This richly illustrated, scholarly book investigates through art the role of the Virgin Mary in Sienese political, cultural, and religious life. A necessary text to fully understand the relationship between Siena and the Virgin Mary.

Waley, Daniel. *Siena and the Sieneese in the Thirteenth Century*. Cambridge University Press, 1991. Waley has studied the commune of Siena in terms of its social, economic, and political culture, creating a picture of an unusual town ruled by a mercantile elite but with powerful roles for artisan guilds, factions, and the Church.