

Patrician and Aristocratic Town Residences in 's-Hertogenbosch c. 1250–c. 1550 – The archaeological evidence

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's-Hertogenbosch (Noord-Brabant/NL); 1250–1550; town residence; Keizershof

Introduction

Financed by the municipality, systematic archaeological research has been carried out within the town of 's-Hertogenbosch and its hinterland since 1977. Preceding building activities, c. 120 large rescue excavations and more than 100 smaller observations and watching-briefs have been carried out. The choice of sites has been based upon an operational research programme (Janssen 1983a; 1990b), some results of which have been presented in other languages than Dutch (Janssen 1986; 1990a; 1990b). Within this research programme patrician and aristocratic town residences have been systematically recorded.

Contextual evidence

Nowadays 's-Hertogenbosch is a town of medium size (c. 150.000 inhabitants), which is the capital of the present Dutch province of Noord-Brabant. The written sources show that during the later Middle Ages, 's-Hertogenbosch was, apart from the city of Utrecht, the largest town in the present Netherlands, finally enclosing c. 115 ha within its medieval town walls and having an estimated population of c. 13.000 inhabitants in the 14th century, gradually increasing to ca 20.000 inhabitants in the 16th century. This made it one of the medium-sized towns in medieval North-Western Europe (Janssen 1983a, 17). Nevertheless, 's-Hertogenbosch was within the duchy of Brabant to which it belonged, only the fourth town after the capital Brussels and the towns of Leuven and Antwerp. The historical sources point also to the fact, that the medieval prosperity of

the town was based on a mixed economy, consisting partly of international trade (with the Rhineland, Flanders, Northern Germany and the Baltic especially), regional trade (the town being the market-centre for the agrarian products of the north-eastern part of Brabant) and the export of a number of small industries, most important of which were metal industries (especially the manufacture of knives and pins), the leather industry and the textile industry. Towards the end of the Middle Ages the town developed into the most important administrative and juridical centre of the northern part of the duchy. It also became the most important religious centre of this part of the duchy, having around the year 1500 more than (nowadays mostly vanished) 30 chapels and churches and 16 monasteries and 8 town-houses of monasteries within its walls.

Ducal and noble houses within the town of 's-Hertogenbosch c. 1180–c. 1275

The town of 's-Hertogenbosch was founded by the Duke of Brabant at the end of the 12th century at the edge of his private demesne of Orthen. 16th century chronicles and documentary evidence mention the presence of a ducal house ("domus ducis"), situated at the west side of the present market-place (fig. 1 nr. 1). Archaeological and architectural investigation at this location has demonstrated the presence of a large house with a probable width of c. 24 m, built of tufa stone, imported from the Rhineland, which indeed can be dated to the second half of the 12th century. Possibly the ducal court to which this house be-

longed, being the most probable seat of the sheriff ("hoogschout") – the representative of the duke within the town – was abandoned around 1230 by the duke and its sheriff and at least partly granted to the newly founded Franciscan monastery. The ducal house itself, the "domus ducis", was granted to the Lombards, Italian bankers we encounter for the first time in the sources as inhabitants of the ducal house in 1274, from then onwards known as

the "domus Lombardorum" (de Bruijn 1996). Probably shortly after 1230, the duke moved his house to a location just outside the early 13th century town walls (fig. 1 nr. 2).

The presence of the ducal stone building must have been a remarkable phenomenon within the early town. Generally the basic construction of all excavated houses during this period consisted of dug-in, heavy upright wooden posts, roughly flattened at the bottom, at regu-



Fig. 1: Map of the town of 's-Hertogenbosch with the location of the most important houses, mentioned in the text. 1. House of the duke (before c. 1230); 2. Ducal court (after c. 1230); 3. Tower house (Achter het Verguld Harnas); 4. House of Willem van den Bosch (before 1344); 4a. Excavated ancillary (?) building of the house of Willem van den Bosch; 5. Hooghuis of the counts of Megen, 14th century; 6. House of Arnout Berewout, 14th century; 7. House Zuidwal (probably later known as "Masereels-huis"), 14th century; 8. House Molenstraat, 14th century; 9. House Cupenborgh, 13th–14th centuries; 10. Moriaan, 13th–14th centuries; 11. Rodenborgh, 13–14th centuries; 12. Leeuwenborgh, 13th–14th centuries; 13. House of lords of Helmond, later Brecht, c. 1500; 14. Hof van Zevenbergen, c. 1500; 15. House "De Munt", built after 1527 by Albrecht van Deventer; 16. House of the priory of Postel, rented by Guy of Brimeu, count of Megen; 17. House later known as "Mariënhage", built around 1550; 18. Keizershof, built shortly after 1526 by Hendrik van Deventer. A. Location of first town wall and town-moat, built first quarter of 13th century. B. Location of second town wall, begun end of 13th century, completed end of 14th century with later, mainly 17th century additions (drawing: D. van de Vrie, BAM, 's-Hertogenbosch).



Fig. 2: 13th century tower (marked: 1) during the excavation in 1998 (photograph BAM, 's-Hertogenbosch).

lar distances of 1.50–2.00 meters apart. These posts supported the main construction of the houses, completely consisting of wood. Between the posts ground-sills are present, wooden beams functioning as a support for walls of wattle-and-daub construction. As a rule the use of stone and bricks during this early period was limited to public, ecclesiastical and military buildings such as the early 13th century town-wall with its gate-houses (Janssen 1983b).

The new settlement proved to be an economical boom-town during the 13th and 14th centuries with an enormous population growth. It is remarkable, however, how very few noblemen we meet in the town's history before the middle of the 14th century. Even among the ducal sheriffs themselves we meet very few outright noblemen during this period. The main reason for the general absence of the nobility within the town-walls can be found in the absence of a princely court with the duke in residence. Consequently, residences of nobles serving at a court were absent. This picture is generally confirmed by the material evidence from the excavations. We have not come across evident noble residences. Two possible exceptions might be mentioned. It concerns two tower houses, both built during the second half of the 13th century just outside the first town. The foundation of one of these towers could be briefly recorded in 1975 during demolition and building activities (Personal communication Dr. A. H. van Drunen). A second tower, further along the same street,

could be excavated more thoroughly in 1998 (fig. 1 nr. 3; fig. 2). The tower was completely built of brick, had an external diameter of 6 x 5.5 m, walls with a thickness of c. 1 m at foundation level and was founded on four brick-built piers at the corners with underground arches springing from them. Probably the tower originally had three floors. Shortly after it was built, wooden buildings were added to it. The tower was located just outside the town-wall at the other side of the town-moat, so it is possible that the tower, when it was built, at least technically was located outside the town. From the written records we have no information about who may have built these towers. Generally this type of tower occurs very rarely in Dutch medieval towns. Only a few examples are known from Utrecht and some towns in the county of Holland. In most cases, however, their builders seem to be connected with the nobility.

Patrician and noble houses within the town c. 1275–c. 1375

In accordance with the economic prosperity, the archaeological evidence shows an enormous increase of brick-built housebuilding within and without the first town-wall during the general period of c. 1275–c. 1350. Together with this phenomenon, the second town wall was begun during the end of the 13th century. It was completed about a century later, enlarging the area within the town walls from c. 10 to c. 115 ha.

Some of the newly-built houses were built on the place of earlier timber-framed houses, others were built in newly reclaimed areas. The largest houses we encounter in the archaeological evidence during this period are very uniform (Janssen 1990a, 415–424; Janssen 1986). They are generally c. 15–20 metres long with varying width, the smallest being 6–8 metres wide, the larger examples generally being c. 10–12 metres wide. They have completely brick-built outer walls, the foundations consisting of brick-built piers with underground arches springing from them, forming underground arcades supporting the brick walls. The internal construction of floors and roofs, however, was still based on a timber frame. The internal division of these houses seems to be rather uniform. Most of them are

provided with a brick fire wall containing the chimney, which separated front- and rear-house at a ratio of one to two-thirds. Some of the larger examples may have been provided with a (vaulted) cellar. Most of these houses are provided with square or rectangular brick-built cess-pits, attached to the back of the house and often serving as the base of a tower containing the staircase. The ground-floor is generally of loam, while hearths constructed of loam, brick or roofing-tiles are only rarely encountered during the excavation of the ground floor. There are indications that the residential apartments of these houses generally were situated at the second floor. Often they seem to have been provided with floors in geometric patterns, consisting of small, c. 5 x 5 cm square, mostly lead glazed redfiring tiles often with a white slip underneath the transparent glaze or glaze with copper or iron, resulting in pale and bright yellow, green, mottled green, brown and black colours. The fact that these houses in the contemporary sources are sometimes called "aula" does suggest that most of them were also provided with a hall. However, the most common name for them seems to have been "mansio".

As a random selection of some of the excavated and architecturally investigated examples of these large houses (fig. 1 nrs. 6–12) show, they are so common and uniform, both within and outside the first town-wall, that I have speculated in an earlier essay (Janssen 1990a) that this might be characteristic for 's-Hertogenbosch as a new, fast-growing economic boom-town, expanding rapidly by reclaiming large areas. This way there might have been no considerable social differentiation to start with, while the new areas in its turn attracted an already rather wealthy, socially and economically homogeneous group. In some cases the study of the contemporaneous written records has revealed, that these houses were built by wealthy merchants and patricians. The presence of the storage of grain, especially rye, in two of these excavated houses (fig. 1 nr. 8 and de Vrie and Janssen 1997, 95–108; van Haaster 1997, 151–153) also points to the combination of a representative and a commercial function.

The basic question for our subject is whether and if so, how many of this type of houses were built and functioned as residences of the nobility. The investigation of the standing

buildings and careful examination of 16th–19th century paintings and drawings show that some of them undoubtedly possessed elements of castle-like architecture as, for example, turrets and crenellations (fig. 1 nrs. 9–12; Boekwijt 1990; van Drunen 1990). There are, however, no indications that these houses were built or lived in by members of the nobility. Nevertheless this is not impossible. For the answer to this question further research into the written sources is necessary and in progress. Gradually, from the second quarter of the 14th century onwards, noblemen living in the town are appearing in the written sources. Among the earliest of them are Geerlink and his son Willem van den Bosch. We know their names from Willem's testament, made up in 1332 with additions in 1335, 1339, 1341 and 1344. Willem van den Bosch, knight, was a rich nobleman, possibly related to the lords of Horne, who died without legal offspring in 1344. Therefore, he bequeathed a large part of his many possessions, in the first place his house along the Hinthamerstraat where he lived (fig. 1 nr. 4), to the order of St Clare in order to found a new nunnery in this house. So it happened (van der Velden 1986). Unfortunately we have no information about the external appearance of the main house of Willem van den Bosch at the time of his death. We have, however, some information about one of the ancillary(?) buildings of his mansion preceding the mid-fourteenth century church building of the later nunnery along the river Dieze (fig. 1 nr. 4a). Fragments of this building could be documented. It was built during the first half of the 14th century, measuring ca. 7 x (more than) 14 m external diameter, vaulted with ribless groined vaults and floored with small glazed floor tiles, probably laid in mosaic patterns (Bloemink 1997).

Willem van den Bosch' opposite neighbour at the other side of the road at the time of his death was the Count of Megen. Apparently the count needed a representative town-house when doing business in the town. The house was sold and demolished in 1800. From descriptions made during the sale and a 17th century drawing showing the house from a distance we know it must have been an impressive building with extremely high stone gables towering over the neighbouring houses. This is in accordance with the colloquial name of the house in the medieval sources: "Hooghuis [=

High House] of Megen". In 1984 a small excavation prior to rebuilding part of the site has shown the house was built during the second or third quarter of the 14th century. The excavation also revealed the presence of one of the earliest and also largest brick-built cess-pits of this period, a clear sign of the need for comfort and luxury. The excavation also made it clear, that the house during the 15th century consisted of two L-shaped wings with probably an inner court and a tower containing a staircase in the inner corner between the two wings (Janssen 1988, 56–57; van Sasse van Ysselt 1910–1914, III, 140–147).

Another nobleman possessing a house within the town, was Hendrik van Moordrecht, knight, who made his testament in 1367. Although later strongly rebuilt his large house along the Keizerstraat, which was later incorporated into the "Keizershof" (fig. 1 nr. 18) was shown during the excavation to have been c. 18.5 x 10 m external diameter. The house functioned from 1389 to 1493 as the bankers house of the Italian Lombards being the successor to the old "domus ducis" along the market place (de Bruijn 2000a).

Our conclusion for the period c. 1275–c. 1375 is, that most of the large houses within this period were built by patrician merchants, although we do not yet know whether and if so, how many of them were built and lived in by nobles. Noble families certainly appear in the 14th century, especially in the area outside the first town wall which technically might have been outside the town. During the period when they were built, many of these early 14th century brick-built houses excavated so far, were free-standing at the back of a court. This means they were not aligned along the later, post-medieval street line. When they are so aligned presently, however, the possibility exists, that the street line itself may have been determined by the front line of these earliest brick-built houses.

Aristocratic residences within the town c. 1375–c. 1550

The archaeological evidence for the 15th–16th centuries in 's-Hertogenbosch shows a material culture with an increasing social diversification and differentiation. The large houses of the 14th century were evolving dur-

ing the 15th century into residences in the true sense of the word. Gradually a new standard type for this kind of residence emerged, consisting of two wings in a L-shape with a round or polygonal tower, containing the staircase, in the interior angle.

Two of these residences are preserved to the present day. One is presently still known as "De Munt", the other as the 16th century town house of the abbey of Mariënghage (fig. 1 nrs 15 and 17). The house called "De Munt" (= "Mint") derives its name from the fact that here the Archdukes Albrecht and Isabella had established a mint between 1614–1626. The house probably was rebuilt into its present L-shaped outward appearance shortly after 1527, when Albrecht van Deventer, brother of Hendrik van Deventer, the builder of the Keizershof, bought three adjacent older houses (van Sasse van Ysselt 1910–1914, I, 245–255) and made it his town residence. Outside the town he also possessed the castle of Nieuw-Herlaer at St. Michielsgestel. Although Albrecht and his brother Hendrik were not of noble descent, they were ennobled by Emperor Charles V. The architectural investigation of Albrechts town residence has been limited to the hexagonal staircase tower during a recent restoration. This tower turned out to have been built during the first half of the 16th century and originally to have possessed a height of at least 14 meters, towering high above the roofs of the house itself (van den Eijnden 2000).

The house still known under the name of Refugiehuis (= safe house) of the Mariënghage abbey acquired this function in 1589. The house was, however, built earlier. Architectural and dendrochronological investigation has shown that the house was built in two stages. The first took place between 1501 and 1538. Around 1550 the house was enlarged to an L-shape with an hexagonal, highly decorated staircase-tower of 18.5 meters high in the interior angle (van Sasse van Ysselt 1910–1914, I, 150–160; Boekwijt 1993). Being even higher than the tower of "De Mint", the tower of Mariënghage widely transgressed its function as staircase. Therefore it is clear that both towers had an important representative function. It is remarkable that the builder of the L-shaped residence Mariënghage was, as far as we know, a rich patrician, but not a nobleman.

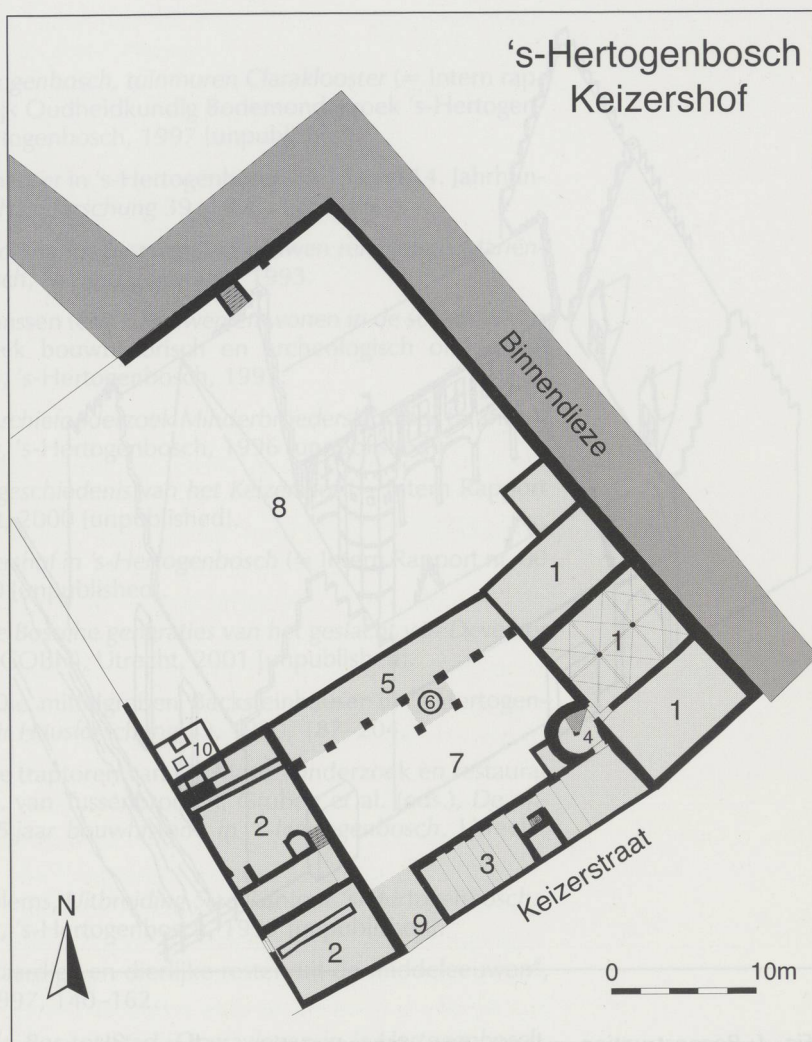
During the end of the 15th and first half of the 16th century a number of aristocratic residen-

ces are known of which no trace is left and of which we have no or little information about their outward appearance. It concerns for instance the house of Paulus van Haastrecht, Lord of Loon (van Sasse van Ysselt 1910–1914, II, 62–69), the house of Guy de Brimeu, Count of Megen, rented by him from the Priory of Postel (fig. 1 nr. 16), the house of the Lords of Horne and Boxel (van Sasse van Ysselt 1910–1914, I, 234–245) and the house of the lords of Helmond, later in the possession of the Lords of Brecht (fig. 1 nr. 13; van Sasse van Ysselt 1910–1914, II, 93–107). Only in this last case a survey of 1812–1813 suggests for this house also a L-shaped ground-plan (Glaudemans/Willems 1999, 20).

Two residences, however, clearly surpassed the others. These are the Hof (=Court) of Zevenbergen and the Keizershof (fig. 1 nrs 14 and 18). The Hof van Zevenbergen still exists, albeit in a heavily restored form.

Around 1500 the house was in the possession of Cornelis van Glymes, Lord of Zevenbergen and Heeswijk. He was an important member of the Burgundian aristocracy, army commander and a Knight of the Golden Fleece. It is quite possible the building of the Hof van Zevenbergen was commissioned by him. It consisted around 1500 of a large hall-house at the back of a more or less square court with a hexagonal staircase tower at the back side. In 1515 the house was deemed sufficient for the lodging of Charles V, when he visited the town (van Sasse van Ysselt 1910–1914, II, 23–43). In the 17th century, wings were added to the front, so in the end the Hof van Zevenbergen consisted of a more or less rectangular court with four wings.

The Keizershof was demolished in 1871. After this date the site has been twice built upon, but after the demolition of a 20th century school on the site, the foundations of the Keizershof and its predecessors could be completely excavated in 2000. We know from the written sources that the Keizershof was bought by Hendrik van Deventer in 1526, who commissioned the rebuilding into a four-winged palace. The status of the complex appears from the fact that Hendrik van Deventer twice (1540, 1545) lodged in his house the Emperor Charles V, twice Queen Mary of Hungary, governess of the Low Countries (1539, 1549), and once (1549) the later King Philip II of Spain. The Keizershof owed its name to the visits of



the Emperor, who as token of gratitude ennobled Hendrik van Deventer. Until very recently it was unknown where Hendrik's and his brother Albrecht's wealth came from. The research of the written sources has made it probable that at least Hendrik owed his fortune to the jewel trade (de Bruijn 2000a; 2000b; 2001; van Sasse van Ysselt 1910–1914, II, 3–23; Glaudemans/Willems 1999).

The excavation has revealed the complete ground-plan of Hendrik van Deventer's town-palace (fig. 3). The whole area measured c. 46 x 40/31.5 m. The back area was an open court (fig. 3 nr. 8). The house itself consisted of four wings around an inner court (fig. 3 nr. 7), containing a well with (probably) a decorative superstructure (fig. 3 nr. 6). The eastern wing (18.6 x 10.2 m external diameter) consisted of the old 14th century house of Hendrik van Moordrecht, mentioned above and later, until 1493, functioning as the Lombard's house (fig. 3. nr. 1). This house was provided with at

Fig. 3: Reconstruction of the first phase of the groundplan of the Keizershof as built by Hendrik van Deventer shortly after 1526 on the base of the excavation results. The numbers are explained in the text (drawing: R. van Genabeek, BAM, 's-Hertogenbosch).

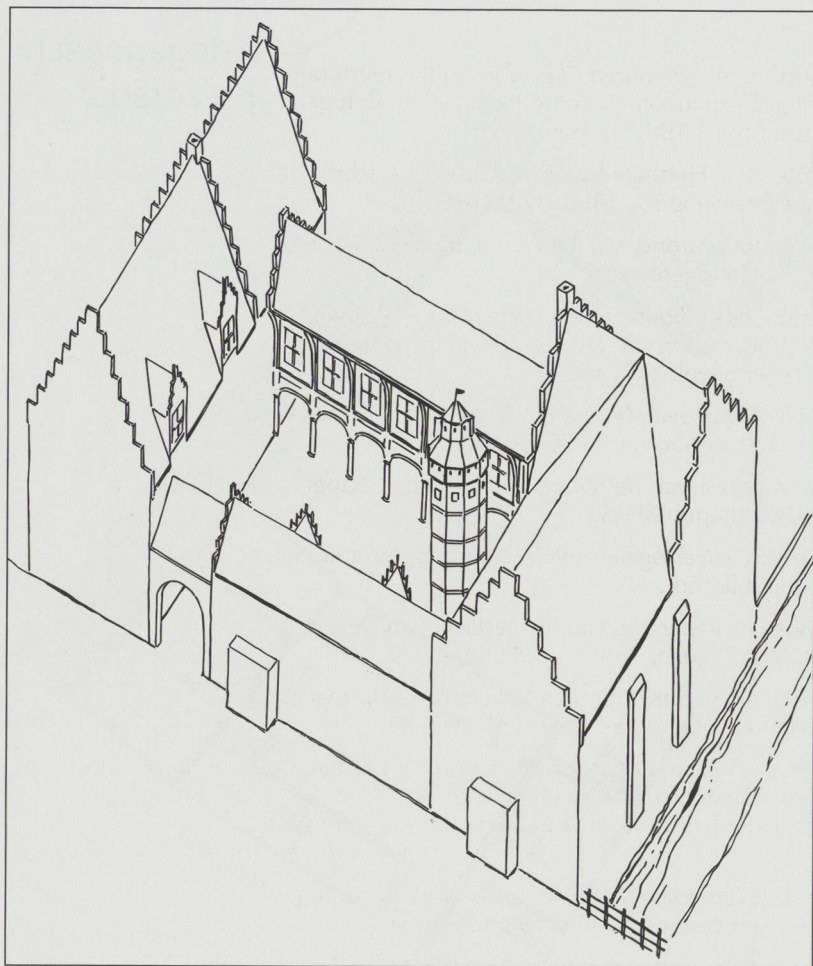


Fig. 4: Reconstruction of the Keizershof on the basis of all available information (drawing: R. Claudemans, 's-Hertogenbosch).

least one representative cellar with cross-ribbed vaults, which was probably built into the older house by Hendrik van Deventer. A possible second cellar may have been destroyed by a recent concrete construction. The excavation has shown that the west wing of the Keizershof (external diameter 18.5 x 8.5 m; fig 3 nr. 2) also consisted of an older 15th century house. During Hendrik van Deventer's time it was rebuilt to a large extent and functioned as a service wing, containing a. o. the kitchens and a very large cess-pit (fig. 3 nr. 10). Along the street a new, rather narrow wing (19.3 x 4.5 m external diameter) was built, completely provided with a cellar (fig. 3 nr. 3).

Between the east wing and the street wing was a decorative arched stone gate with the statue of the emperor on top (fig. 3 nr. 9). The back of the complex consisted of a highly decorated arcade, open at ground level, founded on stone pillars and covered with cross-ribbed vaults (fig. 3 nr. 5). Above the arcade was a covered passage, connecting the east and west wing. In the inner corner between the east and south wing the round foundation (4.2 m external diameter) of a hexagonal staircase tower (fig. 3 nr. 4) was added to the complex. From later 16th century sources we know that the arcade was considered as a very beautiful element. A few corbels from the gallery, preserved during the demolition in 1871, show that the arcade had a rich early renaissance decoration. Drawings of the Keizershof made around 1870 show decorative chimneys and the staircase tower towering high above the roofs, very reminiscent of the Mariënhof and the Munt. The combination of the excavation, the descriptions and the 19th century drawings allowed a reconstruction to be made of the main elements of the buildings (fig. 4).

From the study of the archaeological and the architectural evidence in 's-Hertogenbosch we may conclude for the period c. 1375–c. 1550 that the possession of an L-shaped residence with an staircase tower in the inner angle had become a kind of local standard. The extreme height of the staircase tower, being much higher than was functional, seems to have been a common element of these residences, meant to stress the importance of the owner. This is valid for noblemen, but also for the rich patricians emulating them. The richest man in town, Hendrik van Deventer, even was able to build a palace with four wings around an inner court. Close on his heels was the lord of Zevenbergen with his Hof van Zevenbergen. Nevertheless, Hendrik van Deventer was able to harvest the richest price, which gave him maximum prestige: the honour to lodge the emperor and his entourage on a regular basis.

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