

# 1

## HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT



# THE ROLE OF WATER

## AMSTERDAM

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology



Water defines Amsterdam. Often labeled the “Venice of the North,” this city is as much organized by canals as it is by cobbled streets. In Amsterdam, canals are used for transport and travel, but more importantly, as a defined place for water to be routed.

“I would prefer Amsterdam to Venice: because in Amsterdam, you have the water without being deprived of the land,” said the French philosopher Montesquieu. (Jyeffe)

Amsterdam has been built out into the sea, and today it is literally sinking into this watery environment. Much of this water needed to be relegated into channels for development to ensue. The elaborate canals that charac-

terize modern Amsterdam were dug incrementally as the city developed over centuries. Today these canals serve as handrails for navigation, as paths for circulation, and as boundaries between neighborhoods and streets.





## AMSTERDAM

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology

## EUROPE BEFORE AMSTERDAM

Relative to other European cities, Amsterdam got off to a late start. As a 13th century fishing village, it was just beginning to establish a working infrastructure when many other European cities were well formed. The swampy land that characterized this area in prehistoric Roman times and through the dark ages required a great deal of topographical tinkering to become habitable. Amsterdam developed initially as a small trading town within the territory of the bishop of Utrecht, lacking environmental stability and security. The headwaters of the Amstel River were dammed thereafter, eventually providing protection from the North Sea.

This close relationship to the sea characterized Amsterdam's early years. Because of this natural force opposing development, residents worked aggressively to shape a city that would control this water. This work ultimately paid off, in that it offered residents access to the sea and thus the international trade industry.



# THE ORIGINS

## AMSTERDAM

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology



In the year 1300, Amsterdam was founded, gaining rights as a city in the county of Holland. A dam and series of locks were constructed along the Amstel River, offering some control over access and movement in this area. The river connected the interior with the port of Amsterdam, and goods began to move through Amsterdam. Trade and commerce characterized this city and its relation to the rest of Europe. (Hopkins)

Because most structures in the Middle Ages typically were built of wood, lasting examples of buildings from this time period are rare. Despite this fragile material, a surprising number

of structures in the city center still have timber frames.

Two major expansions occurred in this region during the 14th century. In 1342, land bordering the Amstel River was manipulated (raised and extended) for development. This land was both raised and extended to create buildable space. The Oudezijds and Nieuwezijds Voorburgwal together formed Amsterdam's oldest city ramparts. These ramparts were formed by earthen walls strengthened by wooden palisades.

In 1367 and 1380, a second expansion was realized with the integration of two new canals. The Oudezijds Achterburgwal of 1367 and the Nieuwezijds Achterburgwal (now Spuistraat) of 1380 were integrated into the existing system, allowing the older city gates to remain operational.

Religious buildings, both inside the city walls and beyond the city perimeter, appeared during this time. The Modern Devotion religious movement

led to the construction of a chapel in 1300, an independent parish in 1334, a second parish church at the end of the century, and several other chapels. Convents that were initially outside the city walls were later absorbed by the growing city. (The Old Nunnery in 1391; the New Nunnery in 1403; the convent of St. Paul's in 1415 and the convent of St. Ursula or the Eleven Thousand Virgins in 1419).

When a dike burst in 1380, several new canals ensued: the Kloveniers-

burgwal and Geldersekaade in 1425, and the Singel to the Spui in 1428. In the middle of the 15th century, the land south of the Spui was incorporated into the walled city. By 1454, three different city gates: the Regulierspoort, the Haarlemmerpoort and the St. Antoniespoort enclosed the eighty hectare city. (Hopkins)

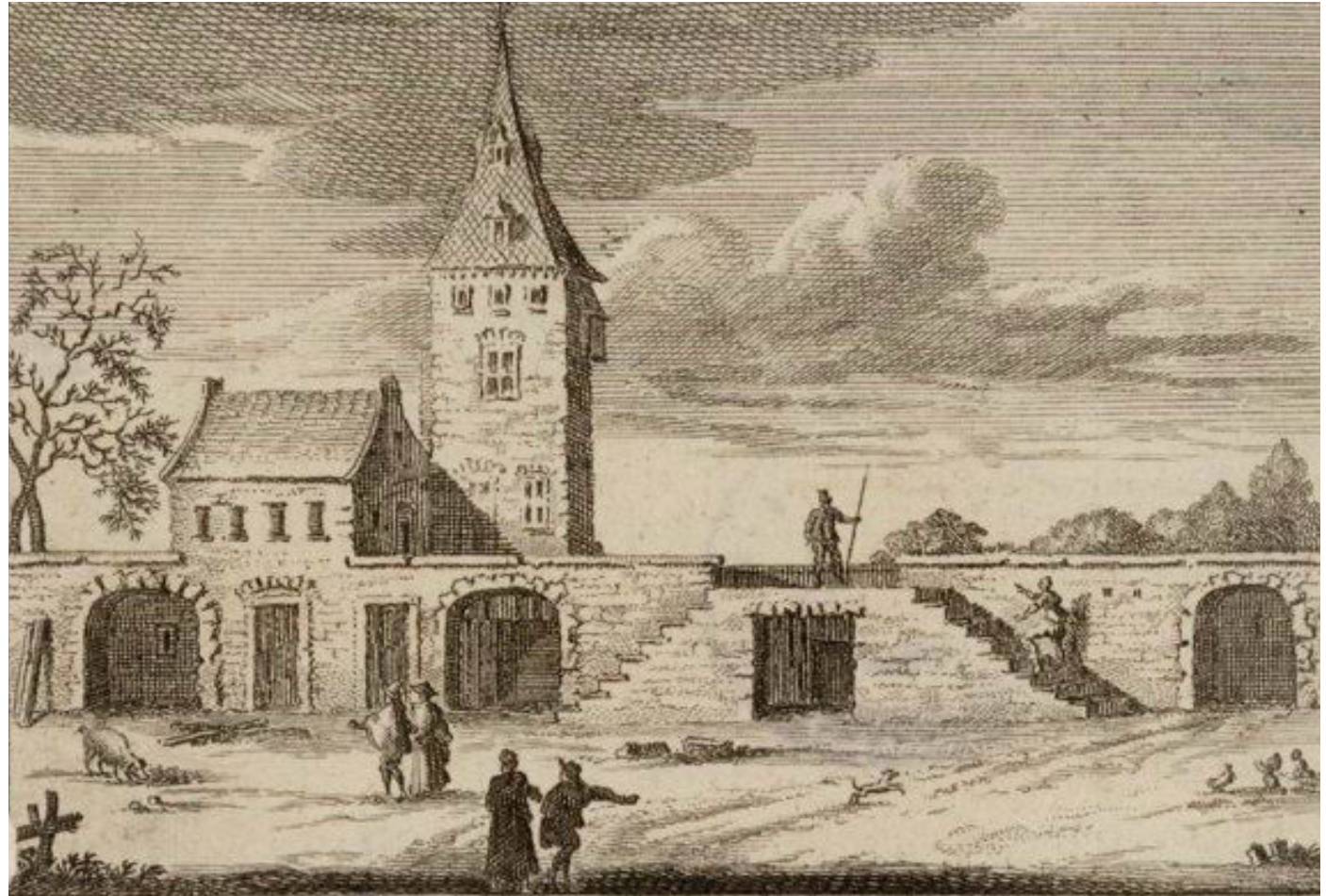






Maximilian of Austria initiated his plan to enclose the city behind stone walls and intermittent towers in 1481. Fifteen years later, the project was finally completed. Today, evidence of this wall system can be seen in several places throughout the city.

The great fire of 1452 led to increased fire-proofing measures for new buildings in Amsterdam. Laws prohibiting new construction with wooden side walls and repeated attempts to ban the use of wood as a universal construction material resulted in a gradual shift towards stone and brick buildings. The ever popular wooden facades, however, lasted until well into the 17th century.



By 1550, the population of Amsterdam swelled to 30,000 inhabitants. The housing stock doubled from 3,000 to 6,000 in the fourteen years between 1546 and 1560. Building outside city limits also increased considerably. The next fifty years represented

a tumultuous period in the life of Amsterdam, during which time Spain seized the Netherlands and the Netherlands eventually escaped this domination and became the Republic of Nine Provinces. The Protestant Reformation was embraced by many,

Catholicism became the official state religion, and Amsterdam nevertheless provided refuge for Protestants from all over Europe. In 1584, the influx of wealthy and skilled refugees from Antwerp impacted Amsterdam's economy.



# THE GOLDEN AGE: 1585-1613

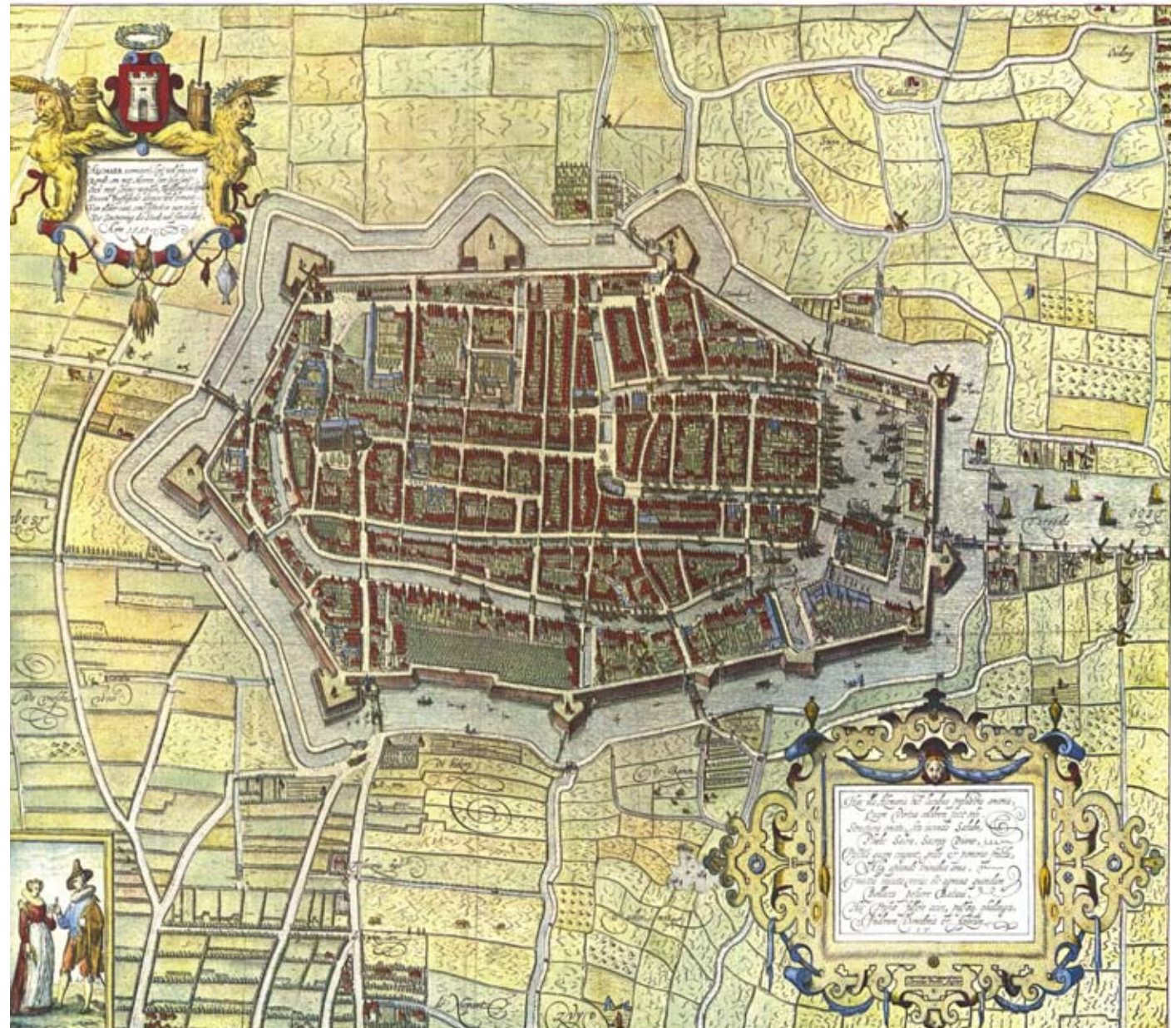
## AMSTERDAM

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology



Amsterdam's Golden Age was marked by commercial success, a thriving art scene, and the emigration of wealthy Europeans. Compared to other major European cities at this time, Amsterdam boasted impeccable city streets, lined with outdoor lights and luxurious townhouses. Most of Amsterdam's wealth was concentrated in the Gouden Bocht of the Herengracht, whereas the working class inhabited the region between the Prinsengracht and Buitensingel on the Jordaan. Amsterdam's cityscape was firmly established during this period of growth.

Many of Amsterdam's important historic buildings date back to this period,





## AMSTERDAM

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology

## THE GOLDEN AGE: 1585-1613

including the town hall in the Dam Square which was built in 1648 from imported German stones, on 13,000 wooden piles, and the canal houses that supported its wealthy elite. A number of these mansions exist even today, including De Dol-fijn, De Gecroonde Raep, the Bartolotti Huis, the Huis met de Hoofden, the Poppenhuis, Kloveniersburgwal 95, the Trippenhuis, the Van Raey-huizen, Keizersgracht 672-674, and Sweedenrijk, Herengracht 462.

When Antwerp fell in 1584, the city of Amsterdam responded by bolstering its own protective wall. The existing wall was not up to the standards of modern warfare, and also needed to be extended to accommodate the size of this growing city. This newer wall enlarged the city both to the West and East. On the Western edge of town, a 60 meter strip of land linked the Singel to the Herengracht, and in the East, the Lastage area was incorporated into the city. Amsterdam grew to 168 hectares during from 1585 to 1593. (City files)

Trade continued to flourish, and

in 1602, the East-Indian Company located their headquarters in Amsterdam. This company operated a trade monopoly on spices, vases and fabrics from Indonesia, China, Japan and India. During this time, the Netherlands expanded its international presence by colonizing South Africa, the Mauritius Islands, Ceylon and Indonesia.

These trading relationships, coupled with the country's zeal for international colonization, firmly established Amsterdam's role in international commerce. These relationships also ensured a steady flow of diverse goods, information, and people through this city. Amsterdam had become a key player in the international trading game.



## THE THIRD EXPANSION: 1613-1663

### AMSTERDAM

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology



In 1613, the Herengracht, Keizergracht and Prinsengracht canals were built beyond the Singel and in conjunction to the fortified Buitensingel canal. These new concentric canals clearly delineated the historic part of Amsterdam from the newer Western development, and are known as the primary components of the third expansion plan.

By the middle of the 17th century, more than 200,000 people inhabited in Amsterdam. Four more squares sprang up under the development of four new Protestant churches: the Noorderkerk, Westerkerk, Zuider and Oosterkerk. (Hopkins)

The third expansion was the result of active planning by the States of Holland and the City of Amsterdam. This process can be tracked in the following account: "On July 10, 1609 the proposal for a crescent shaped groundplan was approved. On August 7, 1609 the States of Holland passed a decree allowing for the extension of the city's jurisdiction for the purpose of the third expansion plan. Such a legal provision was required to enable the city to expropriate the necessary land. In February 1610 the expansion plans drawn up by Hendrick Jacobsz Staets were presented to the city administrators. On July 4, 1611 a committee was set up which was charged with the supervision of the activities. On June 11, 1611 a decision was made to build a Nieuwe Waal. The work on the expansion plan was begun at the western edge of town. On March 5, 1613 the committee presented the map of the new defense walls to the city administrators. A proposal was made to begin in the north-western area (bounded by the Heiligeweg). On August 10, 1613 the plan comprising the realization of the three concentric canals

was approved; followed on August 27 by approval of the plans for the lay-out of the side-streets and side-canal. On November 29, 1613 the administrators decided in favor of the building of the first main canal, the Herengracht. This part of the project did not require any land to be expropriated for the canal was located in exactly the same place as the old city wall. In the course of the months of January and February 1614 all the approximately 200 lots on the Herengracht were sold. In January a decision to build the Prinsengracht had already

been made. The Keizersgracht was to follow later. On November 19, 1615 a by-law was passed pertaining to 27 lots located between the Herengracht and the Keizersgracht. This piece of legislation laid down very strict rules pertaining to the sizes of buildings and gardens and the upkeep of plants and trees, as well as the proper behavior of the occupants. The city administrators intended to curb the breaking of rules and to create model plots. (The basic rules laid down in the 1615 "keur" or by-law pertaining to these keurblokken, i.e. lots to which the leg-





isolation applied, formed a topic of discussion even in our days). By 1620 the new canals had been realized for the larger part. Meanwhile, Oetgens, the spiritual father of the expansion plan, benefited tremendously from this undertaking. Because of his activities in the area of land speculation he was to be accused of insider trading.” (City files)

gpoort in 1636 and the Regulierspoort at the Botermarkt in 1654, diverge from the overall plan.

This first stage of the major expansion plan completed, the city abandoned further work for a several decades. Two new stone gates, the Heiligewe-



## THE FOURTH EXPANSION: 1663-1672

### AMSTERDAM

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology



In 1663 the fourth expansion provided a new stage in the development of Amsterdam. With the extension of the concentric canals beyond the Amstel River, the second part of the overall plan was realized. Amsterdam thus grew nearly four hundred percent in fifty years, creating enough room for many decades of future growth.

This fourth extension actually began as early as 1655, when the three islands of Kattenburg, Wittenburg and Oostenburg were absorbed by the city of Amsterdam. In 1660, the Dutch East India Company moved to these man-made islands, effectively initiating a new period of growth. The States of Holland passed the required decrees for the full building effort in



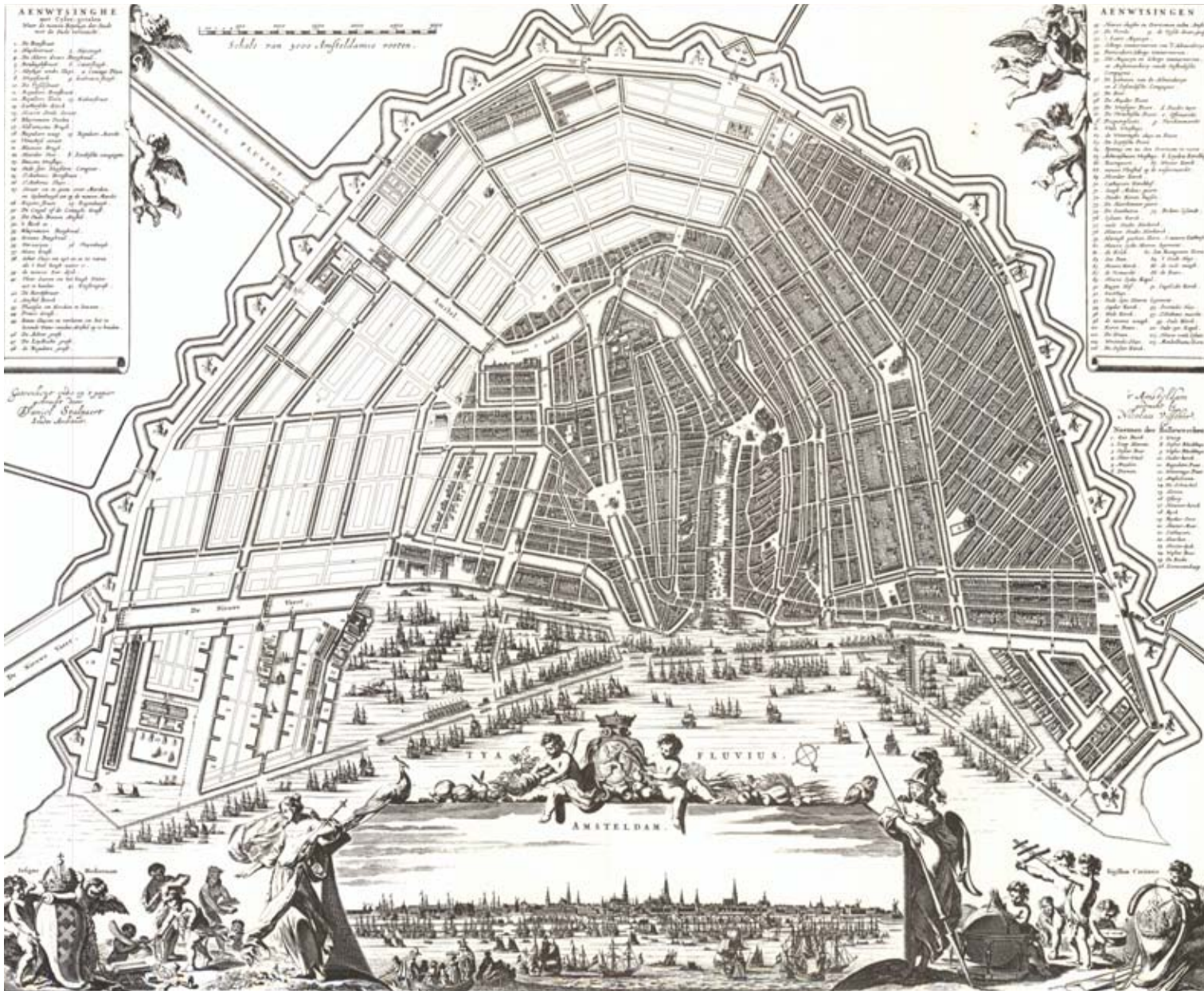
1663, and the city architect Daniel Stalpaert presented his plans for expansion.

Because the scale of this fourth expansion was so great, Amsterdam's

people and building efforts couldn't fill in the full area. East of the Amstel River, open terrain was ultimately used as a recreation area called the Platype. Building activities subsided, aside from parks and insti-

tutional development, until well into the second half of the 19th century. The current zoo (Artis) remains as a testament to land use in this area, and this period is clearly responsible for the wealth of open areas today.







# THE DETERIORATION: 1672-1880

## AMSTERDAM

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology



In 1672, the French and English attacked simultaneously, and ushered in an era of diminished power for the Netherlands. Amsterdam consolidated its prosperity and trade in response to the deterioration of the Republic. Development in Amsterdam naturally ceased with the pressures of this international strife.

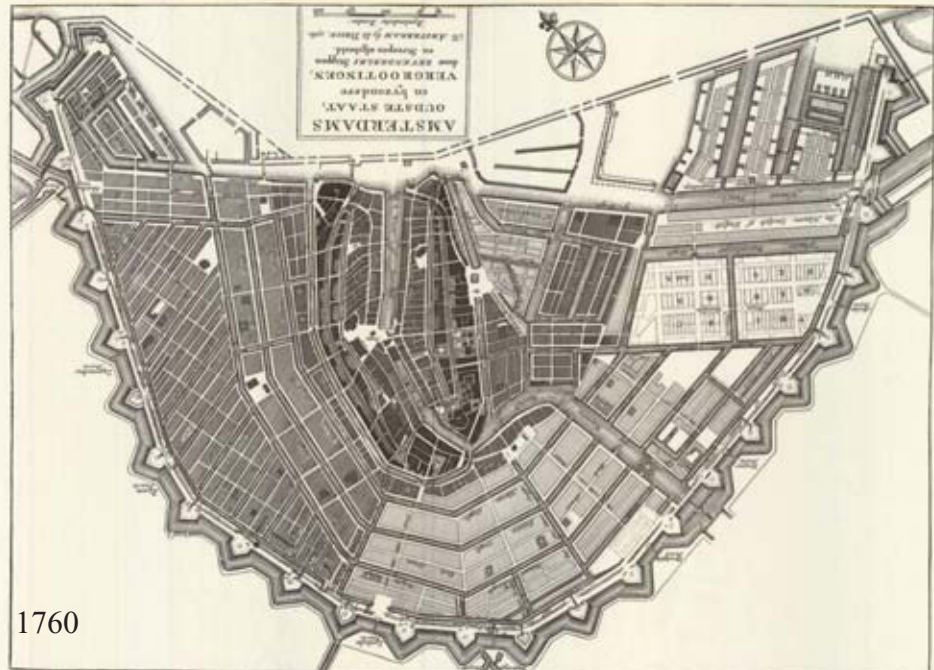
Economic recession, housing degradation, French occupation, and political turmoil characterized the next century. Population and demographic growth in the city was relatively stable, until the final half of the 19th century. In 1850, the city's 224,000 residents still fit neatly into the space created by the fourth expansion. However, by 1879, a substantially increased 317,000 inhabitants required the build-

ing of new homes. The Hague provided the authorization to begin building in 1874, and the area beyond the Singelgracht was developed.

Van Niftrik's costly 1867 city plan was bypassed for the simple, open Kalff plan. This new plan corresponded to existing infrastructure and patterns, but was extremely open-ended, allowing for control of the outcomes to reside with the developers themselves. In 1867 the Nieuwezijds Achterburgwal was filled in to create the Spuistraat, and two decades later, the Nieuwezijds Voorburgwal also was filled in.

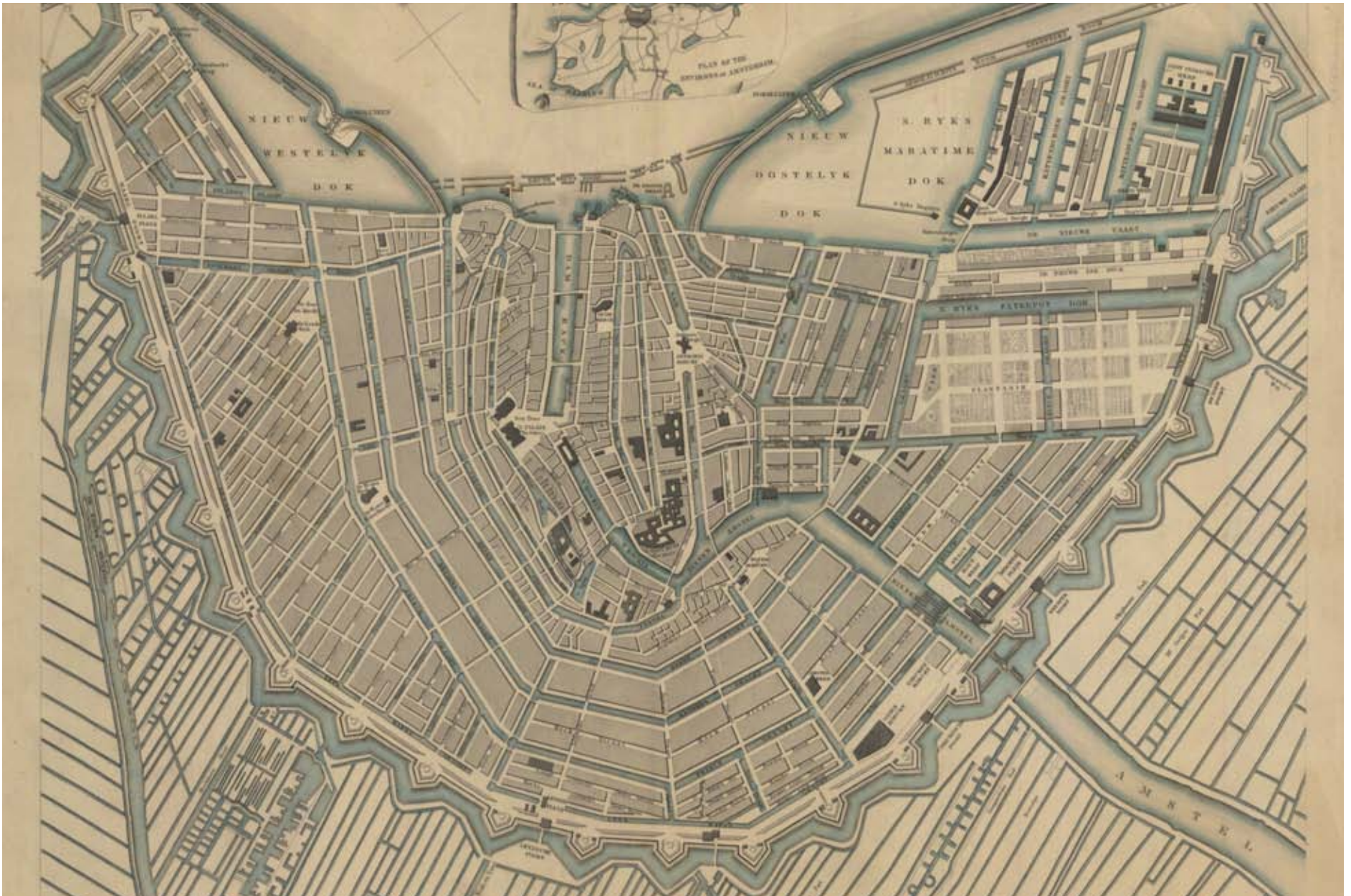


1710



1760







## A RETURN TO GROWTH: 1880-1928

### AMSTERDAM

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology



Population growth continued in the late 19th century, reaching 408,000 residents in 1890. Economic recovery and expansion ensued, after nearly two centuries of stagnant growth. This new boost can be attributed to the Industrial Revolution and the wealth that this movement created. New building developments reflected the need for increased worker housing in Amsterdam.

The cheap homes and new neighborhoods of the Staatsliedenbuurt, Kinkerbuurt, Pijp, and Dapperbuurt developments reflect the lack of funding, planning, and structure of earlier developments in Amsterdam. These areas emerged under liberal political allowances and largely private enter-

prise. Poor construction characterized the development of these working class districts.

Despite this new period of growth and development, Amsterdam witnessed a second major economic recession in the period between 1920 and 1940. At this time, the historic center of Amsterdam was considerably damaged, primarily from filled-in canals and changes in traffic infrastructure. To create the Raadhuisstraat-Rozengracht traffic restructuring of 1893, the Warmoesgracht and the Rozengracht were filled in and the facades of the Herengracht and Keizersgracht dismantled.

“The buildings between the Singel and the Keizersgracht were pulled down between 1917 and 1918 to allow for the widening of the Vijzelstraat. Then, in 1925, the houses between the Keizersgracht and the Prinsengracht were demolished as part of the same project.” (city files) In many other places attempts were made to make the city center more easily accessible to modern traffic. Modern traffic requirements provided

the impetus for much of this change. From the 1920's on, Amsterdam has grappled with the difficulties of integrating modern vehicles into a city designed for earlier forms of transportation.

The Netherlands remained neutral during the first World War, and developed the style of the Amsterdam School, which was evident in many

architectural projects. When the economic crisis hit the world market in the early 1930's, however, Amsterdam felt the reverberations of this economic turmoil.







## AMSTERDAM AT WAR: 1928-1945

### AMSTERDAM

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology

The continued demolition of buildings and filling in of canals continued during this period to accommodate traffic. Widened streets were required for modern vehicle use. The large-scale Carlton Hotel was built in 1929, the Rokin was filled in in 1934 and 1937, and in 1939 the Amstel embankment between Munt and Blauwbrug was widened.

Although these modern changes destroyed some of the fine parts of historic Amsterdam, the city kept most of its character and structure. This retention can be attributed to a variety of factors, including the opposition of active citizens, unwilling city administrators, and the depression of the 1930's. Amsterdam is thus home to a relatively intact historical center.

When Germany occupied Amsterdam during the second world war, the city was remarkably preserved. Almost the entire population of Jewish citizens (nearly 100,000) was deported during this time. The Jodenbuurt, or Jewish neighborhood, was completely wiped out by this occupation.





## MODERN AMSTERDAM: 1945-2005

### AMSTERDAM

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology

In 1949, Indonesia became independent, and Amsterdam lost an important trading partner. Rotterdam took over as the most important port city in the Netherlands, and Amsterdam became a center for culture instead. The development of the international airport at Schiphol, just beyond the city center, reiterates this relationship. Amsterdam has since focused more on service, tourism and cultural amenities than on industry and trade.

The liberal politics that have characterized Amsterdam for centuries peaked in the middle of the 20th century, when Amsterdam openly accepted prostitution, legalized drug use, and adopted an advanced open planning policy. These open values have been tested in recent decades with an influx of foreign refugees. Whereas Amsterdam once enjoyed the benefits of cheap and easy labor from migrant populations, today these different cultural groups are growing increasingly stigmatized. Recent elections and media representation point to an emerging Dutch conservatism. However, Amsterdam remains the financial, historical, and cultural center for the Netherlands.





# MODERN AMSTERDAM: 1945-2005

## AMSTERDAM

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology



