

Medieval Suburbia

Thematic Workshop | 18–19 May, 2026 | Ghent University
Boekentoren, Room 0.8

As medieval cities grew, so did their suburbs. From the eleventh century, amidst urbanization and population growth, new communities took root outside walled settlements throughout western Europe. Contemporaries described these extramural zones as *suburbia*, *bannileugae*, *Vorstädte*, *faubourgs*, and more. Far from the empty spaces evoked by Johan Huizinga in 1919, high and late medieval suburbs were busy places. Institutions of authority—lordships, municipal governments, religious houses, hospitals, guilds—jostled for suburban properties and resources. Suburbs were important sites of industry, grazing, fishing, and horticulture. These zones housed communities of lepers, itinerant encampments, and many so-called “dishonorable trades.” Suburbs were also uniquely vulnerable to the ravages of fire and warfare. By venturing beyond the walls and into the lively world of medieval suburbs, we learn more about institutional power struggles, changes to the environment, and the lives of non-elite populations. This conference proposes to move beyond the typical model of medieval suburbs as mere “margins,” defined by their remoteness from a socio-spatial “center” of urban life. We will consider diverse disciplinary approaches to medieval suburbia. We will look at the ways that medieval suburbs both differed from and mirrored intramural spaces. Finally, we will analyze the communities and activities for which the suburb was a center of its own. From a variety of case studies, we hope to come closer to a comparative and theoretically robust understanding of medieval suburbia as a category of premodern space.

Funded by the Henri Pirenne Institute for Medieval Studies, Ghent University
Organized by Stefan Meysman and Lane B. Baker



HENRI PIRENNE
INSTITUTE FOR
MEDIÉVAL STUDIES

Workshop Program

Day 1 (Monday, 18 May, 2026)

Introductory Remarks (9:00–9:30)

Stefan Meysman and Lane Baker

Panel 1 (9:30–12:00)

Multidisciplinary Approaches to Medieval Suburbia

Respondent: Jeroen Deploige

Jan Dumolyn

Suburbium, bannileuga, vetus burgus and nova villa: Urban Morphogenesis in the Southern Low Countries during the Central Middle Ages

Lennert Lapeere

Reconstructing the Urban Fabric of Medieval Suburbia: Housing, Infrastructure, and Textile Production in Ypres (13th–14th Century)

Elias Holmquist

An Extramural Redux: Re-evaluating Operationalization as Methodology

Lunch (12:00–13:15)

Panel 2 (13:30–16:00)

Beyond “Center and Periphery”

Respondent: Marc Boone

Léa Hermenault

Suburban Materiality: Continuities and Discontinuities in the Urban Fabric between the City Center and its Suburbs in Late Medieval Paris

Justin Colson

Inside and Outside the Walls? Mapping Inns and the Infrastructure of Movement in Late Medieval London

Lane B. Baker

“Heathens” in the Suburbs: The Urban Topography of Romani Immigration (15th Century)

Conference Dinner (Participants Only): 19:00

Day 2 (Tuesday, 19 May, 2026)

Panel 3 (9:00–11:30)

Suburban Activity

Respondent: Wim Blockmans

Mathijs Speecke

Weavers’ Quarters and Fullers’ Corners: Subaltern Topographies in Late Medieval Flemish Cities

Janna Coomans

Fire Risk and Suburbia in Late Medieval Netherlandish Cities

Leen Bervoets

Suburban Discontent: Thirteenth-Century Uprisings and Collective Action in the Towns of Flanders

Concluding Remarks and Discussion (11:30–12:00)

Moderated by Stefan Meysman and Lane Baker