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Amsterdam: City of bridges

From early times people settled along the borders of the river Amstel. The settlement grew slowly and a connection between the two banks of the river was wanted. Around the 11th century a dam was laid in the river with a lock in it. From that the city got its name: Amstelredam, now Amsterdam.

To keep their feet dry in the low and wet lands it was necessary to dig irrigation-canal around the settlement. To come in and go out of the settlement bridges across those canals were needed.

In 1275 the settlement had grown into a town and had become important for the count of Holland. He gave the town municipal rights.

Every extension of the city meant a new irrigation-canal thus more "islands" and more bridges. To give an impression: in 1625 47 islands and 205 bridges; in 1725 75 islands and 291 bridges and in 1885 63 islands and 236 bridges.

Until Amsterdam became very important and rich by the worldtrade the bridges were made of wood. Thanks to the wealth the city could afford to build brick vault-bridges and so it did except for those canals used by boats for all sorts of transport.

After the arrival of the train in 1839 transport over land became more and more important. To provide carriages and the horse-tramway an easy way the high brick bridges had to be lowered.

From 1850 iron and 50 years later steel was used to construct bridges. A very different appearance. When those first iron and steel bridges needed to be renewed after 100 years the city council decided to rebuild vault-bridges. This time of concrete with bricks on the outside.

I can tell the bridge-story of Amsterdam