

The history of Belgium is the history of Europe. It is a country that has been involved in most of the political machinations and territorial disputes on the continent, usually as an unfortunate pawn. Its strategic location, its natural wealth, and its bad luck have conspired to make it a trading piece in the game of European dominion. For an American, the list of ruling parties is bewildering and unfamiliar, but fascinating nonetheless. Understanding the history of Belgium, like that of any culture or country, vastly adds to one's appreciation of the area when one visits.

Because Americans tend to have a more recent view of history, we often think in terms of one nation's struggles against another and identify political entities according to geographic boundaries with which we are familiar. It is important to realize that the concept of a nation state is a relatively new one, and the peoples of a given territory have often been ruled by an individual as part of an inherited or battle-won right to a territory with ever-changing borders. Consequently, they may not have even identified themselves as a "nation" until relatively recently. A related concept that Americans may fail to grasp is the manner in which lands were inherited. A royal ruler (of a kingdom in Spain for example) may also have held other titles that conferred on him or her the right to reign over various seemingly unrelated lands – and these lands and titles may have different rules of inheritance. Consequently, the subjects may at times find themselves ruled over by sovereigns from different monarchies as a given title passed from one ruler to another.

With these thoughts in mind, we must travel back approximately two millennia to get a grip on the beginning of Belgian history. Throughout this narrative, the lands associated with modern-day Belgium will be referred to as "Belgium" even though the country itself didn't officially come into existence until 1830.

During the time of the Roman Empire, Belgium was positioned at the northern extent of the Roman rule. There were likely many native tribes in the area but we know mostly of the Belgae of Celtic (primarily) and Germanic origin; the Belgae included the Nervii, the Menapii, and the Eburones. The Romans gradually conquered most of Gaul (loosely modern-day France) by around 58BC. The tribes in Belgica united for the first time in response to the Roman approach. In two campaigns, first in 57BC where Caesar mostly conquered the Nervii, and then in 54BC where he initially lost ground but then defeated the remaining tribes (although heroes such as the Eburone Ambiorix fought bitterly), Gallia Belgica (from the Seine to the Rhine) was made one of three Gaulish provinces. Eastern Belgium was part of Germani Inferior.

The Roman Empire eroded over a considerable period of time and Frankish invasions starting around 200 AD grew more bold; the Frankish presence was even tolerated by 300. The Franks (one of several Germanic tribes such as the Visigoths who invaded southern France and Spain, the Ostrogoths who ended in Italy and Illyria, the Vandals who landed in N. Africa, and even the Lombards (who also ended in Italy)) invaded Gaul from the east and fought both the Gauls and the Celts. As a result, Angles and Saxons went to England and pushed some Britons to Britany. Even at this early time, Belgium saw some aspects of its current division as the invading armies controlled the northern flatlands and the native tribes maintained a hold on the southern forests. For a period, the Franks maintained a strong presence limited to the north of the present Benelux and the Belgo-Romans stayed in the south. The Wala (Waloons) term began then in reference to Romanized Celts south of the Silva Carbonaria ("charcoal forest" in the middle of Belgium).

In a very general way 500AD can be used as the point when the Roman Empire essentially ceased to exist. By about 480 the Franks headed the provincial government in Tournai with Roman recognition.

In 496, their leader Clovis was baptized and continued to expand Frankish rule as well as the Christian faith. In the 600's, they moved their capital to Paris. Even today, many towns have Frankish names (ending in suffixes such as berg, dal/dael, beek, poel/broek, bos, ghem etc). In the northern parts, paganism continued, while Christianity grew in the south. St. Amand (a contemporary of St. Augustine in England) went to Flanders and started 2 monasteries including one in Ghent in 610. This was likely the start of the town as well as the beginning of the re-Christianization of the area. The Church fostered unity and Belgium began to be neither Germanic nor Frankish, providing an early hint of a national identity within familiar geographic boundaries. The first settlement near Brussels was a Frankish village on St. Michael's hill. Another settlement grew up on Grand Ile (Ile St. Gery).

500AD also marks the traditional beginning of the Middle Ages (Medieval Times or the Dark Ages) which lasted until around 1400 at which point the Renaissance period began. The sixth century was a time of upheaval as the relative stability and the technological know-how of the Roman Empire was lost. As the Franks gained dominion in western Europe, they consolidated their power under a succession of kings (Chlodio in ~431 with his capital in Tournai, then Meroveus from which we get the Merovingian lineage, then Childeric, then Clovis) It was Clovis I (466-511) who united the area under one authority with the exception of areas still controlled by the Ostrogoths and the Kingdom of Burgundy. A number of rulers followed and the Frankish kingdom waxed and waned in size (with inheritance typically divided among the sons). It was also during this time of the 600's that Islam expanded in influence and range, taking root in northern Africa and much of the Iberian Peninsula. When Charles Martel (688-741) became king and united Neustria, Austrasia and Burgundy, he drove the Muslim rulers back south of the Pyrenees. He was succeeded by his son Pepin the Short (who disposed of the last of the Merovingians and thus started the Carolingian dynasty) and then in turn by his son Charlemagne (born in the Belgian city of Liege). Interestingly, one of Charlemagne's relatives may have been St. Gudale (Gudula) for whom the Brussel's cathedral would be co-named.

Charlemagne successfully spread the Frankish rule over the continental land of the Saxons (who had spread to England by the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries) and in 800 he was crowned Emperor by the Pope. Charlemagne established the largest dominion in European history with the exception of the Roman Empire. Upon his death, his son Louis the Pious took over. Upon Louis' death in turn, the kingdom was divided (as per Frankish custom) between his sons Peppin, Lothair, Louis the German and Charles the Bald (illegitimate?), who immediately began fighting. In 843, the Treaty of Verdun ended the conflicts resulting in West Francia (east to the Scheldt – basically modern France) being awarded to Charles the Bald, Middle Francia ruled by Lothair/Lotharious I (including modern Belgium, Netherlands, Alsace, Provence and Northern Italy – it would become lower Lotharingia / Lower Lorraine), and East Francia going to Louis the German (most of Germany and other central and eastern lands), Peppin having died. When Lothair died in 855, his three sons divided Middle Francia, with Lothair II inheriting the northern portion including the Lowlands (Lotharingia). Lothair II died childless, so Burgundy was given mostly to Charles of the western kingdom and the remainder, as the Duchy of Lotharingia (the Lowlands) was taken eventually by E Francia with the lands divided at the Scheldt. Squabbles continued into the 10<sup>th</sup> century and E Francia gradually cemented its hold on the area. Essentially, for three centuries the area was caught in the middle as a border of Francia and Germanic lands. Counts and Princes exemplified a restless independence that would characterize the area for years to come.

During the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries, Brussels as we know it probably amounted to a small market on the river Senne. This was a crossroads of the main North-South river route and the main East-West road route which connected the area nearer the coast to the developing region around the important cities of

Aachen and Cologne. In the early 800's the area was a trading hotspot and a mixing pot of art, culture, and religion.

The 8<sup>th</sup> century had been a time of raids by Norsemen, but Charlemagne's strong military presence kept them at bay, despite the area being the richest in Europe. With the weakening of central power after the death of Charlemagne, an era began with large landlords who could protect the smaller landowners. During this time of the 800's and 900's, Manorialism took root in which peasants lived in villages and owed rent and labor to noble landowners. Manorialism was part of Feudalism in which the knights and minor nobles owed military service to landowners in return for land rental. The lord would grant the vassal land and the vassal would give service to the lord in return. These raids, which had been already affecting England, increased in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. The Viking raids exerted a significant destabilizing effect on Europe and resulted in their settlement of Normandy and in camps in parts of Belgium. Similar to how the Franks had wrecked the advances of the Belgo-Romans, the Vikings wrecked the civilization and culture of Charlemagne's time. Not until Arnulf (King of East Francia at the time) finally defeated a Viking army at Leuven in 891 were they stopped as a major threat, never to return in force. They left the land desolated. In Europe, Romanesque architecture prevailed with large, blocky, stone buildings and narrow windows. Castles also began to be built around this time, becoming a feature of Europe for the next 8-900 years. It was not until the 1500's that the development of artillery made them obsolete.

In the mid 900's, Charles, Duke of Lower Lorraine built a castle on Ile St. Gery, near the center of modern-day Brussels. Charles would have been in line for the throne of France from Lothair (3 or 4) had he not allied himself with Otto of Germany and therefore become shut out. Charles and his son were the last of the Carolingians – his father was Louis IV, king of West Francia – and were supplanted in France by the Capetians of Hugh Capet. The history of Belgium might have taken a much different course if Charles had taken the French throne. The site of his castle is now occupied by the church of Riches Claires. A chapel was also built on the island in approximately 980 by Charles who moved the remains of St. Gudale to the new location. The island, and the original chapel, were named after St Gery (or St Gaugerie), the Bishop of Cambray and Arras. Charles' son Otto died in 1012 with no heir. Therefore, some of the lands of the Duchy went to Charles' sister Gerberga (977-1015) who was married to Count Lambert I of Louvain (952-1015). In approximately 1050, Count Lambert II (995-1062) moved St. Gudale's remains once again, this time to the site of the present cathedral in Brussels where he rebuilt the church there. He also moved his headquarters from Grand Ile to the region of Coudenberg. It is there that he built the first portions of the city walls (completed by his successor Henry II) and began work on a magnificent castle. Importantly, in the late 1100's, the Count of Louvain, Henry 1, became the Duke of Brabant and the Marquis of Antwerp thus combining significant territory and power.

In 918, Emperor Otto united the Franks and Saxons of East Francia, and after fighting the Hungarian raiders was crowned Holy Roman Emperor in 962. Otto had some trouble controlling his Belgian possessions and put the Archbishop of Cologne in charge of the bishops of Liege and Cambrai to exert more control. It should be noted that after the time of the Vikings, the church became more corrupt and political until the rise of the Benedictine order and other reforms. Liege remained as a Bishopric and so functioned as an independent power until 1794. With the break-up of the Carolingian empire of Charlemagne's descendants, a series of counts (Frankish), dukes (Germanic), Bishops, and occasionally "kings", ruled territories of various sizes. These independent rulers gained in power and wealth as they developed their principalities through feudal dues, tolls, and judicial fines. Meanwhile, towns began an era of growth in size and importance as trade developed. The 10<sup>th</sup> century was a time of general societal growth as disease and famine decreased and breakthroughs such as the heavy plow, the windmill, the watermill, the horse collar and even the wheelbarrow were developed. During the time from 1000-1200,

the cloth and metal industries supplied much of the economic power to the region of Belgium. Interestingly, the cloth industry had been a part of the culture for a long time, as even the Menappii were cloth-makers. This was also a time when the popularity of monastic orders began. The power and prevalence of these orders across Europe continued into the 1100's. Also, around 1047, the original church on St Michael's hill was rebuilt but then burned in 1097. It was eventually rebuilt as the St Michael's and St. Gudale's church, although the famous towers were not added until the 15<sup>th</sup> century. In approximately 1100 a new church was erected on Grand Ile which stood for 700 years. Its location is marked by a plaque on Place St. Gery.

Around 1044, various dukes and counts allied to oppose Emperor Henry III, including Baldwin 5 of Flanders. This marks the first real voluntary unity of Flanders and Lotharingia (under Duke Gothelo I) and in some ways marks another step toward Belgian national identity. As the Lotharingians struggled against their German Lords from 900-1100, other entities gained prominence. For the most part, the Counts of Flanders aligned with the King of France while the various Lotharingians were loosely under the power of the German Emperor. Again the division was the Scheldt. A large portion of modern Belgium became the Duchy of Lower Lorraine (despite being north of Upper Lorraine). One of the Dukes was Godfrey V of Bouillon who sold all he had to lead the first crusade around 1075.

The County of Flanders continued to grow in power and wealth. In theory, the Count was a vassal of the King of France, but in reality, the king directly controlled very little. In some parts of the county, the count was also a vassal of the German Emperor. Politics were complicated, with the Duke of Normandy a direct rival, and English politics impacting the continent. By 1100 the Count of Flanders had more knights than any of the surrounding powers including the king of France and the Count of Hainault.

The origins of the County of Flanders can be traced back to Baldwin Iron Arm who stole away (eloped with?) Judith, daughter of Charles the Bald and widow of the English king Ethelwolf (839-858). Baldwin II in turn married the daughter of Alfred the Great. He expanded Flanders into Wallonia and Artois and tried to push into Normandy. Throughout the 10<sup>th</sup> century, a succession of leaders continued to build influence and power. Upon the death of Baldwin V (son of the Baldwin the Bearded) in 1067, his sons Baldwin VI and Robert I (the Friesian) split his holdings. Their sister Matilda married William of Normandy and became queen of England. When Baldwin VI died, Robert attacked his lands, making his capital in Bruges. His son Robert II (of Jerusalem) had a son Baldwin VII who was close to his cousin Charles the Good. When Baldwin VII died, Charles became Count of Flanders but was murdered shortly thereafter. The King of France intervened (Charles having no heir) and tried to install William Clito. The locals put forth Thierry (Theodoric) of Alsace, grandson of Robert I, who battled with William and triumphed in 1128. This victory limited France's influence in Flanders. Had the conflict gone the other way, Flanders would not have aligned with England in the coming years. Thierry's son Philip died in the crusades, thus launching yet another struggle with the king of France for control. Count Baldwin V of Hainault (married to Margaret I of Flanders who was Thierry's daughter) intervened to stop the French invasion. He then reigned as Baldwin VIII of Flanders with his son Baldwin IX following. Baldwin IX had two daughters, Joan and Margaret II (whom we shall meet again shortly). Joan married Ferrard (Ferdinand) and took over Flanders but when they fought against France they were defeated at Bouvins in 1214. Thus Flanders became aligned once more with France for a time while the adjacent Duchy of Brabant was aligned with England.

Other major principalities in the area included Brabant and Limburg as well as the loosely organized area of Frisia. The Duchy of Brabant arose when the Count of Leuven became the Marquisate of Antwerp; the Duchy of Leuven, and the Duchy of Lower Lorraine were officially merged – thus creating

the Duchy of Brabant around 1180. In 1032, The Kingdom of Burgundy was absorbed into the Holy Roman Empire and the Dukes of Burgundy ruled over lands only roughly tied to the geography of the original kingdom. The Duchy would ultimately rise to be one of the strongest political entities in Europe on the basis of the power of its Dukes, and would last until 1477. The Duchy of Burgundy arose from portions of West Francia and the Kingdom of Arles which in turn came out of the Kingdoms of upper and lower Burgundy. This was the period of the High Middle Ages and saw the first Crusade launched in 1095 with Godfrey of Bouillon at the helm. Urban life consisted of walled cities which were granted the capacity to defend themselves, unwalled cities, which although not allowed to have walls did share the ability to hold markets and hence have town squares, and lastly villages which were not allowed to have markets. Nobles granted increasing powers to the towns in return for taxation revenues.

The 1100's also saw the peak of monasticism including the dominance by the Cistercians who were strict followers of the Benedictine rules. Other orders included the Franciscans, the Dominicans and the Augustinians. Several cultic religious orders developed (Cathars, Waldensians, etc) which spurred the rise of the Inquisition. This was also a time in renaissance of literature and law. It was also during this time, as towns developed that we see the construction of Belfries which served to call people to defense and also as meeting places and locations for trade (with or without a clothhall etc).

Since trade returned through the 1100's (now that the Vikings were defeated), the 1200's saw the towns gain even more power. Previously, only nobility and the church had real influence, but now merchants and artisans gained money and even military power through city militias. The Counts, Dukes, and Bishops gave the cities some degree of self-government in return for money and military support. The traders paid tolls and taxes to the nobles. The towns usually started around castles (where the trade and money were) and gradually demanded both rights and protection. They were generally run by patricians – merchants or landowners – under charters granted by the ruler. The patricians worked with the sheriffs or bailiffs (representing the count or duke) or a prefect or provost (representing the bishop). Mayors or aldermen were patricians who controlled the fairs or markets (which existed as places where trade and prices could be controlled). In some towns, like Brussels, the Lineagers were leading patrician families from whom the aldermen were chosen. Lineagers were owners of industry, and the Lineager merchant guilds controlled imports and raw materials. This system kept out foreign intervention, but prevented unity. Even in the 1100's, the Lowlands had been exporting brass and cloth, both industries that spurred the rise of specialized trades. They imported exotic goods via Italy as well as dyes and alum which was used to fix the colors in textiles. The aldermen usually met in the cloth hall since it was large, but then built belfries and eventually town halls as the cloth industry lost its monopoly on power and wealth. As agriculture became more profitable (due to the manure industry, multiple cropping and cash crops), serfs could be more productive and began paying rent instead of feudal service. The 1200's also saw the rise of the free peasant class as people cleared and started farms on previously unworkable land (a trend led by Cistercian monks). It was during the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries that Gothic architecture replaced the Romanesque style of the previous 200 years.

Trade and industry were the primary driver behind the rise of the power and importance of cities. In Belgium, trade with England for wool allowed the cloth industry to fuel the rise of the cities. The period was characterized by conflict and upheaval as multiple dynastic struggles occurred. At this time, succession of title still often depended on Imperial confirmation. In the next century, succession would grow to depend on marriage and family and then on warfare if the claim was disputed. In addition to the cities exerting themselves and challenging the power of the nobility, the Mongols were invading into Europe from the East. All of these ideas and events contributed to refiguring early notions of State Power.

One interesting event in this period is the legacy of Margaret II, Countess of Flanders which eventually resulted in the splitting by inheritance of Flanders under her sons by William 2 of Dampierre (allied with Brabant and from whom she separated due to the machinations of her sister Joan) away from Hainault under her sons by Bouchard d'Avesnes (which allied with the County of Holland and the King of Germany). The D'Avesnes and the Dampierres fought back and forth with the former being largely victorious. John I (John the Victorious) Duke of Brabant (who may be the Gambrinus appearing in local folklore) captured the duchy of Limburg in 1288 and therefore controlled the trade road from Cologne to Flanders. Interestingly, John I married Margaret of Flanders, daughter of Guy Dampierre. Their son, John II later married Margaret Plantagenet, daughter of King Edward of England. Meanwhile, Guy Dampierre, the Count of Flanders, (allied with England) renounced loyalty to France prompting the French king to invade. Guy Dampierre was captured and imprisoned in France. When the Pope sought to mediate peace, it resulted in a separate peace being struck between England and France. Ghent and Ypres promptly sided with the Count of Flanders (the English side) in an effort to gain a share of trade and governance, but Bruges sided with France to maintain their prominent status. The leaders of Bruges had a change of heart at some point and slaughtered the Frenchmen in the town thereby prompting a French invasion. In an effort to protect their perceived rights, the city of Bruges fought victoriously against the French army at the Battle of the Golden Spurs (battle of Courtrai) in 1302. This battle marks the beginning of the end for the noble knights as the supreme power in battle, although the rebellion itself was short-lived. It also symbolizes the shift of artisans (craft guilds) moving from economic regulators to civic governors with legal and military power and thus supplanting the patricians as the seat of urban power. In the cities, we see this period marked by crafts guilds battling for power with the aldermen. The period also marks the end of the Late Middle Ages and the beginning of the Renaissance (1300-1600) as well as the arrival of the plague in the Low Countries in 1349.

1337 marked the start of the 100 Years' War as England fought with the House of Valois for the crown of France. The County of Flanders sided with France (because the nobility had aligned that way – France had military power and could invade, but England had trade and therefore money), but many of the towns sided with England. England had by this time developed their own cloth industry and this marked a period of decline in Flanders until it was co-ruled with the Duchy of Burgundy. Before that, the House of Luxemburg took over the Imperial crown as well as control of Bohemia and Hungary. In 1273 In 1355, the Duchy of Brabant had passed to Margaret of Flanders (through her marriage to John I of Brabant) then to John II and John III and then to his daughter Joanna (Jeanne) and her husband Wincelous the Duke of Luxemburg (and son of the Holy Roman Emperor). Joanna's sisters were Margaret of Brabant (married to the pro-French Louis II Count of Flanders) and Marie (married to the Count of Gelderland). Joanna was obligated to make payments to her sisters, but conflicts arose. As Joanna and Wincelous cemented the inheritance, they agreed to the Great Charter of Brabant which defined the duties of rulers in exchange for obedience of their subjects and broadened the liberties awarded to the cities. They battled against Margaret and Louis II (also known as Louis de Male). Louis and Margaret attacked and captured Brussels, but the city was liberated in a famous raid by Patrician leader Everard 't Serclaes whose statue remains in the Grand Place. This allowed Wincelous and Joanna to make their Joyous Entry in 1356, a name given to the charter as well as to the commemorative pageant and parade still celebrated today. Everard 't Serclaes was later murdered by Zweder, the Lord of Gaasbeek, which prompted the citizens of Brussels to besiege and destroy the castle which can still be toured. When Joanna and Wincelous died childless (he is buried in the abbey of Orval), the Duchy passed to Antoine, son of Phillip the Bold and Margaret III (daughter of Count of Flanders and Margaret of Brabant. She was married to Philip of Rouvres and later to Philip the Bold), and brother of John the Fearless. When Anthony died at Agincourt in 1415, John took over Luxembourg. When Anthony's son John IV died, the Duchy passed to Philip the Good (son

of John the Fearless), Duke of Burgundy. The second town walls were erected following this tumultuous time.

For those still following the soap opera, we continue by noting that in 1346, Philip of Rouvres was born to Philip of Burgundy and Joan I. He inherited the Duchy of Burgundy in 1350 while still a child when his grandfather died. When Philip of Burgundy died in the same year, the widow Joan had remarried John the Good (John II), King of France who ruled over Burgundy while Philip of Rouvres was young. Philip later married Margaret III of Flanders (Margaret of Dampierre) who was heir to Flanders. Unfortunately, Philip died of the plague before having an heir which resulted in a messy inheritance debate. Eventually, the Duchy of Burgundy was awarded to John II of France (John the Good, Philip's step-father), but the Burgundian nobility refused to recognize this and attempted to stay independent. In 1363 Philip the Bold (the son of John II and brother of John the 5<sup>th</sup> of France) became Duke of Burgundy and married Margaret III of Flanders (daughter of Louis de Male), the widow of Philip of Rouvres. Their son John the Fearless later inherited the Duchy of Burgundy, the County of Flanders (1404-1419) and Artois, while his brother Antoine inherited Brabant and Limburg. John waged successful campaigns against France and conquered Paris for a while. The French ultimately assassinated him as he walked to a peace meeting. John's possessions transferred to his son Philip the Good. Brabant, too, would eventually pass to Philip the Good when Antoine's son John IV died without heir. Thus, Philip the Good consolidated Brabant, Burgundy, Flanders, Limburg, and Luxembourg.

In 1382, Ghent again rebelled, this time against Louis de Malle, Count of Flanders. To put down the rebellion, the count received help from France and Philip the Bold, Duke of Burgundy (who was married to the Count's daughter Margaret). When the count died, Margaret inherited – which increased the power of the Duchy. From 1363 to 1477 the Duchy of Burgundy was at the peak of its power and influence. In 1430, the Burgundians cast their lot with the English in the 100 Years' War, largely based on the value of trade and in an attempt to break free from French influence. This was also the time of the Black Death (1347-1350) which by some accounts destroyed a third of the population of Europe. During the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the cloth industry declined, but the tapestry industry was very important and Brussels dominated production, with Bruges and Ghent also contributing. In the early 1400's, Brussels began construction of the town hall which was completed in stages. This was the golden age of Brussels, preceding the religious struggles of the 1500's.

Under Philip the Bold, Burgundy remained nominally as vassals of the French King and Philip was key in the intrigue and power struggles there, even briefly assuming control of the country. His son John the Fearless, took over as Duke of Burgundy in 1404 and battled with various French factions as they struggled to control the weak (insane?) French King. In the course of the conflict, they briefly occupied Paris but later made peace with France. John the Fearless had a son, Philip the Good, who took over the Duchy in 1419 and rolled in Brabant as Burgundian Netherlands along with Holland, Zeeland, Hainault, Luxembourg, and the Bishoprics of Liege and Utrecht. Burgundy here reached the heights of its prestige and influence (as powerful as any force in Europe) and both he and his son Charles the Bold supported more independence from France. In 1477, the 100-year war ended between France and England which left Burgundy somewhat isolated. Soon, artillery began to be used and thus castles and fortresses lost their purpose. Warfare forever changed across Europe. During the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Bruges was at its peak. Burgundian craftsmen took over the concepts of hopped beer and salted herring and created massive industries. Salting herring allowed the ships to stay at sea and follow the fish rather than return to port each day. Hopped beer lasted longer and could be shipped. The various craftsmen and even painters were important to the wealth of the leaders. Having initially lost access to the sea because of silt, a storm

reopened the connection which remained open until 1500 when silt again closed the channel and Antwerp took over as the most important trading town.

Neither Phillip the Good nor Charles the Bold were well liked by the people due to their tendency to consolidate authority centrally. Still, they were successful, rich, and powerful. When Charles married Margaret of York (sister of Edward 4) in 1463 in a wedding so incredibly lavish wedding, it astounded the English with the wealth of the Burgundians. Charles' main enemy was France and he proved to be harsh in crushing dissent within his realm but too ambitious for his limited diplomatic skill. Burgundy at that time was divided into a high and low (the Low Countries) portion separated by Alsace and Lorraine. Charles managed to united them but then attacked Switzerland and was killed in 1477, leaving his daughter Mary of Burgundy as his sole heir. A large part of the Duchy of Burgundy was seized by King Louis XI of France. Mary claimed control of the remaining Duchy and called herself the Duchess of Burgundy with a capitol in Brussels. It was Mary that signed the Ghent Privileges in 1477 which granted greater rights to cities. She married Maximillian I of the Holy Roman Empire and the region became part of the Habsburg 17 Provinces. Thus began more years of conflict with France and with the cities. Bruges and Ghent were defeated around 1490 and a new era of central authority began, temporarily ending the fights for local privileges. Their son, Philip the Handsome, inherited the Duchy from his mother in 1482 (actually getting power from Maximillian in 1493) during a time of renewed conflict with the cities. Philip the Handsome, as governor of the Low Countries, was more focused on them versus his father's more regional aspirations against France. He even sacrificed some titles to Burgundy to have peace in the region.

Philip married Joanna, Queen of Castille and became King of Spain (Aragon and Castille) but died before inheriting the Holy Roman Empire from his father. Castille brought possessions in the Americas and Aragon brought Southern Italy. His son was Charles the Fifth (1500-1558) was born in Ghent and would eventually become the most powerful of the many rulers of Belgian territory. Inheriting the additional kingdom focused Philiip's attention on Spain and he reconciled with his father. Philip died in 1506, preceding his father in death. Maximillian chose his daughter Margaret of Austria to govern the Low Countries (until 1515 and then again in 1522 with power granted by Charles V). Margaret was a firm supporter of the Low Countries until her death in 1530. She was succeeded as Governor of the Low Countries by Charles' sister Mary of Hungary.

As the wool trade continued to decrease, linen replaced woolen cloth as the biggest industry (during the time of Philip the Good). Bruges became separated from the sea by silt and Antwerp replaced it in prominence. During the 1400's the town hall replaced the Belfries as representative of the spirit of the period. This was emblematic of the transfer of power to a central sovereign. The towns recognized the benefit of a strong Duke, and the Dukes saw the benefit (financially) of strong town economies. The town halls served as the seat of government while the economic action shifted to the exchanges. During the first half of the 1500's, Antwerp became the most important city in Europe economically and the second largest in population. In addition to the silting of Bruges' sea access, Antwerp was helped by trading in Papal alum as opposed to Turkish alum, attesting to the many areas of influence of the Catholic church. The city also gained trade in Portuguese spices and sugar and became a center of finance and manufacturing (fish curing, soap making, cloth dying and sugar refining).

Charles V took over the Low Countries in 1515 and became Charles I of Spain in 1516 and Holy Roman Emperor in 1519. The Low Countries sometimes became less important to him, but he maintained his identity with that region. An ardent Catholic, he persecuted the protestant movement which began

with the Reformation in 1517. On the positive side, this period also marked a renaissance of language, medicine, geography and learning in the Lowlands. Charles V reigned until 1555 when he abdicated in favor of his son Philip II of Spain ("Spain" included the Spanish Netherlands, modern day Belgium and Netherlands) and Charles' brother Ferdinand I who would become emperor. Philip II was not popular in Belgium because of his strong Spanish character and failure to show interest. When Philip II married Mary Queen of England, he briefly became King of England but lost that title when she died four years later.

The reign of Philip II and later Philip III (Philip the Pious) marked a time of struggle and decline for Belgium. Both proved to be poor rulers as they exploited their distant territories. Philip II fought France almost continuously and taxed the Low Countries to pay for his efforts. He moved his headquarters out of the region and left his sister Margaret in charge, but with a council of advisors. He pushed forward his own Bishop appointments (a dramatic change) and enforced the persecutory policies of Charles V resulting in many executions, a great deal of emigration, and violence on both sides of the religious divide. Philip's appointed commander was the Duke of Alba (Alva) who was a brutal suppressor of dissent.

Local rebellions led to greater schisms which resulted, in 1568, in the Count of Horn and the Count of Edmont being beheaded in Brussels by the Duke of Alba, which added fuel to the fire. The executions helped spark the Eighty Years' War which was largely fought between the Calvinist North and the Catholic South, neither of which cared for Spanish rule. The war (1568-1648), led by William I of Orange (William the Silent) against Phillip II, was costly for Spain financially and deepened religious divides; it would ultimately result in Dutch independence. The Pacification of Ghent in 1576 represented an attempt at unity. The Dutch under William of Orange took over Brussels but could not get help from either England or the Holy Roman Empire (who benefited from the instability and drain on Spain). The decimation of the Low Countries continued and in 1579 the Union of Utrecht gave rise to the Republic of the Seven United Provinces in which several Northern provinces joined together and, declaring independence in 1582, formed what would eventually become the Netherlands. In 1584, William of Orange was murdered but this setback was offset by the decision by England to side with the United Provinces thus diverting Spain's attention. In 1585 the Dutch closed the Scheldt depriving Antwerp of its access to the sea and dooming it to a period of decline. Philip II died in 1598 and his daughter Isabella inherited the Netherlands along with her husband the Archduke Albert of Austria. Phillip III inherited Spain, Italy, Portugal and the Americas, but various clauses in the contracts meant Spain and Spanish troops were still involved in the politics of the Lowlands. From 1595 to 1621 Albert (son of Maximillian and Maria) and Isabella (daughter of Philip II) were placed in charge of the lower provinces, but in reality had little ability to effect change. Still, they worked hard to improve the lot of the people and were popular. Their reign was generally a time of relative peacefulness. It was also a time when the Spanish Netherlands sheltered many exiled and persecuted nobles including Mary de Medicis, Duke Charles of Lorraine, Queen Christine of Sweden, Charles II of England (deposed by Oliver Cromwell) and the Duke of York. In 1609 Philip III effectively recognized the United Provinces' (Netherlands) independence through neglect, inaction, and a temporary truce. He continued to treat the lower provinces (Belgium) badly. Added to the political situation and the religious and social violence, the early 1600's were a time of famine and a prohibition against the lower provinces' rights to trade with important foreign lands (a political rule by the king). There were some bright spots, as it was during this time that both Rubens and Brueghel painted, although with markedly different styles. Universities became increasingly important. This also marked the beginning of the Baroque period of music and architecture. Albert and Isabella worked to rebuild the Catholic south, and the period saw many churches and cathedrals built. The Dutch Republic became the leading commercial power in Europe. When Albert (1621) and then Isabella (1633) died, Philip IV appointed no local representative for the Low Countries, emblematic of their declining status.

From 1618 to 1648, Europe was also embroiled in the Thirty Years' War in which the Holy Roman Empire fought with France over various parts of central Europe. In 1621 both Philip III and Albert died. Since Albert left no heir, the Habsberg Netherlands reverted to Spanish rule under Philip IV. By 1635, the French were enmeshed in the 80 years' war, but eventually wound up fighting the Dutch as well as Spain. In 1648, the Peace of Westphalia (incorporating the treaties of Munster, Hamburg, Osnabruck) marked the end of the Thirty- and Eighty-Years' Wars. This really marked the beginning of the concept of sovereign nations existing in their own right and resulted in the formation of the United Provinces (Netherlands) which incorporated northern Brabant. The southern portion of the lowlands stayed with the Spanish Habsburgs as the Southern Netherlands. A further blow to Belgian importance was dealt when, in 1659, the Treaty of Pyrenees was concluded between France and Spain which, among other things, resulted in France gaining control over southern Flanders (present day French regions south of Belgium). During this time, Flemish lace became popular, and the Habsberg Netherlands saw some economic recovery, primarily in the rural areas but to some extent also in the cities.

In 1649, Charles I of England was executed and Oliver Cromwell took over as a dictator soon after. In 1650, William II, Prince of Orange died in the same year that his son William III was born. William III gradually took leadership of the Dutch Republic and fought off and on with France before eventually concluding peace (after France had gained some territory). He fought with England off and on too, then invaded and became King of England, eventually marrying Mary. He died in 1702. During this period, Philip IV continued the mistreatment of the lower provinces and fought with the United Provinces but basically relied on the Dutch to keep the French at bay. Belgium was caught between a bad sovereign (Spain), the Dutch and the French. The result was that there was general poor conditions and continued violence. Philip IV died in 1665 leaving Charles II in charge who continued to neglect parts of his realm.

As Belgium languished as a battlefield between England, the Netherlands, and France in the second half of the 1600's, it almost ceased to exist. In 1688-97, France fought the Nine Years' War trying to expand its territory. It was during this war in 1695, while trying to divert the Dutch from a siege of Namur, that the French infamously bombarded the Grand Place, causing much destruction to the buildings. Shortly thereafter, Charles II died thus setting off the War of Spanish Succession from 1701-1714. Charles II had named Philip V (Phillip of Anjou, French) as a successor, but other powers (England and the Holy Roman Empire) could not countenance a united France and Spain. At the war's end, Belgium was ceded in the 1713 Treaty of Utrecht to the Austrian Habsburgs and Spain's other holdings were divided until it resembles the country it is now.

In the meantime, Charles VI of the Holy Roman Empire was succeeded by Maria Theresa (the mother of Marie Antoinette) who ruled from 1740 to 1780, initially with her husband Francis I and later with her son Joseph II. Her popular governor for a time was Charles of Lorraine (statue in GP?). Joseph II, like Philip II before him, was wildly unpopular and brutal in suppressing dissent. Joseph II did appoint Duke Albert and Marie Christine as regents, and they attempted to govern well. Because Belgium was still denied the right to trade abroad, native industries grew in prominence including lace, linen and coal (tapestry having been replaced by printed material). The Dutch continued to block the Scheldt, and the Emperor refused to intervene. In 1789 a revolt against Joseph II resulted in a one-year independence for Belgium (the Brabonconne Revolution resulting in the Republic of the United Belgian States). In 1792, the Scheldt was finally reopened. Later Leopold II, Holy Roman Emperor, took over, but he too proved bad for Belgium.

Troubles continued for Belgium as the French invaded in 1795. From 1747 until 1815, Belgium was repeatedly conquered and lost by France and the Holy Roman Empire. In 1797, Austria renounced all

claims to Belgium, but some degree of rebellion against French rule continued. In 1804, Napoleon declared himself emperor. His defeat in Russia meant that French military strength crumbled as he retreated west. William of Orange landed in 1813, but Russian and Prussian troops were already in the Netherlands. William I was declared king of a united Netherlands (along with Luxembourg) in 1815. Later that year, Napoleon resurfaced and marched north assembling an army in record time. He knew that he could not defeat all the armies combining against him, so he needed to break the individual forces quickly before they united. He first defeated the Prussian forces at Ligny and forced them to retreat. At this point, Wellington chose ground just outside of Waterloo to make his stand.

The day of the battle revealed soggy ground from the night's rain which may have been a factor in Napoleon delaying battle until late morning. Additionally, it is believed that he was quite ill and therefore uncharacteristically passive as a battlefield commander. A counter attack by British cavalry after the initial French infantry attack ended in great losses as they over-extended. The French failed to take Huguenot farm on the right end of the British line and then wasted their cavalry in a massive charge against infantry that had not been properly weakened by artillery (partially because Wellington unconventionally had them lie down behind a berm). Interestingly, William of Orange's son proved to be a horrible commander who was too proud to recall an order leading to the loss of many men. Through the battle, many of the Belgian forces were left unprotected in the front, although a number of them (along with most Dutch cavalry) deserted since they could see little difference in one foreign ruler compared to another. In the end, Napoleon failed to commit his reserves at a critical point and the day was saved by the arrival of the Prussians. Thus, Napoleon's ambitions were stopped forever at the battle of Waterloo which eliminated him as a threat and set the course for Europe for many years (as the royal parties of various countries regained control from the revolutionaries).

The combined country which resulted after the battle suited the powers that formed it, but William I proved to be no friend of Belgium. "Dutch arithmetic" was used to vote in a constitution which divided Dutch debt equally with Belgium. After a brief period of Dutch rule, the Belgians revolted and gained independence in 1830 (the revolution started after a particularly patriotic performance at the Brussels opera). The Dutch invaded but were fought back by the French and English on behalf of the native Belgians. They selected Leopold I (an uncle of Queen Victoria) as their king and a treaty in 1839 guaranteed and demanded Belgian neutrality. King Leopold I was followed by Leopold II (known for his colonial ambitions), Albert I, Leopold III, Baudouin, Albert II and now Philippe. Their democratic (constitutional) monarchy makes them the 2<sup>nd</sup> oldest democracy in Europe.

In 1884, Belgian King Leopold II took the Congo as a personal possession. In 1904 it came under the control of the Belgian government as a colony. Although their policies started off as being on the humane side (considering the standards of the time), they deteriorated into a dismal human rights legacy. In modern times, Belgium has struggled with how to address this part of its past. In general, Leopold II was known for lavish expansion and building projects, but his legacy is mostly that of colonial atrocities.

Albert I followed Leopold II who had no living children. Albert lived a simple life as king and worked for better conditions for the working class (having travelled the country incognito prior to becoming king). He instituted some reforms in the Congo in order to improve life there.

In 1914, Germany invaded Belgium which had rejected an ultimatum of free troop passage. The line was held at the Yser river for about 4 yrs. The Dutch remained neutral and Belgium suffered through the war and the German atrocities. Prior to the war, Belgium was the world's sixth greatest industrial power – they never recovered from the German decimation that saw many killed and more than 100,000 deported

as laborers. Throughout the war, Albert I organized the resistance from abroad. He returned with the liberating armies. In the political post-war discussions, Albert lobbied for more moderate treatments for Germany. He was not heeded and the harsh conditions are thought by many to have fueled the development of the Nazi party prior to WWII. Albert died alone in a mountaineering accident.

The reign of Leopold III and the era of WWII is controversial. Leopold initially tried to stay neutral instead of joining France and Britain, for which he was vilified internationally but remained popular at home. Following Germany's invasion, the beleaguered Belgian army held out long enough to allow the British Expeditionary Force to evacuate at Dunkirk. He had long disagreed with his cabinet, who fled to France. Leopold elected to stay with his army and ultimately surrendered to Germany. The cabinet maintained this was unconstitutional and Leopold became a bit of an international pariah. There were many political and propaganda reasons, including that France wanted an excuse for being overrun, and that the United States needed uranium from the Congo. It remains unclear as to his thoughts and intentions, but it may be reasonable to assume he was not a traitor but was hoping to work for the best of the country. His refusal to set up a German caretaker government resulted in his house arrest for most of the war. In 1944 he was sent to Germany and then to Austria in 1945 where the American army liberated him. Banned from returning to Belgium by the caretaker government (with his brother Charles as regent), he was exiled to Switzerland. Belgians were hugely divided about his return as king. He eventually returned which prompted civil revolt and threatened to tear the country apart. In response, he abdicated in favor of his son Baudouin.

Baudouin's reign was uneventful as was that of his son Albert II (apart from an affair and a child only recently recognized as a member of the royal family). The current king Philippe and his family are relatively popular, but the future of the monarchy is debated as to its relevance and appropriateness in the modern world.