7. History of the Lower Rhine and Limburg (Dutch/Belgian province) until 1789

The first detailed descriptions of the region which now form the Lower Rhine and Limburg appear around 50 BC through the Roman Emperor Caesar’s attack and eventual annexation of Gallia. After being victorious over the Celtic Gauls the Romans turned to their Northern neighbours who Caesar describes “Belgae”. To him they appear different in language, customs and laws to the Gauls but there are no records of the language of the Belgae. Their territory stretched from Northern France to the Rhine in the North and East which included the Lower Rhine area and Limburg. While there are plenty of Celtic place names to the south of the Ardenne mountains they fade out further to the North so the Belgae living there may not have spoken a Celtic tongue. Caesar mentions also the Euroborons as living close to the Rhine and distinguishes them as of Germanic origin and the simultaneously mentioned Menapi may also have been Germanic. In how far they constituted a part of the Belgae is not clear but other Germanic peoples were obviously also settling already on the left bank side of the Rhine when Caesar conquered Belgica. Some placenames may derive from those Belgae such as Büttgen (>Bodica) (Norbert Driëke: Büttgen - Eine siedlungsgeographische Skizze, St. Sebastianus-Schützenbruderschaft Büttgen, Kaarst, 1980, page 17) but still it is not clear whether it was a Celtic language, Germanic language or an Indo-European branch of its own or perhaps not even Indo-European. In “Gallia Belgica” Mary Wightman comes to the conclusion that the “final bonds between the people calling themselves Belgae must have been political” since she is unable to clearly identify them as either Celtic or Germanic while both elements are present (Mary Wightman: Gallia Belgica, University of California Press, Berkely and Los Angelses, ISBN 0-520-05297-*, (http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=aEyS54uSj88C&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false).

After Caesar conquered the Belgae he established the province of Belgica which was then soon exposed to attacks from Germanic tribes settling east of the Rhine. Those Germanic tribes were described as Tenkeri, Uispeter, Sigumber and Ubier. In the meanwhile the Romans established themselves and build fortresses such as Cologne, Neuss, Xanten, Bonn and Nijmegen and a road network. In 257 AC the Franks as a newly formed Germanic tribal formation consisting of smaller Germanic tribes such as the Chamavi, Chattuari, Brukeri, Ampsivari, Uispeter, Tubanti, Chasuru etc., attacked the Romans along the Rhine, some penetrated successfully and settled as Roman allies in what is nowadays called Northern Brabant. These Franks where called Salian Franks. In 454 the Franks conquered Cologne and established control over the Lower Rhine and effectively ending the Roman period. (Jürgen Franssen: Novaesium, alias Neuss, Geschichte und Archäologie des römischen Neuss. Eine kurze römisch-germanische Geschichte, http://www.novaesium.de/geschichte.htm ).

The Salian Frank Chlodwig established a powerful Franconian Kingdom which brought most of the Rhineland and Gallia under his control and expanded his empire to Southern Germany after his victory over the Allemans in 506. He also converts to catholic Christianity around 500. In 768 Charlemagne becomes Franconian king and expands the territory in the North to the river Elbe after conquering the Saxons and he acquired the title of Roman Emperor in 800. After his death in 814 in his capital Aachen, his son Louis the Pios became his successor and after his
death his son Lothar agreed in 843 to divide the Empire into three parts under Louis’ three sons. The Lower Rhine and Limburg become a part of Lotharingia, the centre part, named after Lothar who took control over it, including the Franconian capital Aachen and the large city of Cologne.

While the Northern part of the Lower Rhine and most of Limburg remained associated to the Salian Franks, the southern part became dominated by the Ripuarian Franks, who are named for the first time in the 8th century and whose capital was Cologne. Christianity established itself in the Lower Rhine region and Limburg during the 7th and 8th century and the area was allocated to the arch-diocese Cologne (Friedrich Nettetshelm: Geschichte der Stadt und des Amtes Geldern, Crefeld, 1863, http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=C5A6AAAAcAAJ&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false).

After Lothar’s death the centre part was divided between the other two sons, the Lower Rhine and Limburg, and Brabant become a part of the East Franconian Kingdom. The East Franconian king Otto I acquired the emperor title in 962 as “imperator augustus” which was later developed into “Romanorum imperator augustus” by his son Otto II. The empire title was changed to “sacrum imperium” in 1157 under Friedrich Barabrossa I and then finally described as “sacrum Romanum imperium” (Holy Roman Empire) during the reign of Wilhelm of Holland in 1254. The title was to emphasize the inheritance of the Roman Empire and Christian values and thus to manifest the powerful position of the Emperors (Karl Zeumer: Heiliges römisches Reich deutscher Nation. Eine Studie über den Reichstitel, Weimar, 1910, Entstehung des Titels „Heiliges römisches Reich, http://de.wikisource.org/wiki/Heiliges_r%C3%B6misches_Reich_deutscher_Nation._Eine_Studie_%C3%BCber_den_Reichstitel ).

In the early medieval period local dukes and princes and the dioceses Cologne and Trier are able to increase their power in the Western part of the Holy Roman Empire (the former East Francia) and various duchies such as Berg, Cleves, Gelderen, Gullik and Mark are established in the Northern Rhineland but also the Archdiocese of Cologne and the Prince Bishopric of Liege are controlling substantial territories. In the same period the city of Cologne becomes a dominant trading city with links reaching as far as England, Scandinavia and Russia. Cologne becomes part of the Hanseatic League and a powerful bourgeoisie is established. Aachen retains the privilege to crown the Emperor and is the second largest city in the Holy Roman Empire, both Cologne and Aachen received the title “Free Empirical City”.

In 1288 the duke of Brabant forms alliances with the dukes of Berg, Gullick, Mark and the city of Cologne against the archbishop of Cologne and is victorious in the battle of Worringen. This reduces the power of the arch bishop while it increases the immediate influence of Brabant over the Lower Rhine and the Cologne-Bonn-Aachen region (Landschaftsverband Rheinland: Rheinische Geschichte. Epochen und Ereignisse – Die Rheinlande im Hochmittelalter (925–1288) http://www.rheinische-geschichte.lvr.de/epochen/epochen/Seiten/785bis1288.aspx ).

In the 15th century the House of Valois-Burgundy, originally associated to the French crown, is taking control over various territories belonging to the Holy Roman Empire including most of
the Netherlands. The Duchies of Brabant, Gelderen and Limburg are subsequently also taken over by the duke of Burgund and the Principality of Cleves and the Bishopric of Liege come under Burgundian influence. When the Burgundian Duke Charles the Bold died in battle in 1477 he left no male heir and the territory of the Duchy of Burgundy reverted to the French crown according to Salic law but the parts belonging to the Holy Roman Empire were passed to the Austrian House of Habsburg through Charles' daughter Mary of Burgundy and her husband Archduke Maximilian of Habsburg. Maximilian regarded the Burgundian Netherlands including Flanders and Artois as the undivided domains of his wife and himself and declared war on the French Kingdom and his victory resulted in the County of Flanders also becoming part of the Habsburgian realm and thus part of the Holy Roman Empire while Artois remained part of the French Kingdom. Out of the Netherlandic territories, Philipp created the 17 provinces which included the duchies of Limburg, Brabant and Gelderen (after the dynasty ruling the duchy of Gelderen died out in 1543) but the Prince-Bishopric of Liege, the Archdiocese of Cologne and the Duchies of Cleves and Gullik were not included. When Maximilian’s grandson Charles V abdicated in 1556, his realms were divided between his son, Philip II of Habsburg, King of Spain, and his brother, Ferdinand I, Holy Roman Emperor. The Seventeen Provinces, however, went to his son, Philip II of Habsburg, King of Spain (National Historisch Museum: Geschiedenis – Het ontstaan der Nederlanden, Het Bourgondische Rijk – Het Habsburgsche Huis - Karel V - [http://www.innl.nl/page/15360/nl]).

In the meanwhile protestantism impacted European history dramatically after the proclamation of Martin Luther’s Ninety-Five Theses in 1517 and his subsequent contemporaries Calvin and Zwingli gained a large followship in the Netherlands. The harsh rule by the convinced catholic Philip II, who resided by then in Spain, increased centralization of power in Brussels, diminished religious freedom (including the introduction of the Spanish Inquisition) and reduced autonomy of the provinces and their cities which lead to a revolt under the leadership of William of Orange and the Eighty Years War from 1568 until 1648 (Westphalian peace) (National Historisch Museum: Geschiedenis – Het ontstaan der Nederlanden, Karel V – Philipps II – De Tachtigjarige Oorlog, [http://www.innl.nl/page/15360/nl]).

In the Lower Rhine the Archbishop Gebhard Truchsess von Waldburg of Cologne declared in 1583 to convert to Protestantism which lead to war against the Holy Roman empirical powers and the catholic pope in Rome. He was supported by William of Orange which resulted in the Limburg and the Lower Rhine becoming a major battle ground for the Netherlandic Liberation struggle in the 80 years war (Dr. P.J.H. Ubachs: Handboek voor de geschiedenes van Limburg, Hilversum, 2000, ISBN 90-6550-097-9, pages 178-192). The city of Neuss was changing hands several times between Netherlandic, Spanish and Hessian troops which had a severe effect on the city (Stadt Neuss: Stadtgeschichte - Vom Römerlager zur rheinischen Großstadt, 2013, Stadtverwaltung Neuss, [http://www.neuss.de/tourismus/stadtportrait/stadthistorie]). The local duchies became severely weakened and the inheritance was disputed.

A rebellion of imperial dukes in 1552 weakened further the power of the Holy Roman Emperor and, in turn, increased the influence of the French king and his ally, the earl of Brandenburg in the Rhineland, and territories such as Metz and Verdun became part of France (Landschaftsverband Rheinland : Rheinische Geschichte, Epochen und Ereignisse – Die
In 1609 the last duke of Gullik-Cleves-Berg died without a heir and Johann Sigismund von Brandenburg (Regency 1608-1619) through a policy of intermarriage, and Wolfgang Wilhelm von Pfalz-Neuburg took control of the territory in alliance and were supported by the French King who aimed at further diminishing the influence of the Habsburgian Holy Roman Emperor.

In 1614 catholic Spanish troops, allied with the Holy Roman Emperor occupied Wesel and Emmerick to which the protestant Netherlandic site responded. They occupied Gullik but lost this to the Spanish troops in 1622, in return they successfully attacked Emmerick and Wesel. With the support of Swedish troops the protestants were able to control the region after the decisive battle at Kempen in 1642. As a result, the population of the region suffered severely from the battles, army occupation and looting which hampered economic progress and substantially limited the ability of the local population to rise up against harsh decrees or other forms of discrimination and injustices (Dr. P.J.H. Ubachs: Handboek voor de geschiedenes van Limburg, Hilversum, 2000, De kwalle van de oorlog, ISBN 90-6550-097-9, pages 179-181).

The Wesphalian peace of 1648 made the seven rebellious Netherlandic provinces (Holland, Zeeland, Overijssel, Groningen, Friesland, Gelderland and Drenthe) fully independent from the Holy Roman Empire while the southern provinces remained under Spanish Habsburgian rule and thus, inside the Holy Roman Empire. The Dutchies of Cleves, Berg, Gulllick and Mark, now under the control of Brandenburg and Pfalz-Neuburg, also remained inside the Holy Roman Empire. The Prince Bishopric of Liege, although part of the Holy Roman Empire, was never ruled from Habsburg and it retained this status until 1806. But this division was not consistent and there was a high degree of division, enclaves and subdivisions. Parts of what is now Southern Limburg were allocated to be governed from the Independent Northern provinces while other parts to the North and to the West formed a part of the Habsburgian Southern Provinces. Today, this divisions also form in many ways the border line between Belgian and Netherlandic Limburg (Dr. P.J.H. Ubachs: Handboek voor de geschiedenes van Limburg, Hilversum, 2000, ISBN 90-6550-097-9, page 189).

War broke out in 1702 about the Spanish succession and the peace of Utrecht in 1713 also affected Limburg: The Habsburgian parts were now ruled from Austria instead of Spain and those parts in Northern Limburg which belonged to the Duchy of Gelderen (The Upper Quarter) were detached from the main part of Gelderland and came either under Brandenburgian or Austrian rule. Thus the consequences of the peace of Utrecht in 1713 was that once the duke of Brandenburg acquired control over the Upper Quarter of the Netherlandic Duchy of Gelderen it effectively brought the whole Lower Rhine under Brandenburgian control. In 1701 the duke of
Brandenburg was able to elevate his title to “King of Prussia” because the old Prussia (which later became the provinces of East and West Prussia) lay outside the Holy Roman Empire and therefore outside the control of the Emperor.

A somewhat extraordinary episode is the colonization of the Goch Heath by emigrants from the Palatinate after 1741. These colonists were initially bound for America but due to circumstances were refused to enter the harbour of Rotterdam and continue their journey to America. Eventually the Prussian authorities agreed to offer those colonists land for settlement at the Lower Rhine and the city of Goch supplied land to the north east of the city on the area called the Goch Heath. Three villages were built, Pfalzdorf, Louisendorf and Neu-Louisendorf and a Palatinate dialect was still spoken there until recently (Institut für Landeskunde und Regionalgeschichte, Sprache, Inseldialekte - Die Pfälzische Dialektinsel am Niederrhein, http://www.rheinische-landeskunde.lvr.de/sprache/tonarchiv/dialektaufnahmen/inseldialekte.htm).

Despite being predominantly catholic, a small protestant community existed in Limburg which again, inhibited a small Lutheran community in South Limburg which, in contrast to the remaining Netherlands, used standard German as the ceremonial language and this was also confirmed as late as 1816 by the Netherlandic King who declared both Dutch and German as official ceremonial languages in accordance to the new language laws in the united Netherlandic Kingdom (Dr. P.J.H. Ubachs: Handboek voor de geschiedenes van Limburg, Hilversum, 2000, ISBN 90-6550-097-9, page 289).

The general situation in Limburg and the Lower Rhine remained then more or less unaltered until the eve of the French revolution in 1789 which was also to substantially affect Limburg and the Lower Rhine in subsequent years (Rheinische Geschichte, Epochen und Ereignisse – Landschaftsverband Rheinland, Vom jülisch-klevischen Erbfolgestreit bis zum Ende des Ancien Regime (1609-1794) http://www.rheinische-geschichte.lvr.de/epochen/epochen/Seiten/1609bis1794.aspx).

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