

The Creation of Medieval History in Luxembourg

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Declaration

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I declare that this thesis is of my own composition and that the material contained within describes my own work. It has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

All quotations have been distinguished by quotation marks and the sources of information acknowledged.

Pit Péporté
September, 2007

Abstract

In the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg, the Middle Ages provide several of the most important historical reference points for national identity. This thesis analyses how this period was given its significance. It studies the presentation of several medieval figures through historiography from their own lifetime to the present, how they entered collective memory and a national narrative of history, and how the symbolic values attributed to them shifted according to changing political needs. In addition, it identifies those figures that were forgotten, so as to explore the mechanisms of historiographical selection.

The purported founder of Luxembourg is the tenth-century Count Sigefroid, who was (wrongly) regarded as the first 'count of Luxembourg' by the late sixteenth century. In his posthumous career he became the builder of the local castle and city, the creator of the country and father of the nation. He is often joined by his mythological fish-tailed wife Melusine, borrowed from a late medieval French *roman* that already hints at links to the rulers of Luxembourg. The two founders are linked to later themes through Countess Ermesinde. She was a thirteenth-century ruler, rediscovered by nineteenth-century liberals as an early precursor to their political ideals, while a group of Belgian Jesuits used her to foster a pilgrimage tradition. Historiography of the past two hundred years preferred her persona rather than her two husbands' for creating a continuity within the different medieval dynasties, adding to their national character. Her descendant John of Bohemia was transformed quickly into the national hero *par excellence*. This process had its origin in late medieval literature where his 'heroic' death at the battle of Crécy is remembered. His tomb within the city of Luxembourg helped to keep him in local memory, while the loss of his remains to Prussia in the early nineteenth century created simmering discontent that lasted until their recovery in 1946. Interestingly, John stands for the pinnacle of a glorious age, whereas his successor Emperor Sigismund tended to embody the miserable decline of an era, despite having been endowed with many crowns and titles.

This thesis borrows some of its theoretical framework from the study of *lieux de mémoire*, and makes use of a broad range of different sources, from historical writing to literature, visual art and popular gimmickry.

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Introduction

This thesis will analyse and clarify the creation of the medieval past in Luxembourg by focusing on three central issues. The first one is to explain the emergence of the most important re-presentations developed both by historians and non-historians on the medieval history of Luxembourg. Some of their ideas date from medieval times, others are ‘rediscoveries’ by early modern historians, while others emerged only in the wake of nationalism or after the establishment of a more rigorous academic examination of the period. It is essential to understand where ideas originate from in order to become aware of their initial connotations. A second aim is to show how the representation of medieval *topoi* developed and changed over time, not only individually, but also in connection with each other. Here the main focus will rest on the emergence of a national narrative of Luxembourgian history at the end of the nineteenth century and its dissolution at the end of the twentieth.¹ This links into the third aim of this study, namely to discuss the use of medieval history for political purposes and for the creation of national identity.

Historiography

Two tightly interlinked approaches will be used in order to fulfil these aims. The first one is relatively classic historiographical analysis. Where do historians get their ideas from? How much continuity is there in historiography? How are ideas passed on and taken up by different generations of writers? What ideologies influence specific authors and what ideologies do they convey? This thesis does not try to deny the

¹ It is also for that reason that this study focuses on the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg, while only considering the Belgian Province of Luxembourg when there is an overlapping. For differences between the territorial entities see appendix 1 and my chapter on Ermesinde.

possibility of accurate representations of the past, but it aims to show how representations differ over time and why.

Once the past is interpreted and endowed with meaning, historians inevitably bring in their own present questions and ideologies. What these assumptions are and how they shape history is not always easy to answer, and it is particularly difficult to ascertain those of historians active between the sixteenth and early nineteenth centuries. More than often we (still) lack detailed knowledge about the context of their lives and their works have often been overlooked by scholars in the past two centuries. This is the reason why most of their writings have never been properly edited. Some of them survive only in the original prints (e.g. the works of Richard de Wassebourg); some only in manuscript form (e.g. those by Jean d'Anly, or François Pierret). Of the early modern works that will be analysed, only two have fared better: Jean Bertels's *Historia Luxemburgensis* (1605) was re-edited in 1856, and Jean Bertholet's eight-volume opus (1741-43) saw two facsimile reproductions in 1973 and 1997. Likewise, secondary literature on most of these authors is rare and often their role needs to be re-interpreted. This thesis argues for instance that the traditional role attributed to Jean Bertels (1544-1607) as the 'founder' of Luxembourgian historiography has been overestimated. This view neglects Bertels's own sources, most notably Richard de Wassebourg (†1567); likewise it ignores the writings of Jean d'Anly, who wrote a history of the counts and dukes of Luxembourg decades before Bertels published his *Historia Luxemburgensis* and again served the latter as a source. A fundamental mark of early modern historiography in general is the international context in which it took place, unlike most nineteenth-century history writing. Most historians writing on the history of the duchy were either not born there, or were educated and worked outside its borders. Richard de Wassebourg was based at Verdun, as was Jean d'Anly – although he had been born in Malmédy.² As we will see, some fundamental impulses came from Parisian historians, such as Estienne de Chypre (1537-1590) or Nicolas Vigner (1530-1596), both working for François de Luxembourg-Piney, a French nobleman and very distant relative of the medieval counts of Luxembourg. Jean Bertels (1544-1607) wrote from Luxembourg, where he was the abbot of Neumünster-Abbey, but was born and educated in

² See: Claude LOUSCH, *Bertels et les historiens luxembourgeois du XVIe siècle*, p. 478.

Leuven. André Du Chesne, who corrected many earlier mistakes, worked at the royal court in Paris. Only Eustache de Wiltheim (1600-1678) and François Pierret (1673-1713) were both born in the duchy and wrote their accounts there. Even Jean Bertholet (1688-1755), one of the latest and, for posterity, most influential of these early historiographers, is far from being a ‘particularist’ historian – his account being a celebration of Habsburg absolutism, steeped in his Jesuit morality.³ The fact that he also wrote an unpublished history of Liège⁴ actually places him in an even wider Low Countries context, since the prince-bishopric of Liège did not form part of the Habsburg territories. Another characteristic of many early history works produced in Luxembourg is their relatively low standard by international comparison. This means that it is often impossible to associate specific works with larger currents in history writing. My analysis of these early modern authors will often have to limit itself to showing how ideas spread from one historian to another and how and why they were modified in the process.

The writing of early modern historians was not yet influenced by a nation-state that commanded a teleological outlook through its mere existence and desire for political survival. In the nineteenth century this was to change. We perceive a boom in production of both historiographical material and romantic literature with historical themes, mainly due to the rise of a nationalism that provided history (and medieval history in particular) with the clear purpose of discovering the nation’s roots and exalting its old age. The grand narrative that had emerged from this process by 1918 will represent a central reference point throughout this thesis: how did it come into existence? What were the factors that shaped it? How strong is the continuity of historical themes? Again the existing basis for this research is far from ideal. Overviews of Luxembourg’s historiography are rare,⁵ while much of the knowledge on nineteenth- and twentieth-century historians has to be gathered from the occasional references in more general articles, or based on the personal memories

³ The term “particularist” is borrowed from Jo Tollebeek who applied it to (other) historians in the Low Countries under the *Ancien Régime*. Jo TOLLEBEEK, *Historical Representation and the Nation-State in Romantic Belgium (1830-1850)*, p. 333.

⁴ See: Tom VERSCHAFFEL, *The modernization of historiography in 18th-century Belgium*, p. 139.

⁵ The best overviews remain: Tony KELLEN, *Die luxemburgische Geschichtsschreibung: ein Rückblick und ein Ausblick*, p. 97-203; and: Joseph GOEDERT, *De la Société archéologique à la Section historique de l’Institut grand-ducal. Tendances, méthodes et résultats du travail historique de 1845 à 1985*, Luxembourg, 1987 (PSH 101).

of ‘elder’ historians.⁶ Few can boast a dedicated study and often these are dated. Likewise international studies often ignore the situation in Luxembourg, even those that focus on the Low Countries as a whole.⁷ Again the consequence is that historians’ political affiliations and methodological approaches have seldom been commented on and often need to be extracted from their writings. The situation is further complicated by the intertwined character of educated society in Luxembourg. In the nineteenth century, history was largely the product of three circles, all based in the capital. The first one of these was the Athenaeum, where most history teachers were based, such as Jean-Pierre Mäysz (1780-1866), Joseph Paquet (1804-1858), Jean Schoetter (1823-1881) and later Arthur Herchen (1850-1931). The second circle was the Archaeological Society (founded in the years 1844/5), later renamed the *Section Historique de l’Institut (royal-)grand-ducal*.⁸ This learned society joined together the teachers of the Athenaeum and erudite notables of the city and the government, such as Théodore de la Fontaine (1787-1871) and François-Xavier Würth-Paquet (1801-1885). A third circle emerged in 1894 with the society *Ons Hemecht* (Our Homeland). It included in its early years primarily members of the clergy, such as Martin Blum (1845-1924) and Jacques Grob, and started issuing a history journal with its name in 1895. Although one can distinguish between these circles in theory, in practice they had largely overlapping memberships; history teachers were generally part of the *Section Historique*, while members of the latter were also often members of the clergy and/or members of *Ons Hemecht*. In fact most historians can be associated with more than one of these circles.

A notable variation in Luxembourgian historiography is its cultural re-positioning over time. Since the creation of a national identity in the course of the nineteenth century, local history was not only explained within a wider context, but also used to affirm the country’s own unique character. As we will see throughout this thesis, the creation of distance from its political neighbours was a re-occurring

⁶ I am particularly grateful to Paul Margue and Gilbert Trausch for long conversations about their scholarly predecessors and colleagues.

⁷ See for instance: Jo TOLLEBEEK, Tom VERSCHAFFEL and Leonard H. M. WESSELS (ed), *De palimpsest. Geschiedschrijving in de Nederlanden 1500-2000*, Hilversum, 2002.

⁸ The very first name of the institution was actually *Société pour la recherche et la conservation des monuments historiques dans le Grand-Duché de Luxembourg*, and the short name of *Société Archéologique* was only adopted slightly later, but it will be used exclusively with respect to the early years for the sake of simplicity.

concern in this process. After the Belgian Revolution and the territorial split of 1839, the pro-Dutch mainstream in the grand-duchy was opposed to any expressions of commonality with the Belgian State. In the long run, this was nourished by the occasional annexationist calls from Belgium, especially after the First World War. The pan-German ideologies across the political border in the East were no real alternative, as they generally tended to contain even more of an annexationist element. The grand-ducal mainstream was eager to disagree with them, if only for the sake of national independence. The threat of German annexation was a reality during all the major regional political crises of the past 150 years: during the Bismarckian ‘unification’ process between 1866 and 1870, and in the occupations of Luxembourg during both World Wars. With respect to France the story is slightly different. Unlike Germany, France thus seemed a much more agreeable neighbour from a Luxembourgian perspective. Although in 1866 the possibility of a French annexation was real, the country became increasingly less aggressive towards its northern borders – the pre-eminent territorial issue being instead Alsace-Lorraine after the lost Franco-Prussian war. Furthermore, France’s border with Luxembourg between 1870 and 1918 was only a few kilometres long, further curtailing its territorial interests in the grand-duchy for simple geo-strategic reasons. At the same time the Germanic tongue of Luxembourg created a cultural distance with France from the outset, which it did not with regard to Germany. Finally, French had long been the main language among Luxembourg’s bourgeoisie as well as the worlds of politics, law and administration.⁹ In consequence of all this, the cultural and political perception of France in late nineteenth-century Luxembourg was more favourable than that of its other two neighbours.

This positive view was at the basis of an important movement of literary authors around Batty Weber, Franz Clément and Marcel Noppeney. Shortly after 1900 they started to promote the idea of Luxembourg’s culture as a *Mischkultur* (mixed culture): a cultural fusion of German and French elements.¹⁰ An integral part of this idea was that Luxembourg did not belong to either cultural space, but that by combining the best of both worlds local culture had become unique and, in the

⁹ For more on this see appendix 1.

¹⁰ See: Claude D. CONTER, *Mischkultur*, p. 23-28.

opinion if some, inherently superior. It also reflected the perception of Luxembourg as a meeting place and location of exchange between both cultures. Furthermore, the concept is based on the multilingual character of the Luxembourgian society and it is therefore noteworthy that it sprang up at a time when the local tongue started to receive recognition as a 'language', adding another linguistic layer and increasing local 'uniqueness'.

The concept was not new, nor was it confined to Luxembourg.¹¹ In one of the first articulations of the idea by the Luxembourg writer Batty Weber in 1907, we notice that the author explicitly refers to the *Mischkulturen* in other regions along the French-Germanic language border, especially Alsace and Lorraine.¹² While he claims that the Swiss press saw the concept as a deprecating stigma, he actually thought that neither Switzerland nor Belgium deserved to be regarded as a proper *Mischkultur*. The given reason is the linguistic division along geographic lines, which reflects more of a side-by-side of different cultures than a real cultural amalgam that the term requires.¹³ This opinion was not shared in these countries. In Belgium, for instance, the well-known historian Henri Pirenne had fostered similar thoughts with respect to his own fatherland between 1900 and 1919.¹⁴ Although never employing the term *Mischkultur* himself, Pirenne promoted the idea of Belgium as a "microcosm" of Europe, implying the very same idea of a cultural crossroads.¹⁵ What Pirenne and the adherents of *Mischkultur* in Luxembourg did share was a common cosmopolitan and liberal ideology, which contrasted heavily with that of the racial theorists. The recognition and approval of cultural amalgams of the former was incompatible with the idea of racial purism expressed by the latter. In the aftermath of the First World War, the concept entered ideological mainstream and thus also found its way into historiography. It helped to alienate Luxembourg culturally from Germany and stress their differences, despite its political and economical dependence on the latter until 1918. It also brought the country closer to one of the victors of the war: France. The idea of the *Mischkultur* thus saw its heyday in the interwar period. Although the term

¹¹ This is a point that Conter misses, see: *Ibid.*, p.23.

¹² Batty WEBER, Ueber Mischkultur in Luxemburg, p. 121.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Walter PREVENIER, Pirenne à Gand, p. 32-34.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 33, and especially n. 38.

itself vanished from common use after the Second World War, the underlying discourse then fused with that of a unifying Europe.¹⁶

The direct implication of the fundamental importance of nationalism in the creation of history is that an analysis of nineteenth- and twentieth-century history writing cannot be done outside a study, or at least without an awareness, of the development of national sentiment. Most recent research in the field of national identities has adopted a constructivist conception. Instead of perceiving them in a primordialist fashion as part of the natural order, or in a perennialist one as having very old historic roots, the constructivist approach considers national identities as a relatively recent and artificial construct.¹⁷ Benedict Anderson's widely accepted conception of nations as "imagined communities" constitutes an important shift in paradigm,¹⁸ for it implies that there are no objectively definable elements that make a nation, merely a collective identification with certain elements.¹⁹ For most European nations these often include a language, a religion, or a historic homeland and these are generally bound together with a common past, where they take roots. In this context history plays a role, not as an objective confirmation for the existence of the nation, but rather as an example of how the nation justifies itself.

Collective memory and *lieux de mémoire*

From the nineteenth century on, history thus also received the function of justifying politics, used to rally the nation and increasingly became part of mass-movements. As Eric Hobsbawm has argued: those who seek power in the present generally attempt to legitimise their claim with tradition.²⁰ At several instances, this thesis will argue, for instance, that the ruling dynasty of Luxembourg attempted to present itself as the successors of the medieval counts. At this point, however, a mere historiographical analysis may neglect not only the full extent of the formation of

¹⁶ Claude D. CONTER, *Mischkultur*, p. 28.

¹⁷ For these different interpretations of national identities see: Gopal BLAKRISHNAN (ed), *Mapping the Nation*, London / New York, 1996.

¹⁸ See: Benedict ANDERSON, *Imagined Communities*. Reflections on the origins and spread of nationalism, London, 1983.

¹⁹ It is for this reason that Frederick Cooper and Rogers Brubaker have argued to do away with the term identity, see: Frederick COOPER and Rogers BRUBAKER, *Beyond Identity*, p 1-47.

²⁰ See: Eric HOBBSAWM and Terence RANGER (ed), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge, 1983.

representations of the past, but also their wider use. For this purpose an analysis of ‘collective memory’ (sometimes also referred to as ‘social memory’) will be used.²¹ The approach offers itself as a useful perspective for a study of the interweaving of perceived identities and ‘shared’ history. Collective memories exist for all collective entities independently of their size, although in this thesis those of the nation are central. The collective memory can be defined as the totality of ideas that a collective generates and maintains about its own past. Or put differently (since ‘the collective’ is epistemologically problematic), collective memory includes all the ideas that the (self-declared) members of a certain collective accept (or create) about the past within the structure of the group identity. Collective memory therefore also expresses a message: it reflects the ideals and the lessons that a group of people has drawn from history. In this respect this thesis is not purely a study of ‘medievalism’, as increasingly found, for this type of studies tend to focus on architecture and literature, while generally ignoring a political or other usage of this historical period beyond the moral or aesthetic.²²

The analysis of collective memory is the basis of Pierre Nora’s multi-volume project on the *Lieux de mémoire*,²³ in the introduction of which Nora defined a *lieu de mémoire* as a point “where memory crystallizes and secretes itself”.²⁴ The great success of this concept in France has led to similar projects in Italy, the Netherlands and Germany²⁵ – just to name a few. This success is partly based on two reasons.

²¹ The term was coined in the 1940s by the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs. See the re-editions of his classic books: Maurice HALBWACHS, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*, Paris, 1994; Maurice HALBWACHS, *La mémoire collective. Edition critique établie par Gérard Namer*, Paris, 1997. For an excellent and more recent commentary and exploration of the concept, see: James FENTRESS and Chris WICKHAM, *Social Memory*, Oxford, 1992.

²² See for instance: John M. GANIM, *Medievalism and Orientalism. Three Essays on literature, architecture and cultural identity*, New York / Houndmills, 2005; Michael ALEXANDER, *Medievalism. The Middle Ages in modern England*, New Haven / London, 2007.

²³ See: Pierre Nora (ed), *Les lieux de mémoire*, 7 vols., Paris, 1984-1992. There have been attempts to translate the concept into English, most notably as ‘realms of memory’, but also as ‘sites of memory’. See for instance Arthur Golhammer’s English translation of Nora’s multi-volume publication: Norman KRITZMAN and Pierre NORA (ed), *Realms of memory. Rethinking the French past*, 3 vols., New York, 1996-1998; the French name was kept for the translation by Marie Seidman Trouille: Pierre NORA (ed), *Rethinking France. Les Lieux de mémoire*, Chicago, 2001-.

²⁴ The introduction to the original French series was re-published in English as: Pierre Nora, *Between memory and history*; see: p. 7 for the above quote.

²⁵ Mario ISNENGHI, *I luoghi della memoria*, Rome, 1987-1998; Pim DEN BOER and Willem FRIJHOFF (ed), *Lieux de mémoire et identités nationales*, Amsterdam, 1993; Etienne FRANÇOIS and Hagen SCHULZE (ed), *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte*, 3 volumes, Munich, 2001-2003. The concept has found only very little acceptance in Great-Britain so far.

Firstly, the concept as initially defined by Nora is relatively vague, making it malleable for different interpretations and uses. Secondly, the concept has proven useful for case analyses of the relationship between history and identity. What exactly do *lieux de mémoire* represent? A common mistake is to regard them as sites ‘where one remembers’, while in fact they are items ‘which one remembers’.²⁶ They can thus be places, people, events or dates. Despite their sometimes non-personal character, it may nonetheless be useful to describe them as the ‘saints’ of a nation (or other collective). A parallel between the concepts of ‘saints’ and ‘*lieux de mémoire*’ already emerges during their creation: both require an element of popular acclamation and top-down recognition – although exactly which of the two elements comes first depends on the individual case. *Lieux de mémoire* contain an aspect of ‘transcendence’, in other words, an emotional identification by the group of people, rather than merely being a signifier. In consequence and more importantly, a *lieu de mémoire* needs to stand as a symbol for a larger idea. A practical implication for research is the exploration of underlying symbolisms: what ideals are historical figures, places and dates made to represent? For this reason, the source basis is extended beyond mere historiography, to include literature, visual art, newspaper articles, mass ceremonies and popular gimmickry. One insight that emerges from this study is how historiography influences most of the other media, which rarely create developments of their own. However, the latter have much more of an impact when it comes to spreading ideas to a wider population; they are often much clearer (or blunter) in the message they express and tend to reflect far better an identification with the respective historical *topoi*.

Among the regularly used sources in this thesis are history schoolbooks. They represent a medium in-between scholarly research and the mass media. Not everyone uses them voluntarily and out of sincere interest, but since the teaching of history became compulsory in 1881²⁷ most Luxembourgers are exposed to their content. Schoolbooks also remain the main written source on history for non-academics, and people without a deeper interest in the field. This leaves little chance of escaping their ideology, unless a topic is newsworthy enough to reappear in other media.

²⁶ As pointed out by: Martin REISIGL, 'Österreich' und 'ostarrîchi' als Orte der Erinnerung. Eine diskursanalytische Kritik nationalistischer Trugschlüsse, (forthcoming).

²⁷ Jacques MAAS, Ziele und Inhalte des Geschichtsunterrichts in Luxemburg (1815-1941), p. 29.

Thirdly, because of pedagogical reasons, textbooks often have to limit themselves in the choice of the subjects they deal with, as well as the message they want to express. Thus one can assume that they depict very concisely what can be regarded as the dominant discourse and, to a certain extent, how this changed over time.

One important aspect of the present analysis is that it is based on the production of memory and not its reception. Although the approach can be accused of expressing an elitist concept of the construction of national identities, it is above all justified for practical reasons. The production of sources is comparatively easy to pin down, whereas reception can only be somewhat seriously measured via polls and qualitative interviews, which have only been undertaken (to some degree) in recent times.²⁸

At the same time, this study offers an analysis of parallel and competing movements within collective memory, for the creation (or maintenance) of collective memories not only plays on the level of a national cohesion, but also works within its political and ideological subgroups. As we will see, John of Bohemia, for instance, is presented as the national hero by Luxembourgers with very different political affiliations. However, his changing status, from anti-German warrior to a Francophile prince and on to a proto-European politician, is both bound by time and the political background of those that interpret or use history. Linked to this is the idea that remembering also implies forgetting – both on an individual and a collective level. We remember what we judge worth remembering, while we have to forget about everything else in order to (be able to) make sense of our memories. Forgetting is thus as much part of the selection process as remembering and likewise must be studied in order to grasp the mechanisms of historiographical selection. Some of this is an involuntary process, linked to a lack or disappearance of sources. As for the deliberate forgetting, Benoît Majerus has distinguished between three different levels.²⁹ A first selection takes place between several possible *lieux de mémoire*: why are specific moments or figures given precedence over others? The second type of selection takes place within specific *lieux de mémoire*: why does one retain a certain event in a person's life, but not another? The third type takes place on

²⁸ See below.

²⁹ As pointed out in his paper "Luxemburger Erinnerungsorte – Werkstattnotizen in der Halbzeit", presented at the University of Giessen on 12 July 2005.

a temporal level, acknowledging the fact that over time certain aspects will be ignored and others stressed. All three levels are unavoidably part of any serious study of collective memory. The first of these types, however, has so far never received explicit attention in any study on *lieux de mémoire*, but it will in this thesis.

The structure of this thesis

Rather than providing an encompassing analysis of medieval history in Luxembourg, this study looks at the important national *lieux de mémoire* that refer to the medieval period. This allows for a narrowing down of the scope of this thesis to a manageable size, while at the same time providing it with a focus on those themes with the largest historiographical presence and strongest emotional roles. The only question remaining is how to identify these *lieux de mémoire*. A first option is to assess peoples' opinions by taking a poll and see which historic figures, dates and sites the population of Luxembourg consider of greatest importance. This was undertaken in 1989 in regards to historical figures. The survey was topped by the former Grand-Duchess Charlotte (1896-1985) as the most widely known historical figure of the country, with 42.5% of the vote.³⁰ She was closely followed by the fourteenth-century ruler John of Bohemia with 41.3%. The third position, with 25.7%, was taken by tenth-century Count Sigefroid. The result also reflects the importance attributed to the medieval past in Luxembourg; the picture is completed with the thirteenth-century countess Ermesinde in sixth place (11.7%). Even the medieval, yet fictional, Melusine is considered by 0.8% of those surveyed as a real historic figure.³¹ When asked what historic figure people judge as the most important, the poll's result was almost identical: John of Bohemia behind Grand-Duchess Charlotte in second place (13.9%), Sigefroid in fourth (8.7%) and Ermesinde in fifth (1.9%). When the poll was repeated at the end of 2004, the result was entirely comparable:³² the two medieval figures John of Bohemia and Sigefroid easily reached the top ten, while

³⁰ Ilres-Tageblatt Umfrage zur Luxemburger Geschichte, in: *Tageblatt*, 18/04/1989, p. 4.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 19/04/1989, p. 5.

³² Poll realised in November and December 2004, and commissioned by Fernand Fehlen and his the research project FNR/02/05/06 based at the University of Luxembourg.

Ermesinde followed in twelfth place.³³ The ‘foundation’ of Luxembourg in 963 was voted the fourth most important event in local history, after the liberation of 1944, the national holiday and the ‘independence’ in 1839.³⁴

The second option for identifying medieval *lieux de mémoire* is a quantitative evaluation of the sources referring to the period and an analysis of how much they deal with a specific theme. In 1939 a widely read magazine published a special issue for the celebration of the country’s centenary of independence, which included three articles on local medieval history: one on the rulers of Luxembourg in the fourteenth century, focusing largely on John of Bohemia, a second on Sigefroid and the charter by which he ‘founded Luxembourg’ (963) and a third on Ermesinde’s charters of enfranchisement (1230s).³⁵ This observation can be repeated for many other media. As we will see, John of Bohemia, for example, generally has a much larger presence than Emperor Sigismund. Anniversaries that can be linked to John’s life (and death) are still celebrated; he fills large sections in schoolbooks, figures on works of art, or is a protagonist in comic books. None of this has been the case for Sigismund.

A further criterion applied in this study is the position given to medieval figures within a national historical narrative. This is the reason why for instance St Willibrord (ca. 658-739) is missing in this thesis. Although Willibrord and his monastic foundation of Echternach (698) are well-known both within the country and far beyond its borders, they constitute neither an important element within a national narrative, nor do they in consequence stand as emblematic of the medieval period. Of course, Willibrord remains a *lieu de mémoire* of extreme importance locally. The same applies to Peter of Aspelt (ca. 1245-1320), a fourteenth-century archbishop of Mainz, who was not only an important player on the imperial scene of his time, but also had a decisive impact on the Bohemian policies of the Limburg-Luxembourg dynasty. Peter is above all remembered in his family’s native town of Aspelt in the south of the grand-duchy and has again played only a very minor role within a national memory. On the other hand, we find the fairy Melusine who is in popular mythology closely associated with Sigefroid. Although an entirely fictional figure,

³³ Among the entire resident population, John of Bohemia came in sixth place and Sigefroid in ninth; among those of Luxembourgian nationality, John ranged fourth and Sigefroid eighth.

³⁴ See also my general conclusions for a further discussion of these polls.

³⁵ See: *Numéro spéciale de l’AZ consacré au Centenaire de notre Indépendance*, 1939, p. 11-14 and 17-23.

she is made to represent the foundation of Luxembourg in the tenth century, not only in the capital in particular, but in the national discourse in general.

As a result, this thesis will be structured around four central chapters. The first two are concerned with the founding myths, the ‘first count of Luxembourg’ Sigefroid and his mythical wife Melusine. Like no other figures, they incarnate the beginnings of Luxembourg, the construction of its castle, capital and the origin of its people. Sigefroid will be compared to Count Conrad I, who offers as many reasons to be regarded as a founding figure; a part of the thesis will examine why he lost out to his ancestor. The third chapter centres on the thirteenth-century Countess Ermesinde, a paragon for liberals and Catholics alike. She has developed an importance for people on both sides of the Luxembourgian-Belgian border, reflecting dichotomies between the national identity in the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg and a regional identity in the Belgian Province of Luxembourg. The thesis will argue that she overshadows her husbands and descendants, whose Limburg origin failed to fit into the nationalist view of a unified ‘Luxembourgian’ *medium aevum* (in opposition to ‘foreign’ Middle Ages). The last chapter presents her descendant John of Bohemia, who was transformed quickly into the national hero. This process had its origin in late medieval literature where his ‘heroic’ death at the battle of Crécy is remembered. His tomb within the city of Luxembourg helped to keep him in local memory, while the loss of his remains to Prussia in the early nineteenth century created simmering discontent that lasted until their recovery in 1946. Interestingly John stands for the pinnacle of a glorious age, whereas his successor Emperor Sigismund tended to embody the miserable decline of an era, despite having been endowed with more crowns and lands.

Although these four figures constitute major *lieux de mémoire* by themselves, they also embody others. As we will see, the memories of Count Sigefroid and Melusine, for instance, are intrinsically linked to the date of 963 or the site where the castle of Luxembourg stood – the latter two, one could argue, represent *lieux de mémoire* by themselves. Likewise, Ermesinde cannot be detached from the location of Clairefontaine, or John from the battle of Crécy where he died in 1346; again all of these elements were given historic importance and symbolic values of their own.

Every chapter follows a similar structure. They start with a brief account to help position the medieval figure's life or origins, in some cases including an overview of the medieval sources. This will be followed by a description of how and why these were taken up and shaped by early modern historians and thus how they survived into the nineteenth century. The largest section of every chapter deals with how the different figures have been integrated into a nationalist view of the past and used in different media aimed at a mass-public. The last section of every chapter looks at how the nationalist perspective has been transforming in the past couple of decades.

In his *The myth of nations*, Patrick Geary commented that

As a tool of nationalist ideology, the history of Europe's nations was a great success, but it has turned our understanding of the past into a toxic waste dump, filled with the poison of ethnic nationalism, and the poison has seeped deep into popular consciousness. Cleaning up this waste is the most daunting challenge facing historians today.³⁶

This thesis is intended as part of this cleaning-up process – with the hope that reading it will not be too much of a 'daunting challenge'.³⁷

³⁶ Patrick J. GEARY, *The Myth of Nations. The medieval origins of Europe*, p. 15.

³⁷ Those readers less familiar with Luxembourg may want to read the short overview of the key points of Luxembourg's geography, political history and linguistic landscape in appendix 1, before embarking on the detailed analysis of the four historical figures.

CHAPTER 1

Sigefroid: the founding father

“On an April day in 963, Count Sigfroi, a Wagnerian warrior from the Ardennes, raised his banner over a fortress on a formidable rock above the Alzette River in the eastern Frankish empire. Though Sigfroi’s wife soon vanished – she turned out to be a water nymph – and his fortress crumbled, the fief he founded proved as durable as it is diminutive.”¹

Every nation has at least one founding figure. In Europe many of these tend to be rulers from early medieval times, when territorial unities and kingdoms emerged to which modern nations like to claim succession. As examples one can cite King Harald for Norway, or more legendary in nature, Hengist and Horsa for England, and Hunor and Magor for Hungary.² In Luxembourg this role has been taken over by Count Sigefroid.³ This chapter will explore how the count was put into this position. It will first demonstrate why no other figure could claim the position of founding father. Thereafter it will show that this role came with additional functions, namely that of building the castle of Luxembourg, setting up the city around it and even giving origin to the nation that populated the surrounding lands. The last sections will analyse how and why these ideas culminated in the year 1963 and why Sigefroid has been losing his importance ever since.

* A summary of this chapter has been published as: Pit PÉPORTÉ, Sigfrid, p. 49-54.

¹ *Time Magazine*, 19/04/1963, p. 26.

² For more of these, see: Hans-Joachim GEHRKE (ed), *Geschichtsbilder und Gründungsmymthen*, Würzburg, 2001 (Identitäten und Alteritäten, vol. 7).

³ I chose the spelling of “Sigefroid”, which is also the most common French spelling of his name. The spelling chosen by the Time-Magazine “Sigfroi” has no precedent. The alternative French version is “Sigefroi” (or even “Sigefroy”); in German one can use “Siegfried” or “Sigfrid”.

When it comes to ascertaining the origins, life and deeds of the historic figure of Sigefroid, the researcher is confronted by a serious lack of sources and ongoing disagreement on many issues. In order to illustrate this, we only need to compare the two records for Sigefroid in the *Biographie Nationale de Belgique*.⁴ Was there one Sigefroid as Michel Margue claims, or even two as argued in Jules Vannérus's earlier account? Vannérus names Wigerich as his father, Margue refuses to make a definite statement on the issue.

What seems generally accepted is that Sigefroid was the lay-abbot of Echternach and advocate of Saint-Maximin Abbey in Trier. It also seems very likely that he acted as count in the areas of Bitburg and Thionville. Around 960, he exchanged some of his land for a rock overlooking the river Alzette from St-Maximin;⁵ later he acquired the usufruct of a rock above the river Saar.⁶ On both rocks he had fortifications built, the first of which carried the name Luxembourg, while the second became Saarburg. The parts of his life described in most detail are his dealings with the city of Verdun. In the early 980s he allied with his nephew, the count of Verdun, against the local bishop Wicfrid. The latter responded by assaulting the castle of Luxembourg, which enabled Sigefroid to take him prisoner and subsequently mistreat him.⁷ As a result, he was threatened with excommunication by other bishops in the region, until he had performed penance by paying a sufficient amount to have the cathedral of Verdun richly redecorated with chandeliers. Between 983 and 985, Verdun also became the theatre for rivalries between the Lotharingian princes supporting Otto III and those advocating that the region become part of the Western kingdom. King Lothar rode into the area from the west, conquered Verdun and took the supporters of the Ottonians as his prisoners. Among them was Sigefroid.⁸ In 987, the count built a collegiate church next to his castle of

⁴ Jules VANNÉRUS, Sigefroid, col. 394-435; and: Michel MARGUE, Sigefroid, p. 295-300. Since the Belgian Province of Luxembourg has also historically been part of that historic duchy, there is a justified tendency to include important figures that can be linked to the Duchy of Luxembourg in major 'national' Belgian publications.

⁵ UQB, vol. 1, 173, p. 234-236.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 174, p. 237-240.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 193, p. 268-269.

⁸ Much detail of these events was preserved in the letters of Gerbert of Rheims (the later Pope Silvestre II) to Empress Theophanu; see: *Ibid.*, 197-200, p. 275-282.

Luxembourg, although at this point, opinions have diverged as to whether this was Count Sigefroid himself, or a son of the same name.⁹

Sigefroid was most likely a younger son, therefore not owning many lands.¹⁰ Even so, he succeeded in establishing himself as a major player in the region between the Moselle and southern flanks of the Ardennes. His acquisition of lands was less important than his endowment of positions, which granted him influence in the cities of Trier and Verdun. The key to his success was a good connection to the Ottonian kings, which was largely built on personal verve and presence at court, which earned him prestige and authority. His immediate descendants could build on the standing he had attained, securing thus the see of Metz regularly and gaining further influence at the imperial court.

A detailed analysis of the historic circumstances would require years of research by itself. The focus will remain on how the little we know was interpreted and laden with symbolism.

The first count of Luxembourg

The position that Sigefroid has received in collective memory has been based on his role as the ‘first count of Luxembourg’. From a modern-day historian’s point of view this ascription is highly misleading, mainly for three reasons. Firstly, Sigefroid had never assumed or carried this title. This has been pointed out by historians for many centuries, but, as we will see, had little impact on how the count is represented in most accounts, both historiographical and popular. Secondly, the tenth-century connotations of the name Luxembourg were entirely different from today’s: it was neither the count’s main base, nor at the centre of any territorial entity. The “small castle called Luxembourg”,¹¹ referred to in the charter of 963, was only one of Sigefroid’s strongholds, embedded in a larger area of activities. Furthermore, he was not a ruler over a principality. The role of a post-Carolingian, early-Ottonian count was still very much that of a representative of royal authority, thus making Sigefroid

⁹ See: Armin WOLF, *Luxemburg – Sachsen – Baiern: Neues zur Genealogie des ersten Hauses Luxemburg*, p. 41-58.

¹⁰ Paul MARGUE, *Les biens du comte Sigefroid*, p. 310.

¹¹ “castellum quod dicitur Lucilinburhuc” UQB, vol. 1, 173, p. 235.

an administrator who depended more on offices and prestige than the extent of his scattered lands.¹² Luxembourg can only be considered as a territorial principality from the latter part of the eleventh century at the earliest, perhaps even from the middle of the twelfth century onwards.¹³ The third reason is that the ascription of ‘first count of Luxembourg’ places Sigefroid into a role as a founder of a dynasty, as though he were the *first* count of a succession. The problem with this view is that it is teleological in character. Not only does it refer to a dynastic succession, but the idea also implies once more an intrinsic link between a dynasty and the formation of a particular territory.

As a result, there are no medieval sources that refer to him as the founder of any tradition, either territorial or dynastic. Though the rock of Luxembourg was acquired for himself and his successors, and then later developed into the centre of a principality, Sigefroid laid no foundations which led his direct dynastic successors to preserve a memory of him. Creating a monastic centre, as in the case of Count Conrad I, could have provoked this; Sigefroid however did not even decide to be buried within his own territorial holdings. The latter is probably less telling about the count’s identification with his territories, but more about his perception of his official political role in respect to these. His offices were of higher importance to his power and prestige; Trier was therefore the place he decided to be buried, since as advocate of Saint-Maximin it was from here that he had exercised most of his influence. The only occasions at all that he appears posthumously in documents are the sporadic monastic charters recalling donations made during his time as advocate of the abbey. This does not imply that Sigefroid had little interest in how posterity might remember him, but it means that any knowledge about such attempts is now lost.

It has been widely believed that seeing Sigefroid as the ‘first count’ was the invention of the historian Jean Bertels (1544-1607), the earliest history writer based in Luxembourg, releasing a detailed *Historia Luxemburgensis* in 1605.¹⁴ This view however ignores Bertels’s own sources. Sigefroid already appears in earlier texts of the fifteenth century. Richard de Wassebourg (late-fifteenth century-1567),

¹² Michel MARGUE, Die “Gründungs“-Urkunde von 963: Mythos und Wirklichkeit, p. 38.

¹³ On the role of Carolingian and early Ottonian counts in the region, see: Ulrich NONN, *Pagus und Comitatus in Niederlothringen*, especially p. 42-45.

¹⁴ See: Nicholas GENGLER, Die alten Schloßherrschaften von Kōrich, p. 215-217, and: Victor DELCOURT, Kam Siegfried aus Koerich?, p. 21-2.

archdeacon at the cathedral of Verdun, wrote a detailed chronicle of *Belgian Gaul*.¹⁵ His own city of Verdun constitutes the focal point for most of his account. He attempts to present the political developments in the region, but the nature of his endeavour required a thorough knowledge of the genealogies of the different noble houses in the wider region, a fact reflected by the appendices that contain lists of the succession of the rulers of the different territorial units. We notice that Wassebourg fell for all three misleading assumptions as pointed out above: his Sigefroid is not only the first count of Luxembourg, but also the founder of the county and the dynasty.¹⁶ Furthermore, Wassebourg also made the error of naming Sigefroid lord of *Guerrie*.¹⁷ This mistake resides on an incorrect reading of the charter of 963: instead of “Sigfridus de nobilitate genere natus”¹⁸, he quotes “Sigfridus de Guerram nobilitate natus”. If we want to believe André Du Chesne (1584-1640), the mistake was indeed Wassebourg’s, since he was the first to transcribe the charter.¹⁹ Until Du Chesne, most writers seem to copy the mistake, as for instance another sixteenth-century author, Jean d’Anly.²⁰ In consequence the latter presents Sigefroid as the count of *Guerrie*, who then added the nearby castle of Luxembourg to enlarge those possessions and adopted the name of the new acquisition.²¹ More importantly

¹⁵ Richard DE WASSEBOURG, *Premier [et second] Volume des Antiquitez de la Gaule Belgique, Royaume de France, Austrasie, & Lorraine. Avec l’origine des Duchez & Comtez, de l’ancienne & moderne Brabant, Tōgre, Ardenne, Haynau, Mozelane, Lotreich, Flandre, Lorraine, Barrois, Luxembourg, Louvain, Vvaudemont, Iainuille, Namur, Chiny. Et autres Principautez extraites sous les Vies et Euesques de Verdvn, ancienne Cité d’icelle Gaule*, Paris, 1549.

¹⁶ “(...) le chasteau de Luxembourg fut erigé en comté en la personne de Sigfridus. (...) Cestuy Sigfridus fut premier comte dudict Luxembourg, & de luy sont sortiz les subsequens comtes de Luxembourg.” Richard DE WASSEBOURG, *Antiquitez de la Gaule Belgique ...*, f. 189r. See also his appendices: Troisième table des successeurs de Pharamond. Princes d’Ardenne, Mozelane & Bouillon; and: Table particuliere des Comtes & Ducz de Lucembourg [no page numbers].

¹⁷ *Ibid.* The location is normally identified with Koerich, a village about 20km west of the city of Luxembourg. The link may however have been created *faute-de-mieux*: there are no medieval sources referring to the place under that name, but neither are there many other places in the area whose name is close enough.

¹⁸ See: UQB, vol. 1, 173, p. 234.

¹⁹ See: André DU CHESNE, *Histoire généalogique des maisons de Luxembourg et de Limbourg. Iustifiée par chartes de diuerses Eglises, Tiltres, Histoires, & autres bonnes Preuves*, p. 6.

²⁰ I am indebted to Prof. Claude Loutsch for pointing out this author to me.

²¹ Jean D’ANLY, *Recueil ou Abrégé de plusieurs histoires contenant les faitz & gestes des Princes d’Ardenne, spécialement des Ducs & Comtes de Luxembourg et Chinÿ avec d’autres entremesléz, dignes de memoire & remarquables*, 1585, f. 3r. Nicolas Vigner provides the same explanation in 1537, but his account was only published posthumously by André Du Chesne, see: Nicolas VIGNER, *Histoire de la maison de Luxembourg*, p. 22. Vigner also copied Wassebourg transcription of the 963 charter word for word.

however, Jean Bertels also replicated the claim.²² He was to become one of the most widely read historians until the nineteenth century. Bertels certainly knew the *Receuil* by d'Anly, since the existing manuscript in the National Archives in Luxembourg originated from the monastery of Neumünster, of which he was set to become abbot. The fact that Bertels included a transcription of the charter suggests however that he relied directly on Wassebourg, since this is missing in d'Anly. The other local historian of the seventeenth century, the nobleman Eustache of Wiltheim (1600-1678) had meanwhile corrected the quote from the charter, albeit he took over the idea that Sigefroid and his successors called themselves counts of Luxembourg.²³ The same way Bertels relied on Wassebourg, Wiltheim seems to have used André Du Chesne, who did indeed rectify many of the earlier genealogical mistakes.²⁴

The eighteenth-century historians François Pierret (1673-1713) and Jean Bertholet (1688-1755) started to feel more ambiguous about whether Sigefroid was actually the first count of Luxembourg.²⁵ Pierret, a notary in Luxembourg, noticed that he only ever called himself *Sigfridus comes* “without any other surname”, but assumed despite the evidence that it was only because “until he had acquired the castle, whose name he took that his inheritors and successors kept until the promotion of the County of Luxembourg to a duchy in the year 1354”.²⁶ Bertholet on the other hand went a step further and revealed that the first one to call himself “count of Luxembourg” was Count William about 1120. However, he still decides to refer to Sigefroid that way, since “it is but to conform myself to the general use and

²² Jean BERTELS, *Historia Luxemburgensis seu Commentarius*, p. 38.

²³ Eustache OF WILTHEIM, *Kurzer und schlichter Bericht und Beschreibung des Hauses, Schlosses und Landes Luxemburg sammt dessen Fürsten und Herren Ursprung und Herkommen was sich auch bei deren Regierung im gemelten und anderen ihren Landschaften verlaufen und zugetragen*, p. 91 and 95.

²⁴ See the genealogy in: André DU CHESNE, *Histoire généalogique ...*, p. 2. Du Chesne quickly imposed himself as the new authority on the matter and his ideas were widely adopted. Aubert Le Mire for instance copied his genealogy of the counts of Luxembourg and also included Sigefroid's son Frederic as count of Luxembourg, see: Aubert LE MIRE, *Rerum Belgicarum Chronicon ab ivlii Caesaris in Galliam adventu vsque ad vulgarem Christi Annvm M. DC. XXXVI*, p. 231.

²⁵ On Pierret, see: Robert L. PHILIPPART, *Den Notär a Geschichtsschreier François Pierret*, p 33-37. On Bertholet, see: Jean-Claude MULLER, *Jean Bertholet SJ (1688-1755) umstrittener Historiker des Herzogtums Luxemburg*, p. 93-102.

²⁶ “(...) jusqu'à ce qu'il eut acquis le Château de Luxembourg, dont il prit le nom que ses heritiers et successeurs ont depuis retenu jusqu'à l'érection du Comté de Luxembourg en Duché l'an 1354.” François PIERRET, *Essay de l'Histoire de Luxembourg*, p. xviiij.

prevent confusion”.²⁷ His attitude demonstrates that the title can be used in a different, historiographical sense. It may well have been this type of use that was taken over by other prominent historians, though one has to admit that by the late nineteenth century, most scholarly works tend to be rather more careful. One fine example of a confusing reference to the count by a prominent historian in Luxembourg can be found in a talk given by Nicolas van Werveke (1851-1926) in 1897. He presented how Sigefroid acquired and extended the castle, adding: “Sigefroid became in this way the first of our counts.”²⁸ Technically he used the term in a historiographical sense, but it is nevertheless very doubtful that it was perceived as such by his audience. Even historians could become entangled in the ambiguity, such as Alfred Lefort. He explicitly points out that Sigefroid never referred to himself as count of Luxembourg, only to name him “the first count of Luxembourg” five pages further on.²⁹

One main reason for the establishment of Sigefroid in this ancestral role was the lack of older contenders. In 1631 the Parisian court-historian André Du Chesne wrote that despite many historians’ attempts to identify his father, “none have put forward credible proofs”³⁰. More than 360 years later, Michel Margue still drew the same conclusion.³¹ It is generally agreed that the count’s mother was a certain Cunigunde; the claim is based on an eleventh-century genealogy.³² This genealogy tries to prove that Sigefroid’s daughter, also named Cunigunde, was of Carolingian decent and therefore of appropriate origin to have wedded the future Emperor Henry II. It is further known that Cunigunde (the elder) was married to (at least) two husbands, Wigeric and Ricuin.³³ The questions remains who of the two was actually the father of Sigefroid, since no medieval source specifies this.

Since Wassebourg, Ricuin had established himself as Sigefroid’s father among most early historians. Around 1900, Wigeric slowly took over, starting with

²⁷ Jean BERTHOLET, *Histoire Ecclésiastique et Civile du Duché de Luxembourg et Comté de Chiny*, vol 3, p. 2.

²⁸ “Sigefroid fut de cette manière le premier de nos comtes.” Nicolas VAN WERVEKE, *La Ville de Luxembourg. Conférence tenue dans la grande salle du casino le 7 décembre 1897*, p. 7.

²⁹ Alfred LEFORT, *La Maison souveraine de Luxembourg*, p. 6 and 11.

³⁰ “les vns & les autres n’ont allegué aucunes preuues dignes de creance.” André DU CHESNE, *Histoire généalogique ...*, p. 5.

³¹ Michel MARGUE, Sigefroid, p. 296.

³² *Genealogia regum Francorum*, in: *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, Scriptorum, vol. 2, p. 314.

³³ Michel PARISSÉ, *Généalogie de la Maison d'Ardenne*, p. 19-20.

Jean Schoetter and Nicolas van Werveke – though he later moves back into the Ricuin camp – then followed by Jules Vannérus. Among non-Luxembourgian scholars Wigeric tended to be the favourite.³⁴ After the Second World War, quite a few, such as Joseph Meyers remained with Wigeric, but some new presumptions rendered the issue more complicated again. Emil Kimpen re-evaluated and modified an earlier argument by Depoin,³⁵ adding a new theory of a Saxonian origin and ignoring the alleged mother Cunigunde.³⁶ The theory was taken up by Pierre Brière in 1962, concluding that the father must have been Eberhard II of Hamaland.³⁷ The millennium festivities of Sigefroid's acquisition of Luxemburg approaching, the discussion momentarily gained in relevance. Victor Haag thus added yet another new theory with Sigefroid having been the son of Sigebert,³⁸ later corrected by Michel Parisse, who saw in Sigebert a brother of the former.³⁹ The latest attempt by René Klein concluded that there are indeed no sources to support any of the above theories, but that Depoin was right nonetheless and that the father must have been Duke Giselbert of Lotharingia († 939).⁴⁰

This is neither the place to discuss these individual theories in detail, nor to present a solution, but to offer a general analysis and some conclusions from what seems a never-ending debate. First of all we can wonder why the knowledge of Sigefroid's ancestry was lost. Michel Margue argues convincingly that if we assume, as most theories do, that Sigefroid stemmed from the House of Ardenne, the origin of our lack of knowledge is due to Sigefroid's conscious intent to break with the political tradition of his paternal ancestry.⁴¹ Sigefroid and his generation of the Ardenne family, moved from a West-Frankish Carolingian allegiance to an East-Frankish Ottonian one – helping thus to change the destiny of the whole Lotharingian

³⁴ See for instance the highly influential French historian Robert Parisot, or Heinz Renn, who is still widely read despite his very strong pan-German ideology: Heinz RENN, *Die Ahnen und Geschwister des ersten Luxemburger Grafen Sigfrid*, Bonn, 1939; Robert PARISOT, Sigefroy. Le premier comte de Luxembourg. Était-il fils de Wigeric?, p. 76-83.

³⁵ Joseph DEPOIN, Sifroi Kunuz, comte de Mosellane, tige de la maison de Luxembourg, p. 307-346.

³⁶ Emil KIMPEN, Zur Herkunft Siegfrieds von Luxembourg, p. 316-19.

³⁷ Pierre BRIÈRE, Les origines de la première maison de Luxembourg, p. 9-22.

³⁸ Victor HAAG, A propos d'une nouvelle version sur les origines de la première maison comtale de Luxembourg, p. 511-516.

³⁹ Michel PARISSÉ, Généalogie de la Maison d'Ardenne, p. 4-42.

⁴⁰ René KLEIN, Wer waren die Eltern des Grafen Sigfrid? Eine neue Hypothese zum Ursprung des ersten Grafenhauses, p. 9-27.

⁴¹ Michel MARGUE, Sigefroid, p. 296.

region and attach it to the Empire. Particularly in Sigefroid's case, the relationship with the new overlord seems to have been very close, resulting in high prestige for the count. As a consequence of this rupture with the past, the *memoria* of Sigefroid's ancestry were neglected and the knowledge of them forgotten over time.

Ignorance calls for speculation, in which as Jules Vannérus already noticed in 1947, there had been some attempts to 'nationalise' Sigefroid: the Belgian historian Henri Pirenne tried to see in him a proto-Belgian; the German scholar Heinz Renn sought to portray him as a German.⁴² Nonetheless, it is surprising how little national bias most theories reflect. It would be an overstatement to claim that opinions in the years after the Second World War were developed so as to run against the German-favoured theory by Heinz Renn. Not only was it fully in line with (the French historian) Robert Parisot's thinking,⁴³ but the 'new' theories also suggest a Saxonian origin, which tends to have a much more 'German' connotation than those offering a middle-Frankish alternative.

Although all these studies represent valid attempts at scientific research, they can nonetheless be interpreted as a search for origins of the first dynasty of Luxembourg. From a historian's point of view, the true identity of Sigefroid's father remains somewhat unsatisfactorily unsolved. However, one important result is that Sigefroid emerges as the oldest possible founder of the dynasty. If some careful historians try to avoid the cognomen of "first count", they often reach the very same effect by presenting Sigefroid deliberately as the starting point of the House of Luxembourg.⁴⁴

The forgotten: Conrad I

While the previous section intended to show that no older historic figure could impose himself against Sigefroid, this one reveals why none of his successors did. Whereas the unknown father is a good case of true oblivion, some of his successors

⁴² Jules VANNÉRUS, *La première dynastie luxembourgeoise. A propos de l'étude de Heinz Renn, Das erste Luxemburger Grafenhaus (963-1136)*, p. 812, n. 1.

⁴³ Robert PARISOT, *Sigefroy. Le premier comte de Luxembourg. Était-il fils de Wigeric?*, p. 82.

⁴⁴ See for instance: Jean SCHOETTER, *Geschichte des Luxemburger Landes nach den besten Quellen bearbeitet*, p. 20.

tend to have been deliberately overlooked. The most appropriate candidate among them is Conrad I, for several reasons.

Count Conrad succeeded after the death of his father Giselbert (†1056/59).⁴⁵ In the first years of his rule he entered into a conflict with the archbishop of Trier, most probably over territories that he wished to usurp. The conflict culminated in Conrad's capture of Archbishop Poppo, whom he mistreated and imprisoned in his castle of Luxembourg.⁴⁶ In return Pope Alexander II excommunicated the count, leaving it to Archbishop Poppo when to lift the anathema. Conrad released his prisoner and asked for his forgiveness, which was granted on the condition of a penitential pilgrimage to the Holy Land. It was on the return from that journey that the count died in Italy in 1086.⁴⁷ In 1083, shortly before his departure, one single deed could have catapulted him to enduring fame and stature: together with his wife, Conrad founded the Abbey of Saint-Mary at the foot of his castle of Luxembourg.⁴⁸ It is the seal of this charter that carries the first ever reference to a "Count of Luxembourg", therefore giving Conrad an undeniable claim to the first bearer of the title. Furthermore, the abbey was founded as a burial place of the local dynasty, thus showing that Luxembourg had firmly become the centre of a principality for two reasons. First of all, the rock of Luxembourg had now become the political and cultural heart of a wider territory. Secondly, the ruler now decided to establish his *memoria* within his own territory – a clear break with the tradition of his ancestors who were buried in Trier.⁴⁹

Nevertheless, in terms of the importance accorded to him by posterity, Conrad could not break away from the dominance of his ancestor. Most authors only glance briefly over him, if at all. Take for instance Jean Schoetter's textbook from 1882. Here we find what is probably the most detailed account of his rule and life ever to be found in a schoolbook, yet it only covers about a page compared to the three devoted to Sigefroid.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ See: genealogy 1 (Appendix 2).

⁴⁶ UQB, vol. 1, 292, p. 433-434.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 303, p. 452-453.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 301, p. 445-449.

⁴⁹ For the concept of *memoria*, see: Otto Gerhard OEXLE, *Memoria und Memorialüberlieferung im frühen Mittelalter*, p. 70-95.

⁵⁰ See: Jean SCHOETTER, *Geschichte des Luxemburger Landes ...*, p. 26-27 and 20-23.

The first reason for this neglect is the lack of tradition. Like Sigefroid, Conrad did not leave many traces in posthumous records. It is therefore of crucial importance that the early historians first discovered Sigefroid. While Wassebourg already presented him as the first count, he still thought that Count Conrad was actually two distinct figures, father and son.⁵¹ Again the idea was copied by Bertels.⁵² A more detailed knowledge about Conrad's times was only formed in the eighteenth century, but at this point Sigefroid's position was firmly established.

Conrad was pushed into a different role. Bertholet expanded in much detail on the late eleventh century, but his stance on Conrad is marked by his clerical background – Bertholet was a Jesuit – combined with an inclination to take monastic accounts at face value. His passage on Conrad's attack on the archbishop of Trier enumerates every single committed atrocity as found in the *Gesta Treverorum*, whereas his dealings with the monasteries of Malmédy and Stavelot result in the chaos as described by the local source of the *Triumph of St Remacle*, for instance.⁵³ After having spent over a hundred pages on the troubles that monasteries of the period had with local nobles and how this fitted into the endless struggles between Empire and Papacy, his Conrad, now “at great age”, regrets the aberrant conduct of his life.⁵⁴ Count Conrad thus becomes part of a tale whose point is a moral and thoroughly clerical one:

Conrad I was one of those Christian heroes, who can be blamed and be praised for much. The vivacity of his youth carried him to excesses that gave him the character of a violent man; but when age had corrected his passions, he repaired the scandals of his life with good deeds.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Richard DE WASSEBOURG, *Antiquitez de la Gaule Belgique...*, fol. 240v.

⁵² Jean BERTELS, *Historia Luxemburgensis ...*, p. 46. This is all the more astonishing if one considers that Bertels was the abbot of Neumünster Abbey, which he helped to style as the successor organisation of Conrad's foundation. See my chapter on John of Bohemia for more on this.

⁵³ See: Jean BERTHOLET, *Histoire Ecclésiastique et Civile ...*, vol. 3, p.163-164 and 176-178.

⁵⁴ Jean BERTHOLET, *Histoire Ecclésiastique et Civile ...*, vol. 3, p. 279-280.

⁵⁵ “Conrad I. étoit un de ces Héros Chrétiens, en qui il y a beaucoup à blamer, et beaucoup à louer. La vivacité de sa jeunesse le porta à des excès qui lui donnerent le caractère d’homme violent; mais lorsque l’âge eut corrigé ses passions, il répara les scandals de sa vie par ses bonnes oeuvres.” Jean BERTHOLET, *Histoire Ecclésiastique et Civile ...*, vol. 3, p. 284.

This image creates a counter-point to the grand and (as we will see) pious founder Sigefroid, who worked almost relentlessly to create Luxembourg.

A further hindrance to breaking with tradition was the lack of certainty about his use of the title of Luxembourg. Though we find the title of “Comes de Lucelemburg” on the seal to the charter of 1083, he still only used “Conradus comes” in the document itself. Nonetheless, even in the middle of the nineteenth century Auguste Neyen and Jean Schoetter wondered whether the *intitulatio* in the charters should not be the decisive factor and thus emphasised the role of Conrad’s son William to whom this applied.⁵⁶ In Schoetter’s narrative Conrad thus figures as “fifth count” – starting the list with Sigefroid of course. Rare are the accounts that actually stress any positive achievement,⁵⁷ or go beyond briefly noting the foundation of the Abbey.

The main reason however remains the persistence of Bertholet’s view, and more generally speaking, the strong impact of conservative Catholic writers on Luxembourgian historiography. Many historians of the past two hundred years were either members of the clergy, such as Jacques Grob or Camille Wampach (1884-1958), or can be labelled as pro-clerical, such as Jean Schoetter or Arthur Herchen (1850-1931). Only for a couple of decades in the middle of the nineteenth century was mainstream historiography in Luxembourg dominated by liberal thinkers, such as most founding members of the Archaeological Society, which later became the *Section Historique de l’Institut grand-ducal*. Nonetheless, these thinkers stemmed from different traditions and were principally united by their loyalty to the Dutch monarch, some of whom were far from anti-clerical.⁵⁸ This also interlinks with the very wide spectrum within nineteenth-century liberalism, which included rather progressive positions, as well as more conservative ones.⁵⁹ Although the ideological stance of the individual historians did in no respect bear any relationship to the

⁵⁶ Jean SCHOETTER, *Einige kritische Erörterungen über die frühere Geschichte der Grafschaft Luxemburg*, p. 54. For the same reason Du Chesne already pointed to Count William. See: André DU CHESNE, *Histoire généalogique ...*, p. 30.

⁵⁷ See for instance: J.P. MÄYSZ, *Chronologische Übersicht der Geschichte der Stadt und des Großherzogtums Luxemburg. Nebst einer Topographie. Zum Gebrauche der vaterländischen Elementar=Schulen des Mittel=Unterrichts*, p. 10.

⁵⁸ This can be illustrated by the fact that the president of the *Section Historique* from 1854-1876 was the ordained priest Jean Engling. See: Tony KELLEN, *Die luxemburgische Geschichtsschreibung: ein Rückblick und ein Ausblick*, p. 142-143.

⁵⁹ Daniel SPIZZO, *La nation luxembourgeoise. Genèse et structure d’ une identité*, p. 192-195.

quality of their research, there were few with an interest in challenging the established narrative. The nature of the existing primary sources meant that Conrad's career was fundamentally marked by his initial misbehaviour towards the archbishop of Trier. Furthermore, the count's death on his return from the pilgrimage was too ill-fated to be put in a glorious or heroic light. Herchen and later Joseph Meyers (1900-1964) made an attempt at changing this perspective. Herchen simply ignored the less pleasant affair with Trier,⁶⁰ although he tended to glorify every single of the pre-fifteenth-century rulers, Conrad thus still not standing out as an exception. Furthermore, his account was influenced by Schoetter's research that favoured William over Conrad as the first to use the title. Meyers stresses the creation of what he calls a spiritual centre next to the political one, as a result of which "the face of Luxembourg was shaped by both".⁶¹ Apart from trying to see Conrad's political heritage in a positive light, the interpretation thus tries to bind him into a pro-clerical stance.

Finally, one must add that an acceptance of 1083 as the 'birth date' of Luxembourg would have reduced its age by 120 years. This would have been an obnoxious suggestion during the time of the 'millennium' celebrations in 1963. While the foundation charter of the abbey could have functioned as a foundation charter for Luxembourg, it already had an antecedent carrying the place name. This close link between the earliest mentioning of the name Luxembourg and Count Sigefroid provides the latter with strong claims for being regarded as the founding figure, too strong for anyone else to impose.

The point of this section is not to argue that Sigefroid has been overrated. It is merely an example to show how constructed every narrative is and how different factors contribute to this construction. The degree to which Conrad had the capacity to rival Sigefroid's position can be shown by a recent attempt at adding some nuance to the established perspective. In an article about the development of Luxembourg from a castle to a town, Michel Margue suggests to regard Conrad as a founder of

⁶⁰ Arthur HERCHEN, *Manuel d'Histoire Nationale*. 1918 edition: p. 28-29; 1972 edition: p. 56.

⁶¹ "(...) in gemeinsamer Arbeit wurde von ihnen beiden das Antlitz Luxemburgs gestaltet." Joseph MEYERS, *Geschichte Luxemburgs*, p. 52.

equal importance than his ancestor.⁶² In his article, Sigefroid is far from being ignored, but Conrad's foundation of the monastery is seen as a rupture and likewise the author emphasises the growth of the bailey in front of the castle to a "pre-urban core" in his times,⁶³ challenging thus Sigefroid's traditional image as founder of the city as analysed in one of the following sections. Conrad's recent appeal also rests on his relatively untouched nature: not only does he offer the opportunity to review the classic understanding of events, but his neglect left him unspoilt by any nationalist viewpoint and its resulting stigma. The count's function as an alternative therefore accentuates his subaltern role, rather than confirming a change in approach.

Sigefroid the builder of the castle

Apart from lacking serious rivals, there is a second main factor that helped establish and secure Sigefroid's position in history: his role as founder and builder of Luxembourg. As seen, Sigefroid was the earliest local ruler that could be brought into connection with the name 'Luxembourg' and its fortifications. This section will show how the count became the 'creator' of the castle, believed to be at the origin of Luxembourg as a city and a principality.

In the earliest accounts, Sigefroid only took possession of an already existing castle, without much detail or explanation.⁶⁴ The event is colourfully extended by Wiltheim who tells how Sigefroid went hunting, became fond of the remains of a Roman castle which he rode past and thus acquired it.⁶⁵ Pierret fully agreed that Luxembourg was acquired because of its position within good hunting grounds. In addition he describes how Sigefroid immediately started strengthening the fortifications, raising the wall and adding towers, thus "rendering it one of the strongest castles in the surrounding countries".⁶⁶ One can wonder to what degree this passage was inspired by events in the historian's own lifetime: the massive overhaul

⁶² "Fondateur, Conrad l'est à l'image et au même titre que son ancêtre (...)" Michel MARGUE, *Du château à la ville: les origines*, p. 55.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 56-57.

⁶⁴ Richard DE WASSEBOURG, *Antiquitez de la Gaule Belgique ...*, fol. 189r; Jean BERTELS, *Historia Luxemburgensis ...*, p. 39.

⁶⁵ Eustache of Wiltheim, *Kurzer und schlichter Bericht ...*, p. 49.

⁶⁶ "un des plus forts Châteaux des pays circonsvoisins" François PIERRET, *Essay de l'Histoire de Luxembourg*, p. 44.

of the whole fortress by the French military architect Vauban.⁶⁷ These descriptions were based on conjecture, since all of these authors wrote at a time when the remnants of the medieval castle had already vanished underneath the construction of a modern bastion. The titular dukes hardly ever spent any time at all in the duchy and the governors had created their own residences.⁶⁸ From about 1430 there was thus no real need to keep up the old castle and in the middle of the sixteenth century it was replaced by some more advanced type of fortifications.⁶⁹

When the fortress had to be dismantled according to the treaty of London (1867), only three elements remained that reminded onlookers of the former fortification on the site of the castle. Firstly, the casemates inside the rock, which were part of an underground system of passages, vaults and chambers. These were only built in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and were not visible from atop the rock. Secondly, the outer shape of the rock and the foundations of the walls that hint at the locations of some of the towers. Thirdly, the ruin of one tower remains. Popularly known as the *Huelen Zant* (Decayed Tooth) and often mistakenly regarded as an authentic remnant of the medieval castle, the tower is a mere purpose-built ruin.⁷⁰ During the demolition works, the Archaeological Society of Luxembourg handed a list to the government of all fortifications it wanted to be kept as landmarks.⁷¹ Among these are almost all the remains that can still be seen nowadays, including the tower in question. It had been built as part of Vauban's revamp of the fortress and was therefore not of medieval origin, but it stood next to a former gate and in nobody's way. In the years 1877 to 1878 and at the request of the Society, the government decided to transform it into a "picturesque arrangement in the form of a ruin":⁷² the upper part of the tower was demolished and one of the embrasures remodelled as a Romanesque window. Since the architects were not enchanted by the execution of the works, referring to it as tasteless, it was decided in 1879 to cover up

⁶⁷ The classic book on the development of the fortress of Luxembourg remains: Jean-Pierre KOLTZ, *Baugeschichte der Stadt und Festung Luxemburg mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der kriegsgeschichtlichen Ereignisse*, 2 vols., Luxembourg, 1972.

⁶⁸ On Luxembourg as a residence, see: Michel MARGUE and Michel PAULY, *Residenzen: C.7: Luxemburg*, p. 351-353.

⁶⁹ See: Jean-Pierre KUNNERT, *De la ville fortifiée du Moyen Age à la forteresse des Temps modernes*, p. 81-89.

⁷⁰ See figure 1 (Appendix 3).

⁷¹ André BRUNS, *D'Spuenesch Tiermercher*, p. 174. (173-178)

⁷² Jean-Pierre KOLTZ, *La "Dent creuse" et les "Tours du Rahm"*, p. 138.

one side by climbing plants, which had to be removed in 1939, having damaged the stones.⁷³ Although the tower was transformed with the aim of creating a romantic embellishment for the city and not kept in an attempt to set up a monument to the former buildings, it is sometimes perceived as such nevertheless.⁷⁴

The point is that, since there are no old views or plans of the medieval castle, this was all the material evidence any writer before the 1990s could rely on. Furthermore, the exact outline of the tenth-century castle will probably always remain unclear. If and how many (Roman) fortifications existed before the arrival of Sigefroid, what the extent of Sigefroid's castle was, whether there was an outer 'city' wall or not, all these questions still constitute the object of lengthy debates. Nonetheless, from the point of view of an academic approach a lot of progress has been made in solving these questions: by the historians Michel Margue and Michel Pauly on the one hand,⁷⁵ and a team of archaeologists led by John Zimmer on the other.⁷⁶ They all seem to suggest that there had indeed been minor Roman fortifications next to the site, but probably none that had been in continuous use and that could thus be reused by Sigefroid. The count had probably erected a small fort or tower on the rock in order to control the crossroads of two major roads in the area, which allowed him to create a market (or, make use of an existing one) and levy toll charges. There is not much archaeological evidence remaining from the tenth century, but combined with written evidence there is enough for Zimmer and his team to draw some conclusions. The first fortifications on the small rocky outcrop contained a chapel and a hall, and were encircled by an outer stonewall.⁷⁷ Unfortunately one can say nothing about possible wooden constructions. The outer perimeter of the fortifications also poses a problem. There seems to be some general agreement that the tenth-century castle had a bailey, which enclosed a market area

⁷³ Jean-Pierre KOLTZ, La "Dent creuse" et les "Tours du Rahm", p. 139 and 142-143.

⁷⁴ See: Le Luxembourg Historique et Pittoresque. Les ruines de nos châteaux forts, in: *Luxemburger Illustrierte* 19, 1928, p. 275; or: Roger LEINER and Lucien CZUGA, *De Superjhem. Dynamit fir d'Dynastie*, p. 25.

⁷⁵ See especially: Michel MARGUE and Michel PAULY, Saint-Michel et le premier siècle de la ville de Luxembourg, p. 5-83.

⁷⁶ The main publication here: John ZIMMER (ed), *Aux origines de la Ville de Luxembourg*, Luxembourg, 2002 (Dossiers d'Archéologie du Musée National d'Histoire et d'Art VII et du Service des Sites et Monuments Nationaux).

⁷⁷ John ZIMMER (ed), *Die Burgen des Luxemburger Landes*, vol. 1, p. 254. See also figure 6 (Appendix 3).

and a collegiate church. Although there is some dispute over where exactly it was located, it appears to have consisted of an earthen wall with a wooden palisade at most.

These present-day views tend to be quite sober, compared to those that emerged in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Bertholet took on board Pierret's account and extended it. In his description he talks about a fortress instead of a castle and crowns it with the precise measurements of the towers and their positions.⁷⁸ This provided it not only the aura of a scientific (and thus true) description, but it also appeared much more concrete and thus visually inspiring. However, the grandeur of Bertholet's fortress is also based on a mix-up of the fortifications in Sigefroid's times and the city walls built in the late twelfth century.⁷⁹ Although the enclosed area was 'adjusted' to tenth-century circumstances in subsequent descriptions, he provided an inspiration of the location for the next three hundred years to come.

Interest in the castle still grew in the wake of *Quellenkritik* and the rise of a methodologically coherent writing of history, but initially did not offer much new insight. The first detailed account of the nineteenth century by the Prussian officer Engelhardt adds nothing but some precision in respect of the exact location of the seven towers.⁸⁰ Like most authors on the topic, he was more interested in the impressive fortress of modern times than the medieval origins of the castle. In addition a positivist approach could not be applied considering the lack of sources and the unsurprising absence of any archaeological excavations did not improve the situation either. As a result the detailed accounts of older authorities were more than welcome. Thus, Jean-Pierre Biermann's publication on the fortifications (1890) also only helped endorsing earlier ideas.⁸¹ He was the first one to include a graphic

⁷⁸ "Ensuite Sigefroid répara les ruines de son Château, & le flanqua de quelques tours dans la plaine à l'Occident, ou la Ville-haute est bâtie. Ces tours étoient quarrées, de l'épaisseur de sept à huit pieds, & de la hauteur quarante : On en comptoit jusqu'à sept, dont l'assiette à une égale distance, formoit un demi cercle (...)" Jean BERTHOLET, *Histoire Ecclésiastique et Civile ...*, vol. 3, p. 10.

⁷⁹ He makes the ramparts include the refuges of the monasteries of Orval and Echternach and the town hall (now the grand-ducal palace). See: *Ibid.* The same mistake has been made by some other authors, see for instance: Nicolas BREISDORF, *Luxemburger Kirchenstatistik VIII. Geschichte der St Michaleskirche in Luxemburg*, p. 81.

⁸⁰ Friedrich Wilhelm ENGELHARDT, *Geschichte der Stadt und Festung Luxemburg, seit ihrer ersten Entstehung bis auf unsere Tage. Mit besonderer Rücksicht auf die kriegsgeschichtlichen Ereignisse*, p. 31.

⁸¹ See: Jean-Pierre. BIERMANN, *Abrégé Historique de la Ville & Forteresse de Luxembourg*, p. 9 and 31-33.

representation drawn by Ernest Werling, mixing existing presumptions with current ideas about medieval castles.⁸² He presents us with the birds-eye-view of a stereotypical medieval fortress: a castle made of stone with a keep, high curtain walls and towers; in front of it a large bailey with Bertholet's seven square towers.⁸³ Charles Arendt (1825-1910), the Luxembourg State-Architect in the second half on the nineteenth century released an extremely precise reconstruction of the castle itself shortly after Biermann's publication.⁸⁴ The result is close to Werling's attempt, but even more impressive in style. The former left a courtyard in the middle of the castle, which Arendt filled with high buildings, including a tall keep. Moreover, in his attached written description the number of the fortress towers has now risen to eleven. Their fortifications are in fact massive for the representation of a tenth-century castle: some towers are five stories high and the walls disproportionately gigantic, all made of stone.

Arendt was not a historian but an architect, and his reconstruction is thus an attempt to make sense of the evidence 'architecturally'.⁸⁵ He tried to inform himself thoroughly, basing his assumptions on medieval reports of repairs on the castle and a general secondary literature on medieval castles.⁸⁶ The latter also shows that his results were part of an international trend; Arendt was greatly influenced by French architect Eugène Viollet-le-Duc, himself well-known for his medieval restorations and reconstructions.⁸⁷ This partly explains the relatively generic character of his reconstruction. Furthermore, Arendt does not state that his castle is meant to reflect

⁸² The reconstruction can be found in the Annexes of: Jean-Pierre. BIERMANN, *Abrégé Historique de la Ville & Forteresse de Luxembourg*, Luxembourg, 1890. See figure 2 (Appendix 3).

⁸³ The careful observer may spot the annotation "Luxembourg au XIe siècle. Restitution". This nuance is however nowhere observed, as will be shown below. This may also have something to do with the fact that most reproductions are in such bad quality that the inscription becomes illegible. Biermann himself annotates it with "Essai de restitution du château de Sigefroy avec la première enceinte de la ville (963 to 1050)".

⁸⁴ Charles ARENDT, *Hypothetischer Plan der ehemaligen Schlossburg Lützelburg auf dem Bockfelsen zu Luxemburg*, Luxembourg, 1895. See figure 3 (Appendix 3).

⁸⁵ I am grateful to Simone Weny for sharing some of her thoughts on Arendt, and sending me parts of her unpublished MA thesis: Simone WENY, *La mise en valeur du patrimoine monumental au XIXe siècle au Grand-Duché de Luxembourg. L'oeuvre du restaurateur Charles Arendt (1825-1910)*, Brussels, 2002 (M.A. thesis, Université Libre de Bruxelles). For Arendt's reconstruction of the castle, see especially p. 73-101.

⁸⁶ See: Charles ARENDT, *Hypothetischer Plan der ehemaligen Schlossburg Lützelburg auf dem Bockfelsen zu Luxemburg*, p. 236.

⁸⁷ See: *Ibid.* Viollet-le-Duc is bestknown for his 'restaurations' of Carcassone, the castle of Pierrefonds and Notre Dame cathedral in Paris. For reading on Viollet-le-Duc, see: Jean-Paul MIDANT, *Au moyen-âge avec Viollet-le-Duc*, Paris, 2001.

the state of the tenth-century edifice. On the contrary, Arendt concedes that his vision presents building work of different stages, reflected by the different architectural styles, even adding that he generally prefers the fourteenth and fifteenth-century aspects, since they show the climax of the castle.⁸⁸ He is no exception, since the cultural guise of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries tends to dominate the majority of generalised models of the Middle Ages.⁸⁹ However, Arendt does not specify in his descriptions which part was ‘reconstructed’ according to the which period of style. Independently of how he really meant his reconstruction to be understood, its reception reflects a clear message. As we will see, these representations proved to be highly influential. This was not only because Arendt himself re-released them in the form of a richly illustrated publication for a larger market,⁹⁰ but also because it fitted well with contemporary impressions as reflected by historians’ references to the castle, which range from “ein stattliches Schloss”⁹¹ to “un superb château-fort”⁹². In one of his paintings, Michel Engels (1851-1901) set a design very similar to Arendt’s into colourful and romantic scenery.⁹³ The painting does not specify at what point in time the scene is situated – again the size of the stronghold and its round, roofed towers could point towards the fourteenth or fifteenth century, yet the undeveloped state of the location where the knights ride and their basic chain mail armour seem to imply a much earlier date. A group of knights, who may well be the count and some retainers, ride on a path nowadays referred to as the *corniche*. Their exact location had been included into the city fortifications by the late twelfth century. At the time of painting, however, historians still believed that the area had already been fortified in 1050.⁹⁴ It seems thus very likely that the main person on the painting should indeed show Sigefroid himself. In 1915 Pierre Blanc (1872-1946) presented his view of the construction works: Sigefroid stands between the builders on the busy

⁸⁸ Charles ARENDT, *Hypothetischer Plan der ehemaligen Schlossburg Lützelburg ...*, p. 238-240.

⁸⁹ See: Marcus BULL, *Thinking Medieval. An Introduction to the Study of the Middle Ages*, p. 16.

⁹⁰ Charles ARENDT, *Die ehemalige Schlossburg der Grafen u. Herzöge von Luxemburg auf dem Bockfelsen daselbst. Eine kunstarhologisch-kriegsbautechnische Studie*, Luxembourg, 1895.

⁹¹ Jean SCHOETTER, *Geschichte des Luxemburger Landes ...*, 21.

⁹² Alfred LEFORT, *La Maison souveraine de Luxembourg*, p. 6.

⁹³ See figure 4 (Appendix 3).

⁹⁴ See for instance: François-Xavier WÜRTH-PAQUET, *Noms de la Ville de Luxembourg de ses Faubourgs, de ses rues, portes et places publiques*, p. 102; or: Arthur HERCHEN, *Manuel d’Histoire Nationale*, 1918: p. 28.

worksite and stonemasons around him shape large blocks of sandstone.⁹⁵ The count is consulting the blueprint. To his right one of the architects presents him with a model of the envisaged result and we face a vision very close to that of the Arendt model. On a side note, one also discovers the ‘Decayed Tooth’ in the background to the right – the anachronism shows to what degree the purpose-built ruin had come to be taken as authentic. The most influential depictions of the reconstruction can be found in Arthur Herchen’s schoolbook. In the early editions Herchen reproduced Arendt’s design without any alterations next to his chapter on Sigefroid; in the later editions it was replaced by Werling’s view of the castle.⁹⁶ This particular history textbook was in use from 1918 to 1972 and the two images thus influenced people’s imagination for generations.

A last attempt of a widespread uncritical use of Arendt’s model is a version of the Luxembourg passport of the 1990s, which depicted the reconstruction on its opening page.⁹⁷ Its presentation as part of the 2007 permanent exhibition in the Museum of the History of the City of Luxembourg is part of a scheme to raise people’s awareness of such romantic constructions.

At the same time criticism of the large-scale models were few and took a long while to become accepted. By 1900 Jacques Grob had condemned these romantic impressions in an article on Sigefroid’s acquisition of the rock. Tenth-century castles, he writes, were very “*ursprüngliche*” constructions with wooden buildings on stone foundations and straw roofs, and enclosed by an earthen wall.⁹⁸ His article was very influential in every respect, except for the description of the castle. In 1916 Henry de la Fontaine also criticised the earlier models, but he mainly objected to their lack of precision, discussing thus the exact number of towers, for instance, without questioning the approach as a whole.⁹⁹

We can draw three preliminary conclusions from these representations. Firstly, they strengthen the idea of Sigefroid’s age as the starting point of Luxembourg. Although at that time no serious scholar could style him the first count

⁹⁵ See figure 5 (Appendix 3).

⁹⁶ Arthur HERCHEN, *Manuel d’Histoire Nationale*. 1918, p. 27; 1972, p. 53.

⁹⁷ See figure 8 (Appendix 3).

⁹⁸ Jacques GROB, *Die Erwerbung der Lucilinburhuc durch Graf Siegfried und die darüber errichtete Urkunde*, p. 391-392.

⁹⁹ Henry DE LA FONTAINE, *Le Bock à Luxembourg*, p. 16-20.

anymore, Sigefroid remains nonetheless the builder of Luxembourg and thus its first count implicitly and in retrospect. Secondly, the representations all intend to create an illusion of continuity within the Middle Ages. The representations do not distinguish between different phases of construction, between tentative origins in the tenth century and the full-blown extensions of the fifteenth century. This can also be shown by the titles used for the reconstructions. Charles Arendt entitles his laconically “Die Lützelburg”; Michel Engels used the same title for his painting adding the dates “963-1543”. In both cases the viewer thus faces what can be referred to as “an imprecise, all-purpose medieval era (...), a combination of pure fantasy and realistic detail applicable to different phases of the Middle Ages.”¹⁰⁰ By not differentiating much between the various visual styles that arose between the tenth and fifteenth century, Sigefroid thus becomes the start of this generic medieval bulk period.

This observation links straight into the third point. By the late nineteenth century that medieval age is supposed to symbolise a period of strength and grandeur, and we shall observe this at various points throughout the following chapters. These representations convey a feeling of security and comfort to the population inside, an image of power and steadfastness to the outside. This is already present in Pierret’s account as cited above, but nationalist sentiment and the need to locate a physical focus for this sentiment reinforce the idea. It would come to full splendour in the literature of the mid-twentieth century, but more about this later on.

Sigefroid the builder of the city

The stronger Sigefroid’s castle grew on paper the more entrenched became the view of the count as founder of the city of Luxembourg. According to the most recent findings, if there had ever been a wall on the rocky plateau west of the castle, then it was most probably enclosing an area small enough to consider a bailey.¹⁰¹ From today’s perspective it seems doubtful that one could name the enclosed buildings a

¹⁰⁰ I borrowed this comment from Marcus Bull, which he made in reference to Mark Twain’s *Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur’s Court*. This novel was written in 1889 is therefore a true contemporary (though, from the other side of the Atlantic) of the analysed reconstructions of the castle. Marcus BULL, *Thinking Medieval ...*, p. 15.

¹⁰¹ Michel MARGUE and Michel PAULY, *Saint-Michel et le premier siècle ...*, p. 69-71.

city. As for the castle, any visible vestiges of the tenth century vanished a long while before the first historians mention a settlement in the area – all references to the site made before the archaeological excavations in the second half of the twentieth century can thus be regarded as pure speculation.

Humanist historians, such as Wassebourg and Bertels, kept quiet about any development or foundation of the city. The French historian Nicolas Vigner solitarily mentions the creation of a city, but he added no detail and was not widely read until Du Chesne published his works in 1617.¹⁰² Pierret still only mentioned the idea of growing suburbs below the castle.¹⁰³ The crucial change in tradition came once more with Bertholet's description and Werling's reconstruction – in both cases the small but heavy fortress epitomises the infant version of the city of Luxembourg. Schoolbooks from the first half of the nineteenth century already demonstrate the logic behind this model.¹⁰⁴ We are told that when Sigefroid bought the castle he brought in all kind of craftsmen in order to enlarge it. In a second step he made these craftsmen and some peasants/serfs settle in the safety of the castle's shadow. The settlers on the plateau he encircled with a wall, so to create the upper-city. Those along the river created the lower suburbs. The city was founded. By the middle of the nineteenth century, this assumption had spread so widely that François-Xavier Würth-Paquet (1801-1885) already saw the count quite naturally as the creator of the city.¹⁰⁵ The syllogism castle – fortress – city kept itself in schoolbooks throughout the twentieth century.¹⁰⁶ The only aspect added in the second half of the nineteenth century by the liberal-minded historians of the capital was a slightly pitying remark concerning the status of the new settlers: they had all been the count's serfs. The

¹⁰² “dans ceste Comté y avoit vn Chasteau, qui appartenoit aux Abbé & Conuent de S. Maximian de Treues, lequel Sigefroy trouua à son gré, pour y bastir vne ville.” Nicolas VIGNER, *Histoire de la maison de Luxembourg*, p 22.

¹⁰³ François PIERRET, *Essay de l'Histoire de Luxembourg*, p. 44.

¹⁰⁴ J.P. MÄYSZ, *Chronologische Übersicht ...*, p. 8; Jean ULVELING, *Tableau analytique et chronologique des principaux faits de l'histoire du Grand-Duché et de la ville de Luxembourg*, p. 2-3; Joseph PAQUET, *Die Geschichte des Luxemburger Landes fasslich dargestellt zum Gebrauche der Primär=Schulen*, p. 7.

¹⁰⁵ François-Xavier WÜRTH-PAQUET, *Noms de la Ville de Luxembourg ...*, p. 102.

¹⁰⁶ Arthur HERCHEN, *Manuel d'Histoire Nationale*, 1918: p. 27, 1972: p. 53; Joseph MEYERS, *Geschichte Luxemburgs*, p. 48; Paul MARGUE, *Luxembourg in Mittelalter und Neuzeit*, p. 18.

related element is that they were only freed by Countess Ermesinde in the thirteenth century.¹⁰⁷

In the same order of ideas, the charter of 963 is often being presented as a birth certificate. The charter is not the first document of its kind for the territory of what would later become the (County and eventually the) Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg, nor does it refer to the city (or a town of the name). However, it is an essential ingredient to the story of Sigefroid, the acquisition of the rock and his purported foundation of the city. François Lascombes thus introduces it as the “foundation charter” (*Gründungsurkunde*) of the city of Luxembourg, also implying a deliberate action.¹⁰⁸ Another moment marking its importance is in 1984, when the city of Trier decided to hand the surviving copy of the charter to the city of Luxembourg. The occasion was celebrated with an official ceremony in Trier, in the presence of the prime ministers of Luxembourg and the Rhineland-Palatinate.¹⁰⁹ In 1996 the charter then moved into the new Museum of the History of the City of Luxembourg, where its bright display at the end of a dark corridor marked the start of the permanent exhibition. It was only moved to a less prominent place with the start of a new permanent exhibition in December 2006.¹¹⁰

As the initiator of the city, Sigefroid also became the creator of the capital. This message was contained only implicitly in the accounts before the twentieth century. Nicolas van Werveke for instance had “no doubt” that Sigefroid established his residence in Luxembourg soon after 963.¹¹¹ The idea was spread widely by the schoolbooks of Herchen (1918) and Meyers (1939).¹¹² Although the word ‘capital’ is not used, they nonetheless convey that Luxembourg was the power-centre for the area from the start of its existence. However, there are strictly no sources at all that can back up the claim and again these theories seem to be based primarily on wishful

¹⁰⁷ See my chapter on Ermesinde.

¹⁰⁸ François LASCOMBES, *Chronik der Stadt Luxemburg 963-1443*, p. 18.

¹⁰⁹ See: Stadt Trier (ed), *Die Luxemburg-Urkunde. Veröffentlichung anlässlich der Übergabe an die Stadt Luxemburg am 15. April 1984*, p. 17.

¹¹⁰ Some museum guides still start their tour with a presentation of the charter, although it is now set in a less prestigious location in the middle of a room. I am grateful to Sonja Kmec for pointing this out.

¹¹¹ Nicolas VAN WERVEKE, *La Ville de Luxembourg. Conférence tenue dans la grande salle du casino le 7 décembre 1897*, p. 7.

¹¹² Arthur HERCHEN, *Manuel d'Histoire Nationale*, 1918: p. 27, 1972: p. 53.; respectively: Joseph MEYERS, *Geschichte Luxemburgs*, p. 49.

thinking: why would Sigefroid have built such a splendid castle without the intention of actually wanting to live there? Zimmer concluded from his excavations that the extent of the buildings suggests an administrative use rather than a permanent residence. This only changed at the end of the eleventh century with the addition of a keep.¹¹³ Other authors chose a different approach: rather than presenting Luxembourg as the count's residence, they stressed its 'central location'. Schoetter for instance pointed out that he created the city in the middle of his territorial possession,¹¹⁴ implying that it was a natural centre. Both perspectives however could also be joined, as Jean-Pierre Koltz did in 1938 when defending Luxembourg's ancient standing against pan-Germanist tendencies.¹¹⁵ The interpretation of Luxembourg as the centre of Sigefroid's possessions remained part of the mainstream for some more decades and was still the main reason given for his choice of the location in a textbook in 1974.¹¹⁶ The extent of his territories was again largely based on conjecture and more recent research has shown that most of his territories lay further south and east from today's city of Luxembourg.¹¹⁷ Interestingly enough, but largely ignored, the charter of 963 clarifies that the castle of Luxembourg laid "in pago Methingowi in comitatu Godefridi comitis",¹¹⁸ making clear that the region was not controlled by Sigefroid.

All these cases stress the strong and central role of Luxembourg for its surroundings; a role that the actual city only started to fulfil from the late thirteenth century onwards, but still retains nowadays. Apart from creating a symbol of strength, these models also transpose a modern day centrality of Luxembourg City into the past.

Another important example of how a much more recent local phenomenon was meant to have its origins in Sigefroid's initiative is that of the cult of the Virgin Mary. In 987 Sigefroid had his collegiate church outside the castle be inaugurated by Archbishop Egbert of Trier. It was mainly dedicated to the Saint Salvator, the True Cross and All Saints, but some of its five altars were also consecrated to other saints.

¹¹³ John ZIMMER (ed), *Die Burgen des Luxemburger Landes*, vol. 1, p. 254-255.

¹¹⁴ Jean SCHOETTER, *Geschichte des Luxemburger Landes ...*, p. 20.

¹¹⁵ Jean-Pierre KOLTZ, *Die Stadt und frühere Festung Luxemburg. Das Gibraltar des Nordens*, p. 291.

¹¹⁶ Paul MARGUE, *Luxembourg in Mittelalter und Neuzeit*, p. 18.

¹¹⁷ Michel MARGUE, *Die „Gründungs“-Ukrunde von 963: Mythos und Wirklichkeit*, p. 38.

¹¹⁸ UQB, vol. 1, 173, p. 234.

The fourth altar, placed in the crypt, was dedicated to the Virgin Mary.¹¹⁹ Wassebourg and all those that copied from him emphasised this last altar and ignored all others, thus claiming that the “chapel” had been dedicated (solely) to the Virgin.¹²⁰ Though often repeated, it was not until Bertholet that this point was of any central interest. As a Jesuit, Bertholet belonged to the clerical congregation that had launched a renewal of the cult of the Virgin in Luxembourg during the seventeenth century:¹²¹

In this first monument of piety, [Sigefroid] consecrated himself and the city, which he wanted to construct, to the glorious Mother of God, of which the whole province received in the centuries to come the most signed benefits; and indeed, this is what has been confirmed by a special protection and by the virtue of the cult and the honours that one offers to the saint Virgin, under the title of *Consolator of the Afflicted*.¹²²

The passage puts the veneration of the Virgin into a tradition going back to the tenth century, giving it an implicit continuity over many centuries. The idea found acclaim around 1900 by those to whom can be ascribed pro-clerical tendency. For instance, Jean Schoetter takes it up, despite him being one of the first historians in Luxembourg to read the actual primary sources and apply a rigorous approach.¹²³ Lefort repeats the position and sees it as “first sign of an entirely personal devotion,

¹¹⁹ UQB, vol. 1, 201, p. 282-284.

¹²⁰ Bertels adds that this church anticipated that of St Michael, failing to recognise that the medieval church already contained an altar dedicated to that saint in a prominent position. The church is still consecrated to St Michael nowadays. For Bertels remark see: Jean BERTELS, *Historia Luxemburgensis* ..., p. 39.

¹²¹ She was declared patroness of the city in 1666 and of the entire principality in 1678.

¹²² “Dans ce premier monument de piété il se consacroit lui & la Ville, qu’il vouloit construire, à la glorieuse Mere de Dieu, de qui toute la Province recevroit dans les siècles à venir les plus signalés bienfaits ; & en effet, voilà ce qui s’est vérifié par une protection spéciale, & en vertu du culte & des honneurs qu’on y rend à la sainte Vierge, sous le titre de *Consolatrice des affligés*.” Jean BERTHOLET, *Histoire Ecclésiastique et Civile* ..., vol. 3, p. 9-10.

¹²³ Jean SCHOETTER, *Geschichte des Luxemburger Landes* ..., p. 21.

which is still very much alive in Luxembourg”.¹²⁴ Thereafter the topic found no further appearance in historiography: Herchen mentions it in his first attempt of a history textbook,¹²⁵ but leaves it out in his later and much more successful second attempt. Though, as so often, with a little delay, it then found access into literature¹²⁶ and popular imagination.¹²⁷

Sigefroid as a legendary figure

In the early nineteenth century we also observe the emergence of legendary stories about Sigefroid. One could argue that behind this stands the need for a founding myth, which combined with the scarcity of contemporary sources led to fabricated tales. Since a supernatural character generally adds to the excitement of a story, especially in relation to tales of popular origins, they were far from absent in these. These legends thus surface in the form of an amalgam combining the local count and topography with paranormal figures.

The myths can be divided into two types. The first one links Count Sigefroid to the water fairy Melusine. Since these tales produced a particular abundance of material, putting their female protagonist into a well-known symbol, they will deserve a chapter of their own. The second type is rather Faustian in character: Sigefroid gains the means for the creation of the castle of Luxembourg by selling his soul to the devil.¹²⁸ There is in fact not much more to the story itself. According to some versions the devil only provided the necessary gold coins to afford the building of the castle, in others he builds the castle himself. In the early accounts the devil comes to claim his soul after thirty years, interrupting a large feast at the castle and

¹²⁴ “(...) première assise d’une dévotion toute particulière, qui toujours est restée très vivace dans le Luxembourg.” Alfred LEFORT, *La Maison souveraine de Luxembourg*, p. 6.

¹²⁵ Artur HERCHEN, *Kleine Vaterländische Geschichte. Ein Leitfadens für Luxemburger Volksschulen mit einer geschichtlichen Karte des Luxemburger Landes*, p. 9.

¹²⁶ “E prächtecht Schlass gõf op dẽ Plâz gebaut, / Mat mächtech Fèstongsmaren ann hẽch Tîr; / Der Muttergottes huet eñt uvertraut / Ann hîr èng Kîrch gebaut vir bei seng Dir.” Willy GOERGEN, *Mir wölle bleiwe wât mir sin oder Aus âler a neier Zeit*, p. 33-40.

¹²⁷ „Vor den Thoren seiner Burg erbaute der Graf eine Kapelle zu Ehren der Hl. Gottesmutter und stellte seine neue Stadt, sein Land und Volk unter den Schutz dieser mächtigen Herrin.“ Nicolas LEONARDY, *Jung Siegfried von Luxemburg. Vaterländisches Trauerspiel in 3 Aufzügen und einem Bild*, p. 60; see also p. 30.

¹²⁸ For one of the earliest versions see: Le Chevalier DE LA BASSE-MOÛTURIE, *Itinéraire du Luxembourg germanique*, p. 40-44.

dressed as a black knight. In later adaptations, Sigefroid is generally saved by some good fortune¹²⁹ or even divine intervention.¹³⁰ Another development worth pointing out is that from the late nineteenth century onwards both the Faustian tale and the local legend of Melusine are frequently linked together.

There is a general consensus that the story found its origins by mixing Sigefroid into the legends surrounding François-Henri de Montmorency-Bouteville (1628-1695). The latter had become duke of Piney-Luxembourg through marriage,¹³¹ which in turn earned him the name of *Maréchal de Luxembourg*.¹³² De Montmorency was one of the great French generals during the reign of Louis XIV and particularly loathed for his cruelty, to the extent that in 1679, still in his own lifetime, rumours accuse him of a pact with the devil.¹³³ After his death the tales were embellished and spread through Europe in French, Dutch, German and Danish versions.¹³⁴ The story most probably came to Luxembourg via the Northern German soldiers in the garrison, and over time the original *Maréchal de Luxembourg* was replaced by Count Sigefroid.¹³⁵

The existence of legends reflects, on the one hand, the degree to which the count had established himself among the general public as a founding figure. On the other, they have to be regarded as an important medium in cementing his role and disseminating it further. This also includes some of the historical myths: almost all of these start with the castle of Koerich, thus creating a tradition for a fact long disproved by historians.¹³⁶ Other ideas tended to be more a child of their own times and many descriptions of the castle include a large hall, possibly with a large gathering of many vassals. Furthermore, this type of medium is also important as it

¹²⁹ For instance: Félix MERSCH and René WEIMERSKIRCH, *Festspill fun Millenaire opgefe'ert fun de Scho'lkanner fun der Staad Letzeburg*, p. 9.

¹³⁰ For instance: Jean-Baptiste FALLIZE, *Siegfried und Melusina*, p. 205.

¹³¹ Anton KIPPENBERG, *Die Sage vom Herzog von Luxemburg und die historische Persönlichkeit ihres Trägers*, p. 20-21.

¹³² Jean MILMEISTER, *Der Bau der Siegfriedsburg*, p. 36.

¹³³ Anton KIPPENBERG, *Die Sage vom Herzog von Luxemburg ...*, p. 92.

¹³⁴ Frederick York POWELL, *Die Sage vom Herzog von Luxemburg und die Historische Personlichkeit ihres Trägers* by Anton Kippenberg, p. 196-197.

¹³⁵ Adolphe JACOBY, *Der Graf von Luxemburg hat all sein Geld verjuppt*, in: *Luxemburger Zeitung*, Thursday, 22/08/1929, morning edition, p. 2-3; and: Jean DUMONT, *La légende du pacte satanique de Sigefroid*, p. 121.

¹³⁶ See: Nicholas GENGLER, *Die alten Schloßherrschaften von Kőrich*, p. 216.

reached a large audience, including parts of the population with limited access to education, due to both its accessible nature and its vivid imagery.

Part of the latter are also the values which these stories bestow on the count, although their particular influence tends towards a more ambiguous result. Historians and painters across the ages present Sigefroid as an extremely positive character, even though there are evidently no medieval sources for any of this. Among these virtuous representations one sees him as a good lord who is just to his people,¹³⁷ or protects them from all harm.¹³⁸ Likewise the painting by Pierre Blanc shows him as a man of the people, wearing no distinctly rich attire: only his sword and the central place in the composition identify him.¹³⁹ Others again present him as particularly pious, generally based on his alleged foundation of the cult of the Virgin in Luxembourg.¹⁴⁰ It is with this latter tendency that the legends of the Faustian type evidently clash. Here the count receives a much more dubious personality: he tends to be distant and untrustworthy. One may wonder why Sigefroid's pact with the devil did not undermine his status as founding father, but it appears that some authors did not perceive it as a conundrum and did not even try to solve the apparent contradiction.¹⁴¹

The origin of the nation

In the introduction to his eight-volume history, Jean Bertholet admits that he had received advice to start his account with Sigefroid. He does not specify who gave him this recommendation. It may have been the Estates who financed the publication to a large degree, or it could just have been a rhetorical phrase hinting at Pierret's slightly older account from whom he took much inspiration and who indeed began his *Essay* with Sigefroid. The author then adds that he would consider it "a dreadful void", not to deal with Antiquity at all.¹⁴² It seems therefore that only the high

¹³⁷ Marc ANGEL and Paul MARGUE, *D'Geschicht vu Lëtzebuerg a Bandes Dessinées. Tome 1. Vu 54 viru Christus bis 1443*, p. 19

¹³⁸ Willy GOERGEN, *Mir wölle bleiwe wât mir sin oder Aus âler a neier Zeit*, p. 33-40.

¹³⁹ See figure 5 (Appendix 3).

¹⁴⁰ See: Jean BERTELS, *Historia Luxemburgensis ...*, p. 38; Joseph PAQUET, *Die Geschichte des Luxemburger Landes ...*, p. 7; or: Alfred LEFORT, *La Maison souveraine de Luxembourg*, p. 6.

¹⁴¹ See for instance: Félix MERSCH and René WEIMERSKIRCH, *Festspill fum Millenaire ...*, p. 2-6.

¹⁴² "un vuide affreux". Jean BERTHOLET, *Histoire Ecclésiastique et Civile ...*, vol 1, p. xv.

prestige of classical times prevented the historian from taking another approach. Bertholet's urge to justify the structure of his opus and the way he did it suggest that Sigefroid represented the natural beginning to a narrative of Luxembourg. His historiographical successors never failed to neglect Antiquity either, but the date of 963 had firmly established itself as a turning point in history, much more so than the year 962 in Germany, comparable to the importance of 1066 in England, but in character closer to Rome's 753 BC. Furthermore, Bertholet also enumerated what he believed to be the count's territorial possessions and concluded that his demesne possessed the same limits as the eighteenth-century province.¹⁴³ It would be an exaggeration to identify any sense of particularism or even nationalism in Bertholet's writing. He was a loyal subject of the Habsburg Empress and it is this loyalty that he transfers back onto Sigefroid, who he presents as a loyal vassal to the Emperor.¹⁴⁴ Nonetheless, the reader may infer that the count was not only the founder of castle and city, but actually laid the basis for the territory as a whole.

Like many of Bertholet's opinions, this one was gladly accepted by his successors, most notably those at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. With the change from a local narrative to a national one, the importance of the founding father received additional connotations. Having already become the first count, then the founder of castle and city, Sigefroid's next 'promotion' was assured by nationalist historiography. In Luxembourg nationalist discourse is mainly a child of the late nineteenth century, but found its clearest expressions in the first half of the twentieth century. Take for instance Arthur Herchen's history schoolbook (1918), which was fundamental not only for the construction of the dominant narrative, but also its main medium. Its first edition was only released at the end of the First World War, but the ideas it presents had been developing since the late 1880s. In this publication not merely Sigefroid's reign, but the date of the acquisition of the rock are an important caesura: "It is from this year [963] that the existence of our country as a distinct and autonomous state begins".¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ "Par ce dénombrement on voit que son domaine renfermoit, à peu près, les mêmes bornes que la province de Luxembourg aujourd'hui." Jean BERTHOLET, *Histoire Ecclésiastique et Civile ...*, vol 3, p. 6.

¹⁴⁴ See: Jean BERTHOLET, *Histoire Ecclésiastique et Civile ...*, vol. 1, p. iv, respectively: vol 3, p. 2.

¹⁴⁵ "C'est à partir de cette année que commence l'existence de notre pays comme Etat distinct et autonome". Arthur HERCHEN, *Manuel d'Histoire Nationale*. 1918 edition, p. 27. In the later editions it

About twenty years later Joseph Meyers presents the events in the same light: it is the start of the “Period of Autonomy in the Middle Ages”.¹⁴⁶ For both authors the territorial structure developed as quickly as the city had for previous authors. In order to strengthen his argument, Herchen adds that the name of the growing city imposed itself quickly on the whole territory.¹⁴⁷ As for Meyers, Sigefroid started living in Luxembourg and “his successors called themselves counts of Luxembourg”.¹⁴⁸ Neither of these descriptions is entirely wrong as such, but the manner in which they are presented is highly misleading. What they describe as matter-of-fact within a few lines of their chapter on Sigefroid refers to a slow process that took at least until the reign of Conrad I.

One can already find nineteenth-century precedents for the idea. In 1866 at a time when local patriotism started to manifest itself under the threats posed by Bismarck’s Prussia and Napoleon III’s France alike, Henri Eltz, like Herchen later, stated that the construction of the castle gave rise to the independent existence of the state.¹⁴⁹ Another example – this time from the world of literature – Nicolas Leonardy’s “patriotic” drama from 1899 starts binding Sigefroid into an essentialist nationalist viewpoint. Luxembourg is being described as Sigefroid’s *Heimat*,¹⁵⁰ a word expressing a much more emotional and sentimental notion than “residence” as used by historians. It also refers to a larger space than the city itself and carries the connotation of an existing cultural landscape.

After official adoption by the historiographic mainstream, the new ideology spread and infiltrated the worlds of non-historians, especially that of literature. Franz Binsfeld’s opera *Melusin* from 1951 presents Sigefroid’s rule as the start of a national development: through him the fatherland (*Hémecht*) was born and given

was changed into: “[L’échange de 963] est à considérer le point de départ de la *formation d’un Etat féodal autonome qui est devenu le Luxembourg.*” See: Arthur HERCHEN, *Manuel d’Histoire Nationale*. 1972 edition, p. 53.

¹⁴⁶ “Zeit der Selbstständigkeit im Mittelalter” Joseph MEYERS, *Geschichte Luxemburgs*, p. 47.

¹⁴⁷ Arthur HERCHEN, *Manuel d’Histoire Nationale*, 1918: p. 27, 1972: p. 54.

¹⁴⁸ Joseph MEYERS, *Geschichte Luxemburgs*, p. 48.

¹⁴⁹ Henri ELTZ, Über den früheren Kulturzustand der Ardennen und das geschichtliche Leben der Landmannes im Luxemburger Land, p. 13. Also quoted in: Gilbert TRAUSSCH, *La Ville de Luxembourg*, p. 450, n.2.

¹⁵⁰ Nicolas LEONARDY, *Jung Siegfried von Luxemburg ...*, p. 35 and 58.

strength.¹⁵¹ Further: “[w]hen Sigefroid was named count (...) we Luxembourgers became free and frank.”¹⁵² The nature of the alleged previous lack of freedom remains undefined, but it suggests the idea that the nation is now able to govern its own fate. Still in the same account, the nation is forged when “the knights” come to the rock to swear fealty to the count.¹⁵³ The author makes no allusion as to how these knights were supposed to have emerged, nor does he seem aware of the anachronistic character of the whole procedure. Nonetheless, we encounter once more the idea of Luxembourg as a capital, not simply for Sigefroid’s lands, but for the whole nation. The same teleological view can be found before the Second World War. In his column in the *Luxemburger Zeitung*, the writer Batty Weber (1860-1940) points out that through the acquisition of the rock, it “received for us a national significance, historically, topographically and economically, and it has kept this until today.”¹⁵⁴ As much as the role of Sigefroid, the passage also reflects recognition of the ‘sacrality’ of the location. The same idea emerges from the following excerpt from Nicolas Welter’s *Siegfriedsburg* (Castle of Sigefroid):

The Castle of Sigefroid in the sea of rays,
 How it stands strong as home and defence!
 Until the most far-away time
 It will spread a consoling shine.
 In the safe *Grund*, where the willows wave,
 already close and closer the houses stand.
 Under bridges, in between dams and shrub
 Peacefully River Alzette runs through.
 The heart imagines with happy beat

¹⁵¹ “Um Tûr de Se’fridd ble’st an d’Huer, / du wor ons d’Hémecht stolz gebuer.” Franz BINSFELD and Jules KRUGER, *Melusin. Oper an drei Akten no enger National-So*, p. 25.

¹⁵² “Den Här Se’fridd, hien ass zum Grof ernannt (...) nu si mir Letzebuenger frei a frank.” Franz BINSFELD and Jules KRUGER, *Melusin ...*, p. 38.

¹⁵³ Franz BINSFELD and Jules KRUGER, *Melusin ...*, p. 32.

¹⁵⁴ “Damit bekam der Fels für uns eine nationale Bedeutung, geschichtlich, landschaftlich und wirtschaftlich, und hat sie bis heute behalten.” Batty WEBER, Abreißkalender from 14/05/39 (no. 6652).

The passage is emulated in Franz Binsfeld's opera: the towers light up the surroundings and the castle holding against all enemies.¹⁵⁶ The importance the authors give to 'rays' and 'light' derives from an incorrect origin of the name 'Luxembourg' from the Latin *lux*.¹⁵⁷ The etymology is in fact much older and appears at least as early as 1567, when the place is identified as a city of light (*lucis burgus*).¹⁵⁸ It then re-appeared occasionally in the nineteenth century¹⁵⁹ and proved a well-liked theme among early esoteric writers.¹⁶⁰ Having now become embedded as a literary *motif*, the idea provides Binsfeld with the means of presenting Luxembourg as a shining fortress, but it also contains the connotation of 'Enlightenment' and its triumph over the past chaos and barbarism.¹⁶¹ At the same time the castle also stands against still existing forces of darkness. Welter's entire poem, published in 1936, can be read as being directed against the threat of Nazi Germany. Michel Stoffel's *Clef de Mélusine*, written by the author in exile in 1944, uses the metaphor evocatively to mark the 'triumph' against the oppressors during Second World War.¹⁶² The idea links directly to the mighty reconstructions by Werling and Arendt. Rock and castle retain their symbolism of strength: "for you all it was built. [The castle] shall be a protection and shelter for you and your families on the day of danger."¹⁶³

¹⁵⁵ Die Siegfriedsburg im Strahlenmeer, / Wie ragt sie stark als Heim und Wehr! / Die wird bis in die fernsten Zeiten / Einen tröstlichen Glanz verbreiten. / Im sichern Grund, wo die Weiden wehn, / Schon dicht und dichter die Häuser stehn. / Unter Brücken, zwischen Damm und Hag / Friedlich wallt die Alzet durch. / Es ahnt das Herz mit frohem Schlag / Ein schönes, freies Luxemburg. Nicolas WELTER, Die Siegfriedsburg, p. 12. The word 'Grund' actually means 'bottom' or 'ground', but it is also the name of the southern-eastern part of the valley below the rock where the medieval castle stood.

¹⁵⁶ "We' d'Tîr geflicht hun durch d'Gewan, / du wor ons d'Hémecht stark erstan. (...) Des Burg mat hieren Tîr, / de' weist dem Feind hir Stîr." Franz BINSFELD and Jules KRUGER, *Melusin. Oper an drei Akten no enger National-So*, p. 25.

¹⁵⁷ See also: "Des Burg, si nennt sech lo anescht we' soss; de Fielz an d'Burg a ronderem d'Land bis dohier *Lucilinburhuc* genannt, soll *Letzebuerg* hêsche vun dessem Dâg un, *Luxemburg*, Burg de' glönnert voll Licht (...)" Franz BINSFELD and Jules KRUGER, *Melusin ...*, p. 37.

¹⁵⁸ See: Ludovico GUICCIARDINO, *Belgicae sive Inferoris Germaniae descriptio*, p. 294.

¹⁵⁹ See: Le Chevalier DE LA BASSE-MOÛTURIE, *Itinéraire du Luxembourg germanique*, p. 56.

¹⁶⁰ Henri SCHLIEP, *Ur-Luxemburg. Ein Beitrag zur Urgeschichte des Landes, des Volkes & der Sprache, der Ur-Religion, Sitten und Gebräuche, etc.*, p. 262-263.

¹⁶¹ See my chapter on Melusine for a longer description about the pre-Sigefroidian time as an era of chaos.

¹⁶² See: Frank WILHELM, *Dictionnaire de la francophonie luxembourgeoise*, p. 325-326.

¹⁶³ "An net fir mech elèng stêt se do. Nên, fir Iech all go'f se gebaut. Iech an Äre Familjen soll se Schirm a Schauteg sin am Dâg vun der Gefor", Franz BINSFELD and Jules KRUGER, *Melusin. Oper an drei Akten no enger National-So*, p. 34.

A second strand that weaves into the above is constituted by the image of the rock and castle as the cradle of the great medieval dynasts. Again Bertholet offers the precedent and declares the location as “the cradle of one of the most illustrious and powerful houses of Europe.”¹⁶⁴ And yet again the ideas are taken up at the end of the nineteenth century. In his description of the castle, Arendt presents a long list of many rulers who had lived and reigned here, including a reference to the cradle of Empress Cunigunde.¹⁶⁵ More importantly the idea was woven into a famous song by one of the national bards Edmond de la Fontaine (1823-1891), popularly called Dicks. The song *d’Lëtzbuerger Land* can be ranged in importance right behind the modern-day national anthem (*Hémecht*) and the former one (*Feierwon*). It offers a description of the country and its people, and starts with the following lines:

In Luxembourg stood Sigefroid’s castle
 There was in old times the cradle of a world-famed race
 Of all knights back then the flower.
 Look! Four of them carry the crown
 Of the German Realm on the Imperial throne!¹⁶⁶

The song not only praised the important character of the location, but it also creates a link between the two medieval dynasties. In other words, it creates the same impression already left by Werling’s and Arendt’s reconstructions, and by Herchen’s and Meyers’s narrative structure: the medieval period is to be seen as a single period of national grandeur. The song then goes on to create a link to today’s population:

The spirit of those heroes

¹⁶⁴ “Voilà (...) le berceau d’une des plus illustres, & plus puissantes maisons de l’Europe.” Jean BERTHOLET, *Histoire Ecclésiastique et Civile ...*, vol. 3, p. 10.

¹⁶⁵ “Hier stand die Wiege der heil. Kuigunde, der Gemahlin Kaiser Heinrichs II; hier wohnten und herrschten die Grafen Siegfried, Heinrich IV, Heinrich der Blinde, Heinrich V, Heinrich VI, und Heinrich VII, deutscher Kaiser, die Gräfin Ermesinde, Johann der Blinde, Karl IV, ebenfalls deutscher Kaiser und Wenzel I.“ Charles ARENDT, *Hypothetischer Plan der ehemaligen Schlossburg Lützelburg ...*, p. 226. Similarly, although not as expansively, Biermann also had referred to the location as the cradle of John of Bohemia, see: Jean-Pierre BIERMANN, *Abrégé Historique de la Ville & Forteresse de Luxembourg*, p. 33.

¹⁶⁶ “Zu Letzeburg stong d’Sigfrits Schlass / Do wor zu alen Zeiten d’We’ fun ènger wèltberimter Rass, / Fun alle Ritter démols d’Ble’. / Kuckt! fe’er droen d’Kro’n / Fum deitsche Reich um Késertro’n! (...)” Edmond DE LA FONTAINE (Dicks), *D’Letzebuerger Land*, p. 83.

Still remains in the people's blood
And therefore 't has till now been
Ever well-behaved, loyal and good.¹⁶⁷

The idea proved durable. In a play written in 1963, the people of the newly founded Luxembourg demand from their count: “Count Sigefroid! Let a strong lineage emerge / That can carry [Luxembourg's] name into the world.”¹⁶⁸ But even much more recently, the historian Gilbert Trausch in his 1994 history of the city of Luxembourg writes about Sigefroid: “He had a proper castle built there, which became the cradle, so-to-speak, of the family (*race*) of the Luxembourgs.”¹⁶⁹ The author clearly refers to the imperial dynasty, but despite being likely intended as a pun on Dicks's song, the word “race” used in the original French is problematic. First of all it carries its other, not to say primary, connotations of nation and ethnicity. As a reference to the song, it indirectly carries the baggage of its inheritance. Furthermore, it reflects the ambiguously close relationship between the concept of a dynasty/family and nation already inherent in the older accounts.

So far we can perceive a progression from the idea of Sigefroid as the dynastic father of the ruling counts of Luxembourg, to him being the creator of castle and city, which in consequence led to him being regarded as the founder of the country and to some extent the nation. All these elements were never merged more explicitly than in the year 1963, when Luxembourg celebrated its first millennium of existence.

The millennium of Luxembourg in 1963

Anniversaries often engender a ‘thickening’ of memory.¹⁷⁰ They are occasions to remember and are welcomed by politicians, historians and the general population alike – though their motives sometimes differ slightly. As a consequence the high

¹⁶⁷ “De Gêschft fun dénen Hèlden do, / Dé leit dem Follék nach am Blut / An dofir wor et bis lo, / Nach emmerzo' braf, trei a gutt (...)”

¹⁶⁸ “Grof Siegfried! Loosst ee staarkt Geschlecht entstoën / Dat säin Numm an d'Welt kann droën.” Félix MERSCH and René WEIMERSKIRCH, *Festspill fun Millenaire ...*, p 7.

¹⁶⁹ “Il y fait construire un château fort en règle qui devient pour ainsi dire le berceau de la *race* des Luxembourgs.” Gilbert TRAUSCH, *La Ville de Luxembourg*, p. 11. [My emphasis!]

¹⁷⁰ The concept is borrowed from: Michel MARGUE and Sonja KMEC, Introduction, p. 13.

demand for possibilities to engage with the past results in a high output of media, ranging from historical analysis to promotional gimmickry. In the case of Sigefroid the uncontested highpoint in this respect was the millennium celebration of the ‘founding of Luxembourg’ in 1963.

An awareness of the context in which these festivities took place is essential for their full understanding. 1963 was the first anniversary to be celebrated on a national scale since the centenary of independence in 1939.¹⁷¹ Unlike this earlier commemoration, which took place under the looming threat of a possible German invasion, and which is therefore to be seen as a national demonstration of opposition against the neighbour to the east, the millennium festivities were free from such a burden.¹⁷² On the contrary, the early sixties were a time of economic boom and a newly developing political role as a leading light in the European Coal and Steel Community. Luxembourg had been chosen as the permanent seat of this new international body, which resulted in changes not only on a political, but also an architectural scale, at least within the city of Luxembourg. New large-scale buildings were needed and the authorities decided to develop an entirely new landsite at Kirchberg on a plateau to the East of the old centre.

The commemoration took place in a setting that combined historic themes with the idea of a modern expansion. The scheduled events were very diverse in style. On the one hand, we find clear references to the old past, such as the unveiling of a millennium monument on the rock where the medieval castle stood.¹⁷³ On the other hand, we find exaltations of the city’s new guise. The two major ceremonies in this respect were the inauguration of a large new theatre and the laying of the foundation stone for a long new bridge that connects the city centre with the new

¹⁷¹ For the 1939 celebrations, see: Claude WEY, *Le Centenaire de l’Indépendance et sa commémoration en 1939*, p. 29-53.

¹⁷² The organisers of the festivities were well aware of this fact, see: Ville de Luxembourg (ed), *Die Jahrtausendfeier der Stadt Luxemburg 1963. Offizieller Festkatalog*, p. 5. The comparison also reflects the clear intention to leave as much of an impact as the 1939 predecessors.

¹⁷³ The ‘monument’ consists of a stone wall with the chronogram: SAECLA DECEN REPLENS LEGAT VRBS VESTIGIA PRISCA 963-1963 (Having completed ten centuries, the city shall read its antique vestiges 963-1963). The larger capitals in this chronogram stand for Roman numerals that added together make 1963.

project on Kirchberg. The ‘new theatre’¹⁷⁴ was, by the standard of the surrounding structures, a colossal building. At the same time it was used for quite a few of the celebration events. The bridge in turn had not taken much shape at this time, but the government had chosen the design because of its bold character and the prospect of international recognition.¹⁷⁵ The general impression was a sense of living through a period of transition: Sigefroid’s historic city now opened itself to the new European future.

One might wonder who intended to benefit most from the anniversary: the municipality or the state? Although the stress was generally put on the “millennium of the city”,¹⁷⁶ they both profited. One method of nationalist discourse in Luxembourg has been to blur the different meaning of the word ‘Luxembourg’. This emerges the stronger during this occasion. In early April 1963 a newspaper article claimed the following: “City and country are not to be separated. The millennium of the city can equally be celebrated by the country.” The reasoning behind this is that “[w]ithout the founding and expansion of the castle, the fortress and the city of Luxembourg, a free and independent State would certainly never have emerged.”¹⁷⁷ The author plays with the idea of a progression from castle to nation-state. The official programme of the celebrations as released by the city of Luxembourg even turns the statement around: “Although 1963 is the anniversary of the whole country of Luxembourg, the capital will nevertheless be the core and glorious centre of the upcoming festivities.”¹⁷⁸

Interestingly enough, the fundamental position as to how to interpret Sigefroid’s role in history was based on a broadly accepted consensus and we meet hardly any critical voices. Two historians, Nicolas Margue (1888-1976) and (his son) Paul Margue (*1923), attempted to add some nuance and scientific precision to the

¹⁷⁴ Locals still refer to the building as the “new theatre”, even though the official title was “Théâtre Municipal de Luxembourg”, which has been changed recently after some major renovation works into “Grand Théâtre de Luxembourg”.

¹⁷⁵ Christian DESSOUROUX, *D’Rout Bréck*, 297.

¹⁷⁶ See: *La Ville de Luxembourg de 963 à 1963. Le Livre du Millénaire*, Luxembourg, 1963.

¹⁷⁷ “Stadt und Land sind nicht von einander zu trennen. Das Millennium der Stadt darf in gleicher Weise vom Lande gefeiert werden. Ohne Gründung und Ausbau der Burg, der Festung und der Stadt Luxemburg wäre es bestimmt niemals zu einem freien und unabhängigen Luxemburger Staat gekommen” Marcel FISCHBACH, *Behauptung und Sendung*, in: *Luxemburger Wort*, 10/04/1963, p. 3.

¹⁷⁸ “Obwohl 1963 das Jubiläumsjahr des ganzen Luxemburger Landes ist, so wird doch vor allem die Hauptstadt Kernstück und glanzvoller Mittelpunkt der bevorstehenden Feierlichkeiten sein.“ Ville de Luxembourg (ed), *Die Jahrtausendfeier der Stadt Luxemburg 1963. Offizieller Festkatalog*, p 3.

general opinion. They pointed out that in 963 no-one had the intention to built a city or lay the foundations of a state.¹⁷⁹ Two pages further down, the authors concede that, despite the lack of intention, Sigefroid’s founding role remains key, since “the construction of Sigefroid’s castle [...] gave birth to the city and he himself became the ancestor of the dynasty of the counts of Luxembourg”. The section finishes with an enumeration of the members of the “glorious dynasty” from Henry VII to Sigismund and briefly points out their main achievements. In other words, Sigefroid keeps his position as the origin of a golden age. The second more critical stance comes from the far-left. The editor-in-chief of the communist newspaper unsurprisingly denigrates the medieval period as the age of feudalism and Sigefroid as a “typical feudal lord” from a “family of great estate holders” (*Großgrundbesitzer*).¹⁸⁰ Yet again, the general paradigm remains untouched: Sigefroid laid the foundation not only for the capital, but also for the country and the state. The rock of Luxembourg is described as “the cradle of our 1000-year-old capital”.

The increased output of literature on the topic during 1963 tended to synthesise all previously existing *topoi*. The two plays written for the occasion stress once more the symbolic value of the rock and castle as a national stronghold. Friedmann’s Sigefroid declares that he is building the castle to offer protection to his people that have been living in fear of attacks from the Normans. The count also anachronistically uses the banner with the red lion,¹⁸¹ which reinforces the idea of the modern day nation’s birth.¹⁸² The other play by Mersch and Weimerskirch is equally subtle.¹⁸³ The castle looks like having grown out of the rock and is stronger than any of Sigefroid’s neighbours.¹⁸⁴ The count then leads his newly won subjects into a chant avowing and acclaiming the strength of the castle:

¹⁷⁹ Nicolas MARGUE and Paul MARGUE, *Histoire sommaire de la Ville de Luxembourg 963-1963*, p. 2.

¹⁸⁰ Jean KILL, 1000 jähriges Luxemburg: Woher? – Wohin? Ein Beitrag zum besseren Verständnis der Geschichte des Luxemburger Landes, in: *Zeitung vum Lëtzebuurger Vollék*, 12/01/1963, 2/02/1963, 9/02/1963 and 16/02/1963 (reprinted as a monograph, Luxembourg, 1963), p. 35 (page number refers to the monograph).

¹⁸¹ The red lion did not become the heraldic emblem of the counts of Luxembourg until the thirteenth century. See my chapter on Ermesinde for a more detailed discussion on the topic.

¹⁸² Richard FRIEDMANN, *Festspill fir de Millenaire vun der Stât Letzebuerg*.

¹⁸³ Félix MERSCH and René WEIMERSKIRCH, *Festspill fun Millenaire ...*, Luxembourg, 1963.

¹⁸⁴ “Méng Buerg as ferdeg an si stet do uewen wéi aus dem Field gewuess. Ech sin houfreg drop, well kee vu méngen Noperen huet esou eng opzeweisen.” *Ibid.*, p. 4.

The castle stands and the castle watches
Over country and city,
The walls defend
Show resistance
To those who want to invade it.¹⁸⁵

The image can be completed with Franz Kinnen's artistic impression of the castle: a tough stone structure flanked by large square towers lingering threateningly on top of the rock.¹⁸⁶

Although the context of these festivities was in many respects the opposite of the previous national celebrations of 1939, the way the count is being represented had hardly changed compared to the years before the Second World War. The language used in the popular media and the images emerging from it remain that of strength and grandeur of a small country, as if it still had to prove its status among the nations of Europe. Only in some of the more scientific writings does one find sober and precise accounts, which through their nature were hardly read by a larger audience.¹⁸⁷ The catalogues of the two exhibitions taking place in Luxembourg in 1963 start off a scientific re-evaluation of Sigefroid's times, adopting quite a few new views. To some extent the development was also linked to a change of generation among historians, with some of the older scholars, such as Joseph Meyers (†1964), disappearing from the scene and others launching their scientific careers, such as Paul Margue. In the following decades the myths that had been surrounding Sigefroid received some serious blows, though without really undermining the historic role of the count, at least not initially.

¹⁸⁵ "D' Buerg stett an d' Buerg waacht / Iwwert d' Land and iwwert d' Stad, / D' Maure wieren / Weisen d' Stiiren / Deem, deen s' iwwerfale wëllt." *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹⁸⁶ Depicted in: Jean-Pierre ERPELDING, *Luxemburg, Tausend Jahre*, p. 13.

¹⁸⁷ See for instance: Archives de l'Etat de Luxembourg (ed), *La formation territoriale du pays de Luxembourg depuis ses origines jusqu'au milieu du XVe siècle. Exposition documentaire organisée par les Archives de l'Etat. Septembre – octobre 1963*, p. 32-43.

Losing importance

The first perceptible demotion of Sigefroid's role came in the form of a downgrading of his castle. In the first edition of his large-scale publication on the fortress of Luxembourg, Jean-Pierre Koltz (1909-1989) still relied to a large degree on Charles Arendt. He used the outline of his reconstructions for some of his own, or quotes him as part of his secondary literature.¹⁸⁸ In the later editions, he changed his stance in favour of a more sober description. The dominating authority behind his text is now Joseph Grob, who had criticised Arendt's reconstruction in his 1900 article. One of the results is that Koltz now describes the first fortifications as a tower with two stories, with all remaining buildings made of wood until a *palas* was built.¹⁸⁹ Likewise his description of the "rudimentary" living conditions in a medieval castle are far removed from the cosy court-life suggested by the romantic images: in the low rooms with their narrow windows one sat next to a fire-place "to be roasted from the front, so to freeze up from the back".¹⁹⁰ Although far from taking a post-nationalist stance, Koltz's account nonetheless helped to bring more nuance into what had been a rather monolithic view. It received additional support when Paul Margue adopted a similar position in his textbook in 1974, which became the successor to Herchen's and Meyers's. Here the fortifications were reduced to a square tower, a chapel and some stables.¹⁹¹ Although these views were mainly based on analogy to perspectives developed elsewhere in Western Europe, they became confirmed by archaeologists. The castle saw some initial excavations during its 'millennium' year in 1963,¹⁹² but these were almost amateur in nature and their unsystematic digging and interpretation can be regarded as unscientific.¹⁹³ Furthermore, none of the few tenth-century remnants were reached. Since the 1990s many new results compensate for this first failure. The very small amount of early material still demands a lot of analogical thinking and imagination in regard to the

¹⁸⁸ See: Jean-Pierre KOLTZ, *Baugeschichte der Stadt und Festung Luxemburg*, vol. 1, 1st edition, p. 41 (graph) and p. 44, n. 3.

¹⁸⁹ Jean-Pierre KOLTZ, *Baugeschichte der Stadt und Festung Luxemburg mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der kriegsgeschichtlichen Ereignisse*, vol. 1, 3rd edition, p. 51-52 and 54-55.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

¹⁹¹ Paul MARGUE, *Luxembourg in Mittelalter und Neuzeit*, p. 18.

¹⁹² See: Joseph MEYERS, *Ausgrabungen auf dem Bockfelsen*, p. 81-82.

¹⁹³ Frank REINERT, *Die Archäologie und die Stadt Luxemburg*, p. 79.

suggested reconstructions, but they confirmed the small extent of the initial fortifications nonetheless.¹⁹⁴ As a result almost all views of the original ‘Luxembourg’ one perceives today tend to adjust themselves to this perspective: a wooden or stone tower and some palisades.¹⁹⁵ One only finds the occasional exception in children’s books or comic books.¹⁹⁶ The debates nowadays tend to centre on two elements: firstly the question of the extent of the bailey, and secondly what the situation was before Sigefroid. Had there been Roman fortifications, and if so did Sigefroid use them? Had there been a market, or even a population before Sigefroid acquired the area? Without intending to intervene in this discussion, one should note however that one of its essential features is a disagreement between current historians and archaeologists on almost all these points.

So far unquestioned was the date of 963, but it too did not escape the intense scrutiny of some historians. The charter poses a problem in as far as the date it provides is illogical. It claims to have been written on Palm Sunday, the 15th calends of May, i.e. the 17th April. However, in 963 this day was not Palm Sunday, which actually fell on the 12th April. Since the palaeographic evidence points to the tenth century and the charter was kept within the Abbey in Trier, there is no reason to suspect a fake. Based on the research of Roger Petit,¹⁹⁷ Michel Margue (*1958) and Michel Pauly (*1952) thus suggested that there was a discrepancy between the *conscriptio* and the *actum*: the legal document only validated an act that had already occurred.¹⁹⁸ The question then remains whether the charter had actually been written in 963, with Sigefroid taking possession of the area in the years before, or whether, and maybe more likely, Sigefroid took possession in 963, and had the charter written in 987, the year when the collegiate church and the chapel in the castle were

¹⁹⁴ See figure 6 (Appendix 3).

¹⁹⁵ See figure 7 (Appendix 3). See also: Gilbert TRAUSCH, *La Ville de Luxembourg*, p. 11; Michel PAULY, *Die topographische Entwicklung der Stadt Luxemburg, von den Anfängen bis zum Beginn des 16. Jahrhunderts*, p. 7.

¹⁹⁶ See for instance: Sus HIERZIG, *Zou Lëtzebuerg stong d’Sigfriddsschlass. Eng al Geschicht nei erzielt a mat Biller*, Echternach, 1983; for a comic book, see: Roger LEINER and Lucien CZUGA, *De Superjhemp. Dynamit fir d’Dynastie*, p. 20-25.

¹⁹⁷ Roger PETIT (ed), *Documents relatifs à l’histoire du Luxembourg*, vol. 1, p. 39.

¹⁹⁸ Michel MARGUE and Michel PAULY, *Saint-Michel et le premier siècle*, p. 8.

consecrated and when Palm Sunday did indeed fall onto the 17th April. Whatever the reason, the “sacrosanct date of 963” had been placed into serious doubt.¹⁹⁹

The next established truth to fall victim to the historians was the foundation of the city. As mentioned above, Nicolas and Paul Margue reminded people in 1963 that no one had the intention to found a city a millennium earlier. Over the next decades it became generally accepted that if there was any early settlement, it certainly did not deserve to be referred to as a town or city.²⁰⁰ Worse still, Michel Margue and Michel Pauly pointed out that the neighbouring *villa* of Weimerskirch may already have been a cultural and religious centre when Sigefroid arrived.²⁰¹ In 926 the site had a church (hence its name) and its inhabitants cultivated twenty *mansi* of land with another hundred in reserve. Part of the demense were 300 pigs kept in the surrounding woods.²⁰² With its six mills, it produced flour for what was probably quite a substantial population within it and the adjacent valleys. Sigefroid’s choice of location for one of his castles was thus probably based on the benefits it could draw from the cultivated surroundings. These findings were not new,²⁰³ but again it took until the 1980s and ‘90s for them to be emphasised and to replace the traditional view of Sigefroid implanting his castle onto unpopulated grounds.

Furthermore, some archaeologists have even suggested a possible continuous settlement on the plateau of today’s city from the end of Roman times.²⁰⁴ Although again probably not yet big enough to form a town either, this hypothesis would add another blow to Sigefroid’s historical impact, independently of the suspicion it has been greeted with by historians.

As a result, Sigefroid’s future seems at the moment very much undecided. First of all and as shown above, historians tend to demolish most of the myths that the memory of Sigefroid had attached itself to. At the same time they do not offer an

¹⁹⁹ Gilbert TRAUSCH, *La Ville de Luxembourg*, p. 14.

²⁰⁰ Michel MARGUE and Michel PAULY, *Saint-Michel et le premier siècle ...*, p. 68-69.

²⁰¹ For what follows see: Michel MARGUE and Michel PAULY, *Saint-Michel et le premier siècle ...*, p. 71-72 and 75; Michel MARGUE, *Du château à la ville: les origines*, p. 50-51; and: Michel PAULY, *La charte d’échange entre le comte Sigefroi et l’abbaye Saint-Maximin de Trèves*, (to be published).

²⁰² UQB, vol. 1, 150, p. 180.

²⁰³ See: *Luxembourg. Histoire d’une Ville Millénaire*, p. 36 and 100; François LASCOMBES, *Chronik der Stadt Luxemburg 963-1443*, p. 19-20, n. 3. An edition of the charter can even be found in Bertholet: Jean BERTHOLET, *Histoire Ecclésiastique et Civile ...* vol. 2, *Pieces & preuves*, p. lxxvij-lxxix; and in: UQB, vol. 1, 150, p. 180 as mentioned before.

²⁰⁴ John ZIMMER (ed), *Aux origines de la Ville de Luxembourg*, p. 321.

alternative, either because they cannot agree among themselves as to the extent of the first settlement, or because their thoughts remain too abstract. They present no clear cut result to provoke any emotional identification, as in the case of the date or the paternal ancestry. Therefore many of these recent opinions have not found their way into the world of political speeches or popular culture, which explains why Sigefroid's image has changed little in recent years. Phrased differently: in terms of collective memory Sigefroid is stuck. Unlike other historic figures, he has not yet managed to transcend the constraints assigned to him by the national perspective. As we will see in other chapters, this type of change seems to be a crucial development undertaken by most other *lieux de mémoire* – a rejuvenation that adapts them to contemporary political and cultural needs. Most of Sigefroid's attributes however seem so far unsuitable for providing him with a European character. In this respect it may also be fundamental that Sigefroid never managed to embody the French-German *Mischkultur*. He cannot be regarded as a precursor of multi-lingualism and neither was he present on anything that could be interpreted as a proto-European platform. Acclaiming his pro-Ottonian stance would push him too much into a German corner for it to prove helpful. The post-nationalist presentations of him therefore tend to be rare and short. Schoolbooks for instance have been adopting the more recent views since the late 1990s, but those instances that name the count are extremely brief and sober.²⁰⁵ Apart from maybe reflecting a new type of ideology, their thematic non-chronological structure and scientific precision alike prevent them from adopting the speculative imagery and structural importance educed by a narrative composition as found in earlier examples of this medium.

The ambiguity of having to come to terms with a national symbol that at times prefers the supra-national can be illustrated by the way the rock where the medieval castle stood has been presented since 1995. In 1994 UNESCO accepted the old town of Luxembourg as a World Heritage site; a year later Luxembourg represented the European Capital of Culture. Both these occasions justified a renovation of the site of the old castle to pay tribute to the new status. An elevated platform was built on the site of an old tower and it includes two plaques: one on the

²⁰⁵ See: Michel MARGUE, *Entdecken und Verstehen. Geschichtsbuch für den technischen Sekundarunterricht in Luxemburg*, vol. 2, p. 24; and: Education Nationale (ed), *Die Zeitmaschine. Lëtzebuurger Geschichtsbuch*, p. 94.

street floor commemorating the acquired UNESCO-status, another one on top celebrating the European importance of the site. On the bottom plaque one can read that “the city itself was founded in 963 and has played a significant role in European history throughout the centuries”.²⁰⁶ The text tries to endow one of the national myths with a European dimension, but as a result Sigefroid himself remains absent. This absence becomes even more striking on the upper floor of the platform, which contains a decorative bronze relief with the bust of the Robert Schuman, one of the founding-fathers of the European Community, next to a board with information on his life.²⁰⁷ It does not fail to mention proudly that the French politician had actually been born in Luxembourg. The whole platform thus does not point at the past below it, but towards the future across the valley with the birthplace of Robert Schuman and above it the Kirchberg quarter and its European institution buildings.

Conclusion

So far the analysis in this chapter has been mainly synchronic, though some diachronic changes may already have become apparent. Even though most of the different symbolic charges were kept alive over the ages, one can perceive four major periods of time in the development of the figure, each having had a different impact. The first stretches roughly from the middle of the sixteenth century to the second half of the eighteenth. It is characterised by a slowly emerging interest in the past and the first attempts at reconstructing this. For our purpose it is essential to notice that this phase laid the foundations for everything that was to come: Sigefroid emerges as the first representative of the dynasty, the charter of 963 is first edited and its importance emphasised, and the count is being directly linked to the development of both the city and the territory. The description culminated in the imagery offered by Bertholet, which kept its influence over most descriptions of Sigefroid’s time until well into the twentieth century. The second phase of importance reaches over the last two decades of the nineteenth century. On the one hand this is marked by a serious effort to adopt a rigorously scientific approach,

²⁰⁶ See figure 10 (Appendix 3).

²⁰⁷ See figure 11 (Appendix 3).

discovering new sources and consequently destroying some of the myths. Even so, the influence of previous historians still broke through at many occasions. On the other, it is at this time that nationalist sentiment establishes itself as a supporting factor in the construction of history. The result is a narrative at whose beginning Sigefroid stands once again. Additionally, the scheme renders the Middle Ages as a 'glorious age', thus having strong ideological implications for its representation, as we have seen for instance for the castle of Luxembourg. The third instance is the year 1963. The millennium of the city of Luxembourg, a concept that in itself reflects a high degree of historiographic construction, becomes in fact the millennium of the country as a whole. The year sees a constant stream of references to the founding father, but rather than creating a new image, it expresses the existing ones more forcefully than ever. The fourth phase has mainly been developing since the late 1980s. It can be characterised by a serious re-evaluation of the evidence, mainly in order to get beyond the nationalist images of the past and link local Luxembourgian research more intensely with developments on an international level. However, so far these more recent results have mainly reached a scientific audience, whereas popular images remain largely with the impressions that have characterised the first half of the twentieth century. Part of the reason for this may be the fact that all previous phases were marked by an expansion: until 1963 Sigefroid's role in national history tended to become continuously more important, whereas newer results tend to diminish Sigefroid's influence. One factor in all the historical constructions remains the lack of precise knowledge about Sigefroid. It has always made him susceptible to ideological manipulation, but it makes it also much more challenging for any meticulous historians to portray their ideas attractively.

Although the lack of precise data for his age allowed for considerable malleability, tradition pushed him gradually but steadily into the position of a national symbol. This may also be one reason why no alternative memories, conflicting symbolic ideals or even founding fathers could emerge: one convention built upon another, creating one large coherent image, against which no other could impose itself. In this respect the concept of teleology is essential for our understanding of the mechanisms that created and influenced Sigefroid's roles. Since the count 'founded' Luxembourg, he is the originator of everything supposedly

Luxembourgian. The capital city is certainly the most prominent example in this respect. Even though the settlement (if it existed at all) was smaller than the neighbouring *villa* of Weimerskirch, the tenth-century fortifications are already endowed with the same importance as the political, economic and demographic centre of the grand-duchy. The same logic applies to the alleged origins of the cult of the Virgin, or to the presentation of the ‘acquisition’ charter as the ‘founding’ charter. As in the case of Rome, history starts *ab urbe condita*. It is hard to prove a direct influence of the Roman precedent on Luxembourg’s historians, but the parallel is too obvious to be readily dismissed.

After 1963, Sigefroid suffers a decline in appreciation. On the one hand, he retains almost all symbolic values and remains present in collective memory: surveys keep on placing him among the top-five most important historic people in Luxembourg.²⁰⁸ Nonetheless, it is striking to what degree references to him have decreased in the past forty years. One can perceive a single, central reason for this decline: he no longer responds to any major needs. The year 1963 can thus be regarded as a turning point not only in its own awareness, but also in the way it may have created a juxtaposition of Sigefroid and the esteem for everything European. By emphasising the national character of Sigefroid and at the same time exalting the newly created political and economic possibilities offered by the European Community, the tenth-century count is left vulnerable to a gradual fading into obscurity.

In this respect Sigefroid can be contrasted with his legendary wife, the water-fairy Melusine, who has recently encountered renewed interest, especially in the city of Luxembourg. Above all, the local legend of Melusine helped to promote the figure of Sigefroid and to endorse his position in popular imagination, as the next chapter will show.

²⁰⁸ See: Ilres-Tageblatt Umfrage zur Luxemburger Geschichte, in: *Tageblatt*, 18/04/1989, p. 4; and: the poll commissioned by Fernand Fehlen and his the research project FNR/02/05/06 based at the University of Luxembourg, which was realised in November and December 2004. See also my general introduction and conclusions.

CHAPTER 2

Melusine: the mythological origins

Wandering desperately through the woods after having killed his uncle in a hunting accident, Count Raimondin unexpectedly finds a fountain. Here he meets a most beautiful woman, Melusine, who vows to help the distressed nobleman if the latter fulfils a number of peculiar requests. As the events unfold, Raimondin is not charged with the death of his uncle, but endowed with lands. Melusine succeeds in making him marry her, and as if by magic has a large castle built. The couple lives happily on and Melusine gives birth to many children, some more monstrous in appearance than others. Thus the House of Lusignan is born and the couple's descendants fight valiantly throughout Christendom and against the Saracens in the East. They achieve glory by acquiring the titles of Cyprus, Armenia, Luxembourg and Bohemia. In all these cases they conveniently happen to save the sole heiress of the territory and subsequently marry her. Back home, the mutual trust between Raimondin and Melusine is eventually broken. While visiting, the count's brother stirs up jealousy and makes Raimondin break the vow he gave to his wife not to disturb her peace on the first Saturday of every month. Peering through a hole carved with his sword into the door to Melusine's chambers, the view strikes him with sheer surprise and utter shock. His wife is bathing in a tub, but she is human only down to her navel, with the tail of serpent instead of legs. This discovery leads in the short term to a severe crisis in their marriage. The couple separates, Raimondin keeps the castle and Melusine flies out of a window, having mutated temporarily into a winged serpent. The

* A summary of this chapter has been published, see: Pit PÉPORTÉ, *Mélusine*, p. 55-60. At the time of writing this chapter Michel Margue published a short article taking up some of the same points, see: Michel MARGUE, *La fée Mélusine. Le mythe fondateur de la Maison de Luxembourg*, p. 129-137.

fortunes of their descendants now change for the worse and remain so for another seven generations.

The version as summarised here was put together by Jean d'Arras in 1392-94 and taken up again by the troubadour Couldrette in the early fifteenth century. A slightly altered version of the story resurfaced in nineteenth-century Luxembourg, though the Poitevin Count Raimondin had by then been replaced by the 'Luxembourgian' Count Sigefroid. This chapter will attempt to retrace the development of the story and how it became embedded in its new geographical context. The focus shall first reside on the possible links between Melusine and Luxembourg in the late fourteenth century. Thereafter we shall see how the myth and its links to the rulers of Luxembourg survived the ages, so to resurrect in the nineteenth century. A final section will analyse what the figure of Melusine has stood for in Luxembourg in the past 150 years.

A medieval myth and its purpose

In order to discover the purpose of the medieval story, one needs to turn towards a key figure: the main patron of Jean d'Arras's *Roman de Melusine*, Duke John of Berry. It has long been established that his central interest in commissioning this piece of literature was to legitimise his claims over neighbouring Poitou. John had conquered that county in the 1370s from the English, and particularly the stronghold of Lusignan had proven not only of vital strategic importance in this endeavour, but its acquisition had been a lengthy and above all very costly affair. John of Berry's overlordship was questioned again during the negotiations between Charles V and Richard II in 1390 and it is from this context that the *roman* emerged.

The author's strategy was to connect his patron and the lands of his desire via the Luxembourg dynasty. In his *roman* Jean d'Arras tells how the members of the local House of Lusignan expand their lands, power and renown in Western France. In the subtext he then presents John of Berry as a descendant of the Lusignan and thus the rightful heir to their territories. The dynastic link may be less evident to today's readers, but was probably the more striking for contemporaries. In the *roman* two of Melusine's sons ride out together to Luxembourg, where they liberate the local

princess from the grips of the evil count of Alsace.¹ The elder of the two, Antoine, marries the Luxembourg heiress; the younger, Renaud, rides on to complete more deeds in Bohemia. These lands also happen to be ruled by a local princess, whom Renaud marries after the accomplishment of some heroic feats. The reader's conclusion must be that John of Berry was a descendant of both brothers, since his mother, Bonne of Luxembourg was the daughter of John, himself count of Luxembourg by descent and king of Bohemia through marriage.² The focus on John's maternal ancestry is reinforced by the structure of the narrative. Even though most of the protagonists are valiant men, who spread the Lusignan name all over Christendom, the key to their political success is the women they marry. Add to this Melusine herself and the effect is to achieve a matriarchal type of dynasty. If one transfers the perspective onto the patron of the book, it directs us again to the dynasty of the Luxembourgs. Furthermore, John of Berry may have been the main patron of the text, but Jean d'Arras dedicated it also to John's sister Marie and to their cousin Josse of Morvia.³ Again their common ancestor happens to be John of Bohemia.

One can speculate to what degree the protagonists were directly inspired by historic figures. Antoine for instance could represent Waléran of Limburg, who married Ermesinde, the sole heiress of Namur and Luxembourg in 1214.⁴ He was the countess's second husband and became the founding father of the Limburg-Luxembourg⁵ dynasty, of which John of Berry's mother was a direct descendant. As a result, the figure of Christine (Antoine's wife) can be related to Ermesinde.⁶ Moreover, Antoine is disfigured by a mark on his cheek that resembles the claw of a

¹ Jean D'ARRAS, *Mélusine*. Edited by: Louis STOUFF, p. 157; Edited and translated into modern French by: Jean-Jacques VINCENSINI, p. 262. The episode is often completely ignored, not only in literary analyses, but also in some editions. See for instance: Michèle PERRET, *Le Roman de Mélusine ou l'Histoire des Lusignan*, Paris, 1979.

² See genealogy 3 (Appendix 2).

³ "Si requier a mon Createur qu'il lui plaise que mon tresnoble et redoubté seigneur le vueille prendre en gré et aussi sa tresnoble seur Marie, fille du roy de France, duchesse de Bar et marquise du Pont, ma tresredoubtee dame, et le noble marquis de Morave, cousin germain de mon dit seigneur, qui a fait requerre qu'il lui veulle envoier ceste histoire." Jean D'ARRAS, *Mélusine*. Edited by: Jean-Jacques VINCENSINI, p. 810.

⁴ See: Jean-Pierre KAUDER, La légende de Mélusine. Contribution à l'histoire de la fée poitevine, p. 32. See also genealogy 2 (Appendix 2).

⁵ Technically spoken 'Limburg-Namur'. Nationalist historiography in Luxembourg, however, has normally named the dynasty 'Luxembourg-Limburg'. See my chapter on Ermesinde for more on this.

⁶ Arthur DIDERRICH, La Légende de Mélusine et la maison de Luxembourg, p. 11.

lion and he also carries a red lion on his coat of arms.⁷ This could be a direct reference to the red lion in the Limburg coat of arms, which made its way into that of Luxembourg through Waléran's descendants. However, it is much easier to argue that in general the characters are semi-fictional amalgamations that can all be related to more than one historical figure. Antoine's brother Renaud is a good example in this respect. He sets off from Luxembourg to defend the kingdom of Bohemia and marry its heiress. The parallel to John of Bohemia is certainly striking. The fact that Renaud only has one eye may be an allusion to John's blindness in his later days, which started off in one eye but after failed treatments spread to both. On the other hand, there is a direct historical precedent for a one-eyed Renaud: the early twelfth century count of Bar and Mousson and grandfather to Ermesinde of Namur-Luxembourg's first husband, Thibaut of Mousson-Bar. What may seem a bit far-fetched at first sight becomes more believable when considering the position of John's sister, Marie of France, to whom the book had also been dedicated.⁸ The latter had married Robert I of Bar, a direct descendant of Renaud I the One-eyed,⁹ and became duchess of Bar herself.

Melusine's son Renaud thus also represents the key ancestor that Marie shared with her husband, which in itself may not be the only reason to refer to him. Robert of Bar was still a minor when his father and, shortly afterwards, his elder brother died. His mother, Yolanda of Flanders, acted as his regent, but had herself aligned with Philip of Navarre, an opponent of King John II of France.¹⁰ The marriage between Robert and Marie in 1364 was thus an essential step in securing long-term royal control of the duchy of Bar and part of a rapprochement with Charles V that culminated with an official alliance two years later.¹¹ Renaud's appearance in the roman is thus a reminder of Marie's legitimate position as duchess, since she herself was of Barrois ancestry. The aim is thus very much the same as in the case of John of Berry: legitimating the rule over specific lands through ancestry.

⁷ Jean D'ARRAS, *Mélusine*. Edited by: Louis STOUFF, p. 171.

⁸ The Barrois court has even been regarded as the main influence on Jean d'Arras's composition, see: Jules BAUDOT, *Les princesses Yolande et les ducs de Bar de la famille des Valois*, Paris, 1900. This view is not supported anymore by recent scholarship.

⁹ Eleanor Roach misses him in her quest for the identity of the 'Renaud' in Couldrette, see: Couldrette, *Le roman de Mélusine, ou, histoire de Lusignan*. Edited by: Eleanor ROACH, Introduction, p. 42-3.

¹⁰ Georges POUILL, *La Maison souveraine et ducale de Bar*, p. 320.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 330-1.

Coming back to my earlier point, it seems reasonable to assume that Melusine's son Renaud is not a mere fictional character, but at the same time represents more than one real life personage.

Josse (or Jobst) had merely inherited the March of Moravia, but unlike his cousin King Wenceslas IV, whose reputation ranges from 'the Sloth' to 'the Drunkard', he proved to be highly skilled politician. He was also a shrewd financial politician and the only member of his wider family who did not constantly meet severe financial problems. In the early 1390s Josse fell out with his cousin. He allied with the Bohemian nobility that showed itself concerned about the king's lifestyle, not to mention its demand for more political influence and control. Upon Josse's orders, Wenceslas was captured and held prisoner in his own capital, Prague.¹² Even though at the time Josse did not manage to impose himself as king of Bohemia, nor as king of the Romans, the latter being his most likely goal, Josse nonetheless managed to secure the rights over the duchy of Luxembourg that were pawned by his half-brother Wenceslas, the nominal duke in 1395. The story of Melusine was composed at exactly that time of that political struggle and Josse's involvement most likely an expression of his wish to justify his envisaged conquest of Bohemia and Luxembourg in the same way his cousins John and Marie did theirs. The story of Melusine further shows similarities to the origin myth of the dukes of Bohemia.¹³ This legend focuses on the female figure of Limbuše, who is endowed with magical and prophetic powers. She marries Přemysl and together they found Prague. It remains, however, entirely speculative as to whether there is a direct link between both stories, or whether they do not rely on rather generic visions of female founding figures.¹⁴ Likewise, it remains somewhat doubtful that Josse of Moravia may have had any substantial impact on the shaping of Melusine, let alone adding a Bohemian influence.

Heraldry constitutes one of the fundamental elements that should convince any reader of an obvious dynastic link between Lusignan and Luxembourg. The banners and coats of arms worn by Melusine's sons represent a red lion on white and

¹² Dana CEJNKOVÁ, *Der letzte mährische Marktgraf*, p. 49-50.

¹³ I am grateful to Harry Schnitker for pointing this out. See also: Patrick J. GEARY, *Women at the beginning. Origin myths from the Amazons to the Virgin Mary*, p. 35-39.

¹⁴ For some of the latter see: *Ibid.*

blue barry. They refer to a version of the Lusignan coat of arms, as worn especially by the kings of Cyprus. But at the same time they are identical to the arms worn by the counts of Luxembourg. Both heraldic devices show a barry of ten Argent and Azure overall a lion rampant Gules.¹⁵ How could John of Berry not be a relative of the Lusignans, if his Luxembourg ancestry wore coats of arms identical to those of Lusignan? Their similarity has intrigued heralds and historians alike through the ages, some of whom felt compelled to analyse the arms in order to find only a minute difference to be presented as a proof of their entirely different origins, while others attempted to achieve what Jean d'Arras tried with literary means and indulged in scientific speculations on a possible common origin of both families.¹⁶

Jean-Claude Loutsch observed that both families can be linked up and that furthermore all these families carry a barry in their coats of arms in one form or another.¹⁷ What looks at first sight like a brilliantly crafted breakthrough, evaporates at a second glance into feeble speculation. Loutsch seems to take the idea of a dynastic connection from Eleanor Roach, who managed to draw a large genealogy of the House of Lusignan, link it to many other dynasties and make the different branches symbolise Melusine's many descendants.¹⁸ In actual fact, one daughter of Robert of Dreux (†1219) married a Lusignan, another one Henry of Bar, son of Thibaut of Bar, who himself had married Ermesinde of Namur-Luxembourg after the death of his first wife.¹⁹ The point is that the link between Lusignan and Luxembourg is an indirect one via two sisters of the Dreux family. There is thus no common

¹⁵ The exact detail on medieval coats of arms is sometimes difficult to recognise depending on the source material; armorials can be difficult enough, seals are certainly worse. It is therefore also difficult to describe the exact development of a certain coat of arms through the centuries. Today's coat of arms of Luxembourg has been extended to barry of ten Argent and Azure overall a lion rampant queue forchy and nowed Gules crowned, armed and langued Or. See the law from 23 June 1972, published in: *Mémorial. Journal officiel du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg, Recueil de Législation*, A 51, 16/08/1972, p. 1288.

¹⁶ For the former see: Jean BERTHOLET, *Histoire Ecclésiastique et Civile du Duché de Luxembourg et Comté de Chiny*, vol. 3, p. 429-430; for the latter see for instance: Jean-Claude LOUTSCH, *Le cimier au dragon et la légende de Mélusine*, p. 195.

¹⁷ Jean-Claude LOUTSCH, *Le cimier au dragon et la légende de Mélusine*, p. 195-7. One should add that his argument is entirely bought by Michel Pastoureau, who regards it as a nice example of how heraldic devices are passed on from one dynasty to another and thus sometimes indicate very obscure common ancestry, see: Michel PASTOUREAU, *Une histoire symbolique du Moyen Âge occidental*, p. 242.

¹⁸ See: Couldrette, *Le roman de Mélusine, ou, histoire de Lusignan*. Edited by: Eleanor ROACH, Annexe.

¹⁹ To complicate matters Henry of Bar's daughter married Ermesinde's eldest son.

ancestor or direct intermarriage. This fact considerably weakens Loutsch's argument concerning the common origin of the coats of arms.

The resemblance between the coats of arms certainly was a source of inspiration to Jean d'Arras, but it is after all a mere coincidence. The arms of Lusignan are traditionally argent and azure barry, and the red lion only an occasional addition. The latter derived most probably from the arms of Poitou and may have been donated by Richard the Lionheart to Hugh of Lusignan during the Third Crusade, although others prefer an Armenian origin.²⁰ As for the source of the arms of Luxembourg, it seems uncontested that the red lion is of Limburg origin, whereas the argent and azure barry is most probably a *brisure* to identify the younger branch of the dynasty. Their Limburg cousins kept a plainly argent background.

The Luxembourg adventures of Melusine's sons are much neglected in most literary analyses²¹ and as a result there seems little awareness of the importance of their role.²² Nonetheless they are key for an understanding of the *roman's* patronage and political message alike. They allude to the dynastic descent shared by the three patrons that Jean d'Arras names. Furthermore they illustrate John of Berry's willingness to position himself within the direct heritage of his maternal grandfather.²³ The *roman* allows him to profit from the Bohemian king's aura of chivalrous heroism, which stands in stark contrast to reputation of his father, who was captured at Poitiers and for whom he had to leave for England as a hostage in the early 1360s. John tried to present himself as a successor of his grandfather, not in a political sense, but a cultural one. For instance, he acquired the French residences of the Bohemian king: the castle of Mehun-sur-Yèvre and the *Hôtel de Nesle* in Paris.

²⁰ For the first assumption see: Jean BERTHOLET, *Histoire Ecclésiastique et Civile ...*, vol. 3, p. 429-430; for the second: Jean-Claude LOUSCH, *Armorial du Pays de Luxembourg*, p. 27, n. 1.

²¹ Emmanuelle BAUMGARTNER, *Fiction and History: The Cypriot Episode in Jean d'Arras's Mélusine*, p. 186.

²² Donald Maddox sees the link between Lusignan and Luxembourg on a completely different level. He ascribes it to John of Luxembourg, Lord of Beaurevoir, marrying a descendant of Hugh of Lusignan. The John of Luxembourg he refers to however is a member of a younger branch of the dynasty that split off in the early thirteenth century – the link thus becomes a very vague and remote one. See: Donald MADDUX, *Configuring the Epilogue: Ending and the Ends of Fiction in the Roman de Mélusine*, p. 286, n. 22. Likewise some literary critics seem not aware of the lack of actual dynastic connections and assume the existence of a “distant kinship”; see: Jane H. M. TAYLOR, *Melusine's Progeny: Patterns and Perplexities*, p. 166.

²³ See: Françoise AUTRAND, *Jean de Berry. L'art et le pouvoir*, p. 44.

Furthermore, his patronage of literature also placed him in a Luxembourg tradition;²⁴ Wenceslas I had been a major patron of Froissart, whereas John of Bohemia had employed Guillaume de Machaut as a secretary and poet. This latter poet also had one of the main shares in promoting the king's posthumous fame.²⁵ John of Berry himself employed his grandfather's former clerk in the early 1360s and the poet composed the *Fonteinne amoureuse* for the prince's consolation during the latter's English captivity.²⁶ It is not clear how much of an impact John of Berry had on de Machaut's *Prise d'Alixandre*, but it is noteworthy that the oeuvre describes the deeds of Peter of Lusignan. It may thus well have been Guillaume de Machaut who inspired the duke of Berry to commission a history of Lusignan; one can speculate whether he would not even have been its author had he not died in 1377.

A lot of evidence seems to suggest that the *Roman de Melusine* was widely read both in d'Arras's version in prose and Couldrette's in verse. Even though the latter's version grew out of a different patronage with different aims, it nonetheless adopts almost all of Arras's storyline.²⁷ Apart from the French romances, we also see the appearance of translations. Thüring von Ringoltingen's widely read German translation of Couldrette dates from the 1450s, a Castilian version of d'Arras was published in 1489,²⁸ and the first English translations of both books emerged at about 1500. The main protagonists of the legend must have been well known in court circles. As a result, the figure of Melusine was increasingly associated with the family and the lands of the Lusignans, becoming the insignia of the family. In the spectacular *Très Riches Heures* of that very same duke of Berry, she hovers in her serpent shape above the castle of Lusignan, defining it through her presence.²⁹

²⁴ For more on their patronage, see: Nigel WILKINS, A pattern of patronage: Machaut, Froissart and the houses of Luxembourg and Bohemia in the fourteenth century, p. 257-284.

²⁵ See my chapter on John of Bohemia for more information in this issue.

²⁶ Françoise AUTRAND, *Jean de Berry. L'art et le pouvoir*, p. 60.

²⁷ See: Matthew W. MORRIS, *A Critical Edition of "Melusine", a fourteenth-century poem by Couldrette*, p. 8-10 and 49. And the 'Introduction' in: Matthew W. MORRIS, *A Critical Edition of Couldrette's "Melusine" or "Le Roman De Parthenay"*.

²⁸ See: Isidro J. RIVERA, *The Historia de la linda Melosina and the Construction of Romance in Late Medieval Castile*, p. 131-146.

²⁹ See figures 12 and 12a (Appendix 3). One can ascribe the same message to the *Très Riches Heures* as for the *Roman de Melusine*: the Limburg brothers' illuminated masterpiece is commissioned the very same year that Henry V demands Poitou for the English crown (1414). Françoise Autrand argues that the Melusine above the castle of Lusignan is once more meant as a reminder for John of Berry's claims over the county. See: Françoise AUTRAND, *Jean de Berry. L'art et le pouvoir*, p. 150.

This close association of Melusine and Lusignan also transferred unto her the symbolism of the crusades often associated with the name of Lusignan. This becomes obvious at Philip of Burgundy's so-called Feast of the Pheasant (1454). Here she is part of an *entremet* in which she functions once more as the signifier of the castle of Lusignan.³⁰ Given the setting of the ceremony, the message was clear: remind the present nobles of the Lusignans' victories against the Infidels, though their legendary deeds were more of a success than their factual ones. The crusading connotations are already apparent in the *roman*: Melusine's sons Urian and Guyon set off for the east where they defeat Turkish armies and become kings of Cyprus and Armenia. Renaud who conquers Bohemia is described as fighting Saracens. The latter may stand for the Lithuanians that John of Bohemia went out to fight at two occasions,³¹ but neither should we forget that Renaud I of Bar died in 1149 on his return from the Second Crusade.³² The crusading adventures thus appear as a much more attractive topic for the late medieval audience than any underlying dynastic connections that Jean d'Arras may have been emphasising.

It remains, however, a bit of a mystery into which context the House of Luxembourg-Ligny, which provided the counts of St Pol, must be placed. The counts of St Pol had adopted the crest of a winged dragon in a tub.³³ After the fifteenth century the crest was interpreted in heraldic terms as a 'Melusine'. The popularity of the *roman* certainly must have played a role: the crest could be used as a reminder of the legendary connection of their House to Melusine and thus to Lusignan. The question remains whether the decisive element was the connotation of the crusades or, in line with d'Arras, the link to the imperial branch. Both interpretations seem entirely plausible. Styling themselves as the inheritors of the crusading Lusignans may have provided the dynasty with prestige among the Order of the Golden Fleece. Likewise it could have been a subtle reminder of their connection to the main branch of the Limburg-Luxembourg dynasty, their importance in European politics and the perfect knight John of Bohemia.

³⁰ Jacques PAVIOT, *Les ducs de Bourgogne et les Lusignan de Chypre*, p. 242.

³¹ The image of John of Bohemia as a crusader was widespread in his own times. See my chapter on John of Bohemia.

³² Georges POULL, *La Maison souveraine et ducal de Bar*, p. 99.

³³ See figure 13 (Appendix 3).

The relation between Melusine and Luxembourg was an essential ingredient to the original story. The reader should be convinced of a link between the dynasties of Lusignan and Luxembourg through Jean d'Arras's subtle genealogical references and the more obvious resemblance of the two families' coats of arms. Whether Melusine really contributed to keeping Poitou in John of Berry's hands is of course a different question. While the crusading elements of the roman proved to be the most attractive aspect for the late-medieval audience, the underlying genealogical references remained in the awareness of the humanist writers of the early modern period.

The emergence of the legend in the local context

The question now remains as to how this medieval myth was transformed into a nineteenth and early-twentieth century popular myth with, in our case, a very local Luxembourgian focus. Moreover, we need to ask how much continuity there was from Jean d'Arras to the emergence of the local legends. There are arguments for the assumption that the legend was known in Luxembourg from a fairly early age and may have been integrated into the local context soon thereafter.

In 1531 appeared an account on the life of Emperor Henry VII. It was written by a certain Conrad Vecerius (Konrad Wecker), a sixteenth-century humanist who originated from the duchy of Luxembourg, yet spent most of his life outside the duchy. After having studies in Louvain, Vecerius entered the services of Emperor Maximilian and his successor Charles V as a secretary in 1511. He ended his career in the service of Pope Clement VII and died in 1527 of the plague.³⁴ One could therefore imagine that he inserted the reference of Melusine in order to demonstrate his wide range of reading and his awareness of medieval French literature, rather than alluding to a legend that he heard in Luxembourg. However, there is more to it: he refers explicitly to a tale written in the vernacular existing in Luxembourg.³⁵ Furthermore, he points out that the French branch of the House of Luxembourg carries the dragon and tub on their crest. Finally, Vecerius also mentions a tower in

³⁴ Henry DE VOCHT, *Jerome de Busleyden. Founder of the Louvain Collegium Trilingue. His life and writings*, p. 425-426.

³⁵ Conrad VICERIUS, *De rebus gestis impertoris Henrici VII libellus*, fol. Ciii r.

the city of Luxembourg that was considered having been built by her hands, but was largely destroyed shortly before he was born.³⁶ There seems to be no reason why he should mislead us on the first of these points, especially when considering his reference to a tower in the city. Even though there are no sources that support the early existence of a local legend, there are traces for such a tower.

In 1632, the city's records mention "a tower of Melusine" that had been destroyed and replaced by another building.³⁷ The archaeologist Isabelle Yegles-Becker indeed suggests that a 'tower of Melusine' had been destroyed in 1598.³⁸ It seems just slightly odd that the memory of this demolished tower should have survived over a century. From this only two conclusions remain. Either the tower destroyed before Vecerius's birth was rebuilt later, or the legend transferred to another old tower of the city fortifications. Whatever the case, it does show the existence of a local tale, even though it seems impossible to say what it consisted of precisely.

The work of Vecerius did make an impact: it became an important source for the *Généalogies* of Estienne de Chypre de Lusignan (1537-1590).³⁹ As his name suggests, Estienne was a descendant of the Lusignan kings of Cyprus and bishop of Limassol. He wrote his *Généalogies* for François de Luxembourg-Piney (†1613) and aimed at presenting his patron with the genealogies of sixty-seven noble dynasties that can all be traced back to the Merovingians – Melusine and the search for her true historic identity being a recurrent theme of the book. This may be unsurprising, since it is that very figure that allows connecting the author's own glorious dynastic roots to that of his patron, or as he wrote: "the House of Luxembourg, according to our opinion and that of many others derived from the House of Lusignan".⁴⁰ He also sees the Melusine on the crest worn by "all members" of the House of Luxembourg and

³⁶ *Ibid.*, fol. Civ r.

³⁷ "la tour de la ville appelée la tour de Melusine, Maintenant demolie et redigee en autre Bastimen" ANL AXV12, f 16.

³⁸ Isabelle YEGLES-BECKER, Fouilles archéologiques au 11 rue de la Boucherie. Un site d'habitation dans la Vieille Ville de Luxembourg du 8^e au 13^e siècle, in: John ZIMMER, *Aux origines de la ville de Luxembourg*, Luxembourg, 2002, p. 282.

³⁹ Estienne DE CHYPRE DE LUSIGNAN, *Les Genealogies de soixante et sept tresnobles et tres-illustres maisons, partie de France, parti estrâgeres, yssuës de Meroüée, fils de Theodoric 2. Roy d'Austrasie, Bourgongne, &c. Avec le blason & declaration des armoyries que chacune maison porte*, Paris, 1586.

⁴⁰ "La maison de Luxembourg, selon nostre opinion & beaucoup d'autres, est sortie de celle des Lusignans." *Ibid.*, fol. 99r. See also figure 14 (Appendix 3).

Lusignan as a clear proof for his hypothesis.⁴¹ Estienne quotes Vecerius (who he calls Conrad Vercer) at certain locations,⁴² but interestingly he cites other sources when referring to the alleged tower of Melusine in the city of Luxembourg. Unfortunately, some of these contain nothing on the subject, such as the *Cosmographie* by André Thevet⁴³ or the writings of Jean de la Haye,⁴⁴ and others tend to be scientifically useless, such as the “common opinion of the French, the Flemings and those who live in that very County of Luxembourg”.⁴⁵ Considering the re-occurring lack of scientific precision of his opus, it is imaginable that he only embellished the evidence offered to him by Vecerius.

Authors within the Duchy of Luxembourg remain rather silent on the topic. In his *Historia Luxemburgensis* (1605) Jean Bertels does not lose a single word on the topic. Only Eustache of Wiltheim (1600-1678) admits in a solitary line that quite a few people believe that the origin of Luxembourg has something to do with the legend of Melusine.⁴⁶ Likewise the eighteenth-century historian Jean Bertholet (1688-1755) mentions that there are theories that try to link Count Sigefroid to the House of Lusignan.⁴⁷ He also discusses the similarities between the two coats of arms, which could hint at a wider awareness of the problem.⁴⁸ Contrary to any possible expectations, he does not mention Melusine explicitly or hint at a relation between Sigefroid and Melusine – an essential ingredient of all later tales. Estienne de Chypre indicated that some authors believe that Sigefroid descended from

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, fol. 100v.

⁴² E.g.: *Ibid.*, fol. 47r.

⁴³ Thevet wrote two *Cosmographies*. The one that Estienne refers to is his *Cosmographie Universelle* (André THEVET, *La Cosmographie Vniverselle*, Paris, 1575). Thevet mentions Melusine briefly in reference to the mythical ancestors of the Lusignan (vol. II, fol. 527r.), but she is not even presented as having been the alleged builder of the castle. His account on Luxembourg is void of any references to her (see: vol. II, fol. 683); the author also seemed much more fascinated by antique remnants than medieval ones.

⁴⁴ De la Haye recounts the story of Melusine’s sons. He considers the resemblance of their coat of arms as a proof for a dynastic relationship between Lusignan and Luxembourg. See: Jean DE LA HAYE, *Les Mémoires et recherches de France, et de Gaule Aquitannique*, p. 122-123.

⁴⁵ “commune opinion des François et Flamès, & ceux de ladite Comté mesme de Luxembourg” Estienne DE CHYPRE DE LUSIGNAN, *Les Genealogies ...*, fol. 100v.

⁴⁶ “So sind auch etliche, so den Ursprung von der Fabel der Gauklerin Melusinae herbringen und Lusenburg nennen.“ Eustache of Wiltheim, *Kurzer und schlichter Bericht und Beschreibung des Hauses, Schlosses und Landes Luxemburg sammt dessen Fürsten und Herren Ursprung und Herkommen was sich auch bei deren Regierung im gemelten und anderen ihren Landschaften verlaufen und zugetragen*, p. 90.

⁴⁷ Jean BERTHOLET, *Histoire Ecclésiastique et Civile ...*, vol. 3, p. 3.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 429-430.

Antoine and Christine, the protagonists of the roman, and it seems likely that Bertholet referred to the same. Both Wiltheim and Bertholet seem to have relied on André Du Chesne's *Histoire généalogique*, which made the same claims already in 1631.⁴⁹ There is no proof of any link between their claims and a local legend.

Even if there existed one or more Luxembourgian legends of Melusine, it remains impossible to say what exactly they were supposed to tell and nothing suggests that any particular story was popular in Luxembourg before the nineteenth century, or that it existed at all between the early seventeenth and late eighteenth century. We can also only speculate about the impact the Luxembourg connections of the medieval plot had on the survival and reappearance of the figure. The local dynasty had already stopped residing on Luxembourg territory at the time that Jean d'Arras composed his story – there was thus no court that could have had an interest in promoting the myth. Moreover, the story was taken up in other regions and Melusine was made responsible for the construction of quite a few castles and particularly towers all over Western Europe.

The context in which a new local version of the myth developed, how it assimilated elements and was integrated into the local settings remains entirely unknown. We could assume that local intellectuals knew about the original story and kept it in the cultural memory for three centuries, but there is no trace of a distinct Luxembourgian version emerging before the end of the eighteenth century: only Théodore de la Fontaine (1787-1871) claims to have heard a local version in his childhood.⁵⁰ Therefore, it seems more likely that the modern stories developed in the context of Melusine's re-birth within early German and French romanticism. Multiple re-editions of the medieval texts and popular tales on the topic of Melusine throughout Western Europe prove a continuing subsistence of the story in early modern times.⁵¹ When medieval topics started to become fashionable at the

⁴⁹ André DU CHESNE, *Histoire généalogique des maisons de Luxembourg et de Limbourg. Ivstifiée par chartes de diuerses Eglises, Tiltres, Histories, & autres bonnes Preuves*, p. 4 and 89.

⁵⁰ Gaspar-Théodore-Ignace DE LA FONTAINE, *Légendes Luxembourgeoises*, p. 120.

⁵¹ For the German context see: Paul HEITZ and François RITTER (ed), *Versuch einer Zusammenstellung der Deutschen Volksbücher des 15. Und 16. Jahrhunderts nebst deren späteren Ausgaben und Literatur*, p. 125-131; for the situation in France: Hélène BOUQUIN, *Éditions et adaptations de l'Histoire de Mélusine de Jean d'Arras (XVe-XIXe siècle). Les aventures d'un roman médiéval*, Paris, 2000 (PhD thesis, Ecole Nationale des Chartes). A summary of this thesis can be found online: <http://theses.enc.sorbonne.fr/document76.html> (last visited: 26/09/2007)

beginning of the nineteenth century, Melusine emerged as popular theme. The most famous examples in this context include *Die sehr wunderbare Geschichte der Melusina* by Ludwig Tieck (1800), while Goethe wrote a short story called *Die neue Melusine* (1807).⁵² Franz Grillparzer worked with Ludwig van Beethoven on an opera on the subject in 1823, which unfortunately remains unfinished. In France she appears in a *Romance* by Edmond Géraud (1810), *Les Chevaliers de la Table ronde* by Creuzé de Lesser (1812) and in one of the *Nouvelles Légendes françaises* by Edouard d'Anglemont (1833).⁵³ There are many more such examples and their influence should not be underestimated. One could further ponder whether the Luxembourgian tradition and the wider European renewed interest in the theme were not reinforcing each other, but again this would be mere speculation.

The first two written accounts, published in 1843 and 1844, were written by foreigners who gathered local lore during their stays in Luxembourg. Theodor von Cederstolpe (1811-1878) was a Prussian officer in the garrison of the Luxembourgian capital; the Chevalier l'Evêque de la Basse-Mouturie, a Belgian-French would-be nobleman, put together his travel experiences in his *Itinéraire du Luxembourg germanique*.⁵⁴

Cederstolpe wrote short poems and ballads of which five refer to Melusine.⁵⁵ His works provide us with two key ideas. Firstly he tells how Melusine haunted parts of the fortress of Luxembourg awaiting deliverance from a fateful ordeal. She appeared to young Prussian soldiers on duty, who were subsequently killed by fear of her, or by the trial she asked them to undergo.⁵⁶ It is likely that these stories originated among the garrison, who adapted some of the local lore. A second theme

⁵² The story can be found in the second volume of his 'Meister Wilhelms Wanderjahre'. It only used Melusine in the title and the story is about the narrator being lured by a beautiful woman into the realm of the dwarfs, from which he then successfully tries to escape.

⁵³ See: Hélène BOUQUIN, *Éditions et adaptations de l'Histoire de Mélusine de Jean d'Arras (XVe-XIXe siècle). Les aventures d'un roman médiéval*, <http://theses.enc.sorbonne.fr/document76.html> (last visited: 26/09/2007)

⁵⁴ Although he assumed a title he was not actually of noble descent; his claim was based on his membership in the French *Légion d'Honneur* and the name refers to his father's farm in southern Brabant. In addition he also claimed membership of the *Institut Historique de France*. Likewise the organisation is completely made up and has no link the actual *Institut de France*. See: Jules VANNÉRUS, *Le chevalier l'Evêque de la Basse-Mouturie et son itinéraire du Luxembourg germanique*, p. 1-3.

⁵⁵ The original French name is *Melusine* and I shall use it throughout this paper. In German and particularly in most local versions her name changed to *Melusina*. In one of his poems, Cederstolpe also referred to her as *Melusinda*.

⁵⁶ Theodor VON CEDERSTOLPE, *Sagen aus Luxemburg*, p. 5-9.

is the origin of the city of Luxembourg – an adaptation of the medieval narrative.⁵⁷ Instead of count Raimondin, it is Count Sigefroid who rides along the River Alzette, encounters a beautiful woman, falls in love and marries her. She asks him to stay away from her every Saturday, but after some time Sigefroid becomes jealous, follows her and sees her real appearance. She is not pleased, jumps into the river and is never to be seen again. It is interesting to note that his Melusine is not only seductive, but also looming and dark: she does not mean any evil, but nevertheless she drags young men to their death, or sits waiting for the destruction of Luxembourg, which she cannot prevent herself.⁵⁸ The fact that Cederstolpe splits up the different themes into several poems may indicate the existence of different traditions at the origin.

The Chevalier l'Evêque de la Basse-Mouturie only presents us with one single storyline.⁵⁹ Sigefroid sees that his newly-built palace is empty and rides out to find a wife. He finds Melusine, they marry and he betrays her trust. The author then adds the idea that the count's action banished Melusine into the depths of the rock which the old castle stands upon, waiting for someone to rescue her from her fate. Every seven years, she reappears in the form of a large snake with a golden key, which needs to be removed from between her teeth in order to break the curse.

Both storylines are much simpler than the medieval one, the main perceptible novelty being the change in Melusine's appearance. She exchanges the tail of a serpent for that of a fish and keeps this shape in all modern representations.⁶⁰

The two previously named authors inspired the production of further similar stories in Luxembourg. Antoine Meyer was the first author of local origin to produce a poem on the theme in the Luxembourgian language in 1853;⁶¹ two years later

⁵⁷ Theodor VON CEDERSTOLPE, *Sagen aus Luxemburg*, p. 10-14.

⁵⁸ For the latter see: Theodor VON CEDERSTOLPE, *Sagen aus Luxemburg*, p. 4 and 14.

⁵⁹ Le Chevalier L'ÉVÊQUE DE LA BASSE-MOÛTURIE, *Itinéraire du Luxembourg germanique*, p. 60-64.

⁶⁰ It is impossible to say when the fishtail started to replace the tail of a serpent. There are very few medieval representation of her with a fishtail; see for instance: François EYGUN, *Ce qu'on peut savoir de Mélusine et de son iconographie*, Puisaux, 1987 (re-edition of: Poitiers, 1951), p. 5. However, it could have found its origins in the twin tail of some Melusine representations (see again figure 14 in appendix 3), which subsequently merged together. In heraldry the fishtail version of her only appears in the seventeenth-century, see: François EYGUN, *Ce qu'on peut savoir de Mélusine et de son iconographie*, p. 41

⁶¹ Antoine MEYER, Melusina, in: *Oilzegt-Kläng*, p. 85-90.

Nicholas Steffen published another version.⁶² In 1856, Pierre Klein was the first to connect the legend of Sigefroid and Melusine with another, Faustian-type, story in which the count sells his soul to the devil in exchange for the gold he needed to build his castle.⁶³ In Nicholas Steffen's anthology of Luxembourg legends, both stories were still separated.⁶⁴ Most subsequent versions linked the two, such as Friederich Albrecht's of 1859.⁶⁵ In all these cases the story follows closely that of the Chevalier l'Evêque de la Basse-Mouturie.

At the end of the century we perceive a revival of the theme. This is initiated by Nicholas Gredt, who in 1883 connects the dominant tradition with some of Cederstolpe's ideas.⁶⁶ He retains the tale of the devil, but adds some elements of how Melusine charms some soldiers of the fortress garrison into futile attempts for her rescue. In his account she no longer appears as a giant snake, but keeps her female shape. Gredt's account was also the main source of inspiration for what should become the most influential and widely read version, Nicholas Welter's from 1900.⁶⁷

Facets of a national myth

Through her connection with Sigefroid, Melusine became part of the mythology of the birth of the nation. The parallel to the medieval legend, which describes the birth of a dynasty, is manifest. Key to this similarity is the essential prerequisite for the role of a mother figure: the proof of her fertility. While Jean d'Arras was comparatively rather subtle, the modern day descriptions tend to be less so. The medieval romance starts in an atmosphere of courtly love, with Raimondin meeting the mysterious woman and accepting to serve her – although this is partly because of her extreme beauty, the description is rather sober. After Raimondin has created an

⁶² Nicholas STEFFEN, *Mährchen und Sagen des Luxemburger Landes*, p. 10-19.

⁶³ Pierre KLEIN, *Siegfried und Melusina*, p. 101-122. See my chapter on Sigefroid for a more detailed analysis of the Faustian legends.

⁶⁴ His "Die Sage von der Erbauung des Schlosses Lützelburg" can be found in: Nicholas STEFFEN, *Mährchen und Sagen des Luxemburger Landes*, p. 3-9. The same story can already be found in: Le Chevalier L'ÉVÊQUE DE LA BASSE-MOÛTURIE, *Itinéraire du Luxembourg germanique*, p. 40-44.

⁶⁵ Friedrich ALBRECHT, *Melusina. Luxemburgische Sage aus dem zehnten Jahrhundert*, Wismar / Luxemburg, 1859.

⁶⁶ Nicolas GREDT, *Sagenschatz des Luxemburger Landes*, p. 47-48.

⁶⁷ Nicolas WELTER, *Siegfried und Melusine*, Berlin, 1900; and: Nicolas WELTER, *Aus alten Tagen. Balladen und Romanzen aus Luxemburgs Sage und Geschichte*, Luxembourg, 1900.

opening in the door with his “phallic sword”⁶⁸ and peeps through it, we are exposed to a description of Melusine’s naked body as she is sitting in the bathtub. But as Kevin Brownlee has observed, just before we reach the climax “the whole thing turns comical”, with d’Arras acknowledging that her tail was as large as a cask for herrings.⁶⁹ Nineteenth century accounts tend to be void of such irony. Antoine Meyer twice stresses her bare breasts during her first encounter with Sigefroid,⁷⁰ while Friedrich Albrecht adds how her hair flows over shoulders and breasts,⁷¹ making it clear once more that she is not supposed to be dressed as she was in the medieval version. Visual representations tended to be only slightly less graphic, at least in the early days of the twentieth century – a post stamp from 1997 shows her once more bare-breasted, blond and with an expansive hairstyle.⁷²

It is thus not surprising that accounts with a clearly humorous intention tend to stress these physical attributes, such as Félix Servais in 1898,⁷³ or more recently the *Superjhem* comic books.⁷⁴ Whether the intention was to ridicule common representations of Melusine is doubtful, less so the aim to mock the hypocritical tendencies of a society that publicly presents itself in a conservative fashion, but remains privately open to ‘obscenities’. Both satirical depictions, although almost a century apart, may well suggest similar tendencies in that respect. However, their accusations are relatively timid. The critique is sharper in the novels of Roger Manderscheid. He takes Melusine as a projection for what he sees as the unadulterated sexual drive of the conservative population and also uses the metaphor of the peep show to reinforce his point.⁷⁵

An essential aspect of the legend is that before Sigefroid and Melusine meet there was no castle yet and therefore no city, no country, no nation.⁷⁶ One author

⁶⁸ Kevin BROWNLEE, Melusine’s hybrid body and the poetics of metamorphosis, p. 79-80.

⁶⁹ Ibid. The exact quote from d’Arras is “[une] queue de serpent aussi grosse comme une tonne ou on met harenc”.

⁷⁰ Antoine MEYER, Melusina, p. 86.

⁷¹ Friedrich ALBRECHT, *Melusina. Luxemburgische Sage aus dem zehnten Jahrhundert*, p. 60.

⁷² See figures 15-17 (Appendix 3).

⁷³ Félix SERVAIS, *Boutade sur le conte de Mélusine*, Luxembourg, 1898.

⁷⁴ Roger LEINER and Lucien CZUGA, *De Superjhem. Géint de Bomelée*, p. 21, and: Ibid., *De Superjhem. Dynamit fir d’Dynastie*, p. 74.

⁷⁵ elfter ausflug – in die welt der legenden zu melusino und melusina, in: Roger MANDERSCHIED, *Ikarus, dreißig Ausflüge und ein Absturz*, Luxembourg, 1983. See also his: *die dromedare. stilleben für johann den blinden*, p. 9-10.

⁷⁶ See for instance: Antoine MEYER, Melusina, p. 85.

adds that there were no paths (not to speak of roads),⁷⁷ which is inaccurate for the historical setting of the tenth century, but emphasises the idea of a void in the cultural landscape and therefore, metaphorically, in history. Richard Friedmann in his play for the city of Luxembourg's millennium celebrations in 1963 creates a similar picture. Melusine laments the loss of the Roman Peace and that of Charlemagne, while her own times are now rife with Norman violence.⁷⁸ This can be seen as a parallel to the creation stories in antique mythologies: there was chaos before there was Luxembourg. Melusine symbolises this anarchic past, almost 'pagan' in connotation, which was broken through her union with the civilised Sigefroid. The result was the birth of the dynasty out of her fertile body and the structure from which could arise castle, city and country.⁷⁹ She is the link between the mythological and the historical.

Mixing in historical facts often enhanced the constancy of the accounts. Friedrich Albrecht entitles his deeply romantic account *Melusina. A Luxembourgian legend from the tenth century*, referring to Sigefroid as "Ardennen-Graf" in order to use what he believed to be a contemporary label.⁸⁰ Nicolas Gredt adds how Sigefroid rode to the Abbey of Saint-Maximin in Trier to exchange some of his territories for the rock where he wanted to build his castle.⁸¹ Nicholas Steffen goes on and provides a detailed list of their children, giving them the names of Sigefroid's historical offspring.⁸² He also adds that the count then became so powerful that Emperor Henry II asked for the hand of his daughter.⁸³ Luxembourg had made its entry into history.

The local tales therefore also helped to strengthen Siegfroid's position as 'the first count of Luxembourg'.⁸⁴ Even though this historiographic construct antedates

⁷⁷ Sus HIERZIG, *Zou Lëtzebuerg stong d'Sigfriddsschlass. Eng al Geschicht nei erzielt a mat Biller*, p. 9.

⁷⁸ Richard FRIEDMANN, *Festspill fir de Millenaire vun der Stât Letzebuerg*, Luxembourg, 1963 (Unpublished, ANL DH 098).

⁷⁹ See for instance: Nicholas STEFFEN, *Mährchen und Sagen des Luxemburger Landes*, p. 16: "und bald konnte er mit dem Titel eines Grafen eine neue Oberherrlichkeit hier gründen, und von nun an hiess Herr Siegfried Graf von Luxemburg."

⁸⁰ Friedrich ALBRECHT, *Melusina. Luxemburgische Sage aus dem zehnten Jahrhundert*, Wismar / Luxembourg, 1859.

⁸¹ Nicolas GREDT, *Sagenschatz des Luxemburger Landes*, p. 47.

⁸² Nicholas STEFFEN, *Mährchen und Sagen des Luxemburger Landes*, p. 7.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 16-7. Steffen bends the chronology slightly and refers here to Sigefroid's daughter Cunigunde who in 998 married Henry, duke of Bavaria, who was to become Emperor in 1002.

⁸⁴ See for instance: Antoine MEYER, *Melusina*, p. 85.

the Melusine legends,⁸⁵ they reinforced the idea and promoted it to many parts of society. The legend that originally described the origins of the House of Lusignan and only marginally commented on the House of Luxembourg, became in this local context exclusively concerned with the rise of the local dynasty and the nation that was said to have stemmed from it. It provided another possible means by which to integrate the modern day dynasty, by connecting it to the very same roots.⁸⁶ the supposed ‘medieval’ unity of dynasty and nation implies a similar desire for the present. Michel Stoffel dedicated his version of the story to the then Hereditary Grand Duke Jean, “descendant of Sigefroid, founder of the dynasty and the people of Luxembourg”.⁸⁷ More implicit in style, but along the same lines, a musical play from 1904 has a scene of the couple’s joy being supported by the choir chanting “long live the House of Luxembourg”.⁸⁸ The idea was even taken up by scholarly literature. Writing during a phase of strengthened nationalism in the years before the Second World War, Arthur Diderrich again refers to the Hereditary Grand-Duke Jean and sees in him the culmination of a historical process. Since his mother, Grand-Duchess Charlotte, had married a Bourbon prince, the blood of both the modern dynasty of Nassau-Weilburg and that of Jean d’Arras’s patrons runs through the veins of the monarch, whose legitimacy must therefore be utterly unquestionable.⁸⁹

The idea that the nation itself was born from the union of Melusine and Sigefroid is not explicit in all accounts and saw its heyday in the middle of the twentieth century. As seen, it emerges very clearly from Franz Binsfeld’s opera *Melusin* from 1951:⁹⁰ the moment that Sigefroid became count, his people became an independent nation.⁹¹ After the couple had moved into the castle and light shined from its windows that fatherland (*Hémecht*) was born and grew strong, the castle

⁸⁵ See my chapter on Sigefroid.

⁸⁶ See my chapter on Ermesinde and John of Bohemia for many more examples.

⁸⁷ “descendant de Sigefroid fondateur de la dynastie et du peuple luxembourgeois” Michel STOFFEL, *La Clef de Mélusine*, p. 3.

⁸⁸ Lexi BRASSEUR and Pol CLEMEN, *Lidder aus de Letzebuenger Flautereien 1904 an der Melusina. Séchen an 3 Akten*, p. 7.

⁸⁹ Arthur DIDERRICH, *La Légende de Mélusine et la maison de Luxembourg*, p. 21.

⁹⁰ See my chapter on Sigefroid.

⁹¹ “Den Här Segfridd, hien ass zum Grof ernannt (...) nu si mir Letzebuenger frei a frank.” Franz BINSFELD and Jules KRUGER, *Melusin ...*, p. 38.

holding against all enemy.⁹² As seen in the previous chapter, the importance he attributes to ‘light’ derives from an incorrect etymology of the name ‘Luxembourg’ from the Latin *lux* for light. Binsfeld further expands on it a few pages later:

This castle, it is now called differently than before; the rock and castle and the surrounding land, ‘till then named *Lucilinburhuc*, shall be called *Luxembourg* from this day, *Luxembourg*, castle that glows full of light (...)⁹³

Through the union of Melusine and Sigefroid the place not simply changed name, it transformed into a shining fortress. The author imbues the location with a quasi-sacred importance. It became a capital, not simply for Sigefroid’s lands, but for the entire nation: “for you all it was built. [The castle] shall be a protection and shelter for you and your families on the day of danger.”⁹⁴

The topos of the rock as the cradle of Luxembourg thus finds a catalysing medium in the Melusine stories. The fact that the location serves as the setting of the stories puts Melusine into the role of a local mascot. This may be less obvious in written texts than the visual and material sources. In 1963 the year when the city celebrated the ‘millennium’ and thus also the millennium of Sigefroid’s encounter with the fairy, the local diving club was founded. It adopted Melusine as its emblem, not only because of the historic moment of its foundation, but also because of the location where they practice: the river Alzette, the river below the rock and on whose banks the couple first met.⁹⁵

Likewise one of the two branches of the local soroptimist-movement named itself after her – the year of its foundation is marked again by a hallmark event of Luxembourgian nation sentiment, the 150th anniversary of the country’s

⁹² “We’ d’Tîr gelîcht hun durch d’Gewan, / du wor ons d’Hémecht stark erstan. (...) Um Tîr de Se’fridd ble’sst an d’Huer, / du wor ons d’Hémecht stolz gebuer. (...) Des Burg mat hieren Tîr, / de’ weist dem Feind hir Stîr.” Franz BINSFELD and Jules KRUGER, *Melusin ...*, p. 25.

⁹³ “Des Burg, si nennt sech lo anescht we’ soss; de Fielz an d’Burg a ronderem d’Land bis dohier *Lucilinburhuc* genannt, soll *Letzebuerg* hêsche vun desem Dâg un, *Luxemburg*, Burg de’ glônner voll Lîcht (...).” Franz BINSFELD and Jules KRUGER, *Melusin ...*, p. 37.

⁹⁴ “An net fir mech elèng stêt se do. Nêh, fir Iech all go’f se gebaut. Iech an Äre Familjen soll se Schirm a Schauteg sin am Dâg vun der Gefor”, Franz BINSFELD and Jules KRUGER, *Melusin ...*, p. 34.

⁹⁵ See figure 18 (Appendix 3); and the website of the Sub Aqua Club: <http://www.sacl.lu> (last visited: 26/09/2007).

‘independence’ in 1989. The water-fairy probably qualified because of her role as a strong female figure – she can be interpreted as the dominant force in comparison to her husband. There is another key example: below the ruins of the castle, next to the banks of the river, is one of the largest nightlife centres of Luxembourg City, a central point of which is a nightclub called ‘Melusina’. Again, it is the location, the romantic setting where Sigefroid fell in love with her, that may be held mainly responsible for the baptism, but we can assume that the name’s other connotations, the mystery and fertility, also played a role.

There are three more recent examples that seem to indicate a growing interest by local civic authorities for the figure. At the end of the year 2005, the Luxembourg City Tourist Office released a computer-mouse with a Melusine floating inside.⁹⁶ It was intended as a Christmas present for members and important customers. The same institution has also used her as one of 10 small stylised logos used on their leaflets and webpage, where a summary of her tale has been included.⁹⁷ In summer 2007, the Luxembourg City Tourist Office further commissioned a large audio-visual spectacle by the name of *Meluxina*. Without giving away much detail about the actual legend, it consisted in projecting large images of the fairy from the banks of the Alzette river unto the castle rock, combined with a laser-show and music. Another important institution in the city, the Museum of the History of the City of Luxembourg (MHVL), has been planning on redesigning its permanent exhibition. The new display opened to the public in spring 2007 and starts with an atmospheric section on Melusine before engaging with factual history.⁹⁸

It is, however, not only the castle that protects the people of Luxembourg, it is to a large degree Melusine herself. The medieval *roman* depicted her as a *femme fatale malgré-elle*. She has the best intentions, helps to create a new dynasty and elevates it to greatness. Though, in the end, she cannot avoid fate and thus becomes involuntarily a menace to the fortunes of her husband and descendents. Cederstolpe takes up these darker shades of her character. In one of his poems she sits deep in the rock on top of which she once lived, knitting a garment. She is only allowed a couple

⁹⁶ See figure 19 (Appendix 3).

⁹⁷ See: http://www.lcto.lu/html_en/history/ (last visited: 26/09/2007).

⁹⁸ Sonja KMEC, “Luxembourg. Une ville s'expose”. Nouvelle exposition permanente du Musée d'histoire de la Ville de Luxembourg, p. 42-44.

of stitches now and so often, but once the dress is finished the city will fall into ruins. In another poem she flies over the city walls to announce upcoming danger. Subsequent authors do not refrain entirely from giving her a slightly eerie touch, but render her role more ambiguous. She does not announce danger, but warns the population of it, sorrowfully.⁹⁹ She retains this role until Nicholas Welter. In the twentieth century her character changes towards a fundamentally benevolent nature. The idea can be traced back to the Chevalier l'Evêque de la Basse-Mouturie, for whom she protects the city until she is freed.¹⁰⁰ Franz Binsfeld takes it up in 1951 and she now watches over the good of the fatherland.¹⁰¹ The idea may however have also found fruitful ground in the different type of audience the Melusine legends became targeted at. Many of the more recent tales are specifically designed for families and children.¹⁰² In Jemp Schuster's play, the servant digs her out from underneath the rock and so she rescues Sigefroid's soul from the grasps of the devil.¹⁰³ The idea may have been taken from an earlier version, in which Sigefroid calls for his wife while being taken by the devil. Having thus proven his true love, Melusine comes to his rescue and they live happily ever after.¹⁰⁴ With this change of interpretation came a new idea about the key she holds. While in initial accounts she keeps the golden key to her liberation, in the later ones she watches over the key of "her" city.¹⁰⁵

Melusine appeared to Sigefroid on the banks of the Alzette, she lived on the rock of Luxembourg and into it she was damned. But with the rise of nationalism came a growing union and a complete blurring of the distinctions between the city, country and nation.¹⁰⁶ This development can be observed in the different versions of the Melusine stories. For Cederstolpe the context of the story may only have been the fortress and not even the city: both had a different legal status at the time, the city being the capital of a state ruled by the Dutch monarchy, and all fortress territory

⁹⁹ See for instance: Nicolas GREDT, *Sagenschatz des Luxemburger Landes*, p. 48.

¹⁰⁰ "(...) la charmante déité protège encore la forteresse de Luxembourg de sa bienveillance tutélaire. Elle veille sur cette ville avec la sollicitude d'une mère tendre et affectueuse." Le Chevalier L'ÉVÊQUE DE LA BASSE-MOÛTURIE, *Itinéraire du Luxembourg germanique*, p. 64.

¹⁰¹ Franz BINSFELD and Jules KRUGER, *Melusin ...*, p. 53.

¹⁰² See for instance: Sus HIERZIG, *Zou Lëtzebuerg stong d'Sigfriddsschlass. Eng al Geschicht nei erzielt a mat Biller*, Echternach, 1983.

¹⁰³ Jemp SCHUSTER, *D'Seeche vun der Melusina*, Luxembourg, p. 22-5.

¹⁰⁴ Lexi BRASSEUR and Pol CLEMEN, *Lidder aus de Lëtzebuurger Flautereien 1904 ...*, p. 19-20.

¹⁰⁵ Sus HIERZIG, *Zou Lëtzebuerg stong d'Sigfriddsschlass ...*, p. 23.

¹⁰⁶ See also my chapter on Sigefroid.

being administered by the German Confederation and in particular its Prussian garrison. Needless to say that as a Prussian officer, Cederstolpe had a slightly different stance towards the principality than local nationalists later on. In the introduction to his collection of legends he referred to Luxembourg as a German *Gau* and a “province of the German *Vaterland*”.¹⁰⁷ On the other hand, other versions also illustrate the absence of a Luxembourgian national sentiment amongst the local population for the majority of the nineteenth century. In his poem on Melusine, Pierre Klein referred to Sigefroid as “a German knight”,¹⁰⁸ a phrase whose usage would be unthinkable only 50 years later. The change in connotation, respectively the ambiguity between the signifiers for city and country can be illustrated by two caricatures from 1870. The satirical magazine *d’Wäschfra* published one in July of that year where Melusine represents the city and stands as an allegory for its bourgeoisie.¹⁰⁹ Three months later that same periodical published another caricature where she not only withstands Chancellor Bismarck’s flirtation, but categorically rejects them.¹¹⁰ The drawing refers to the Prussian efforts to include Luxembourg in their Northern German Confederation; Melusine’s behaviour therefore only makes sense when she actually stands for the country as a whole and not just its capital city. In 1885 Jean-Pierre Glaesener presents Sigefroid as the founder of the Luxembourg dynasty and the construction of his narrative, i.e. his absence of any ‘Luxembourgian’ history before him, also leaves no doubt that by now the setting has become a ‘national’ one.

The connotation is especially strong in the last days of the Second World War, when some authors let their patriotism burst out in reaction to the now vanished German oppression of everything Luxembourgian. Michel Stoffel thus presents his version of the story from his exile in Paris, which he places in a numinous pseudo-Celtic setting, using a metaphorical tone.¹¹¹ Luxembourg is for him the castle of light as founded by Melusine and Sigefroid and that should probably stand in contrast to

¹⁰⁷ Theodor VON CEDERSTOLPE, *Sagen aus Luxemburg*, p. vii and ix.

¹⁰⁸ “ein deutscher Rittersmann” Pierre KLEIN, *Siegfried und Melusina*, p. 103.

¹⁰⁹ *D’Wäschfra. Humoristisch-satyrisches Wochenblatt*, 9/07/1870.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 22/10/1870. She carries a basket, which she pulls over Bismarck’s head. The local expression “to give someone a basket” means to decline.

¹¹¹ Michel STOFFEL, *La Clef de Mélusine*, Paris, 1944. The more Celtic sounding elements can also be seen as an opposition to the Germanic elements stressed by the occupying Nazi regime.

the dark forces, in the manner of the Nazi oppressors.¹¹² In his introduction he characterises the story as a “an essentially Luxembourgian myth”¹¹³ – ignoring not only the context of its origins, but also similar traditions elsewhere in Europe. In the same year in Luxembourg, the author Franz Binsfeld writes his *D’Melusin, ons ounfra* (1963) (Melusine, our ancestress (1963)) which he releases as part of a collection of poems entitled *Hémechtslant, meng Gottesburech*.¹¹⁴ Even more than Stoffel’s publication, this one is entirely drenched in an anti-German form of nationalism: not only is the book covered with the Luxembourgian flag, but the author uses his own spelling which he wants to be as unrelated to German as possible. Later versions of the legend tend to follow further changes in national sentiment. Et Clement’s tongue-in-cheek play from 1993 introduces the ‘mermaid’ deliberately as “our National-Melusine, Count Sigefroid’s first wife”.¹¹⁵ His coquettishness goes further. The modern protagonists literally fish their national emblem from the river Alzette, hide her in a bathroom and then try to sell her to a circus. On the other hand, the play does not intend to be much of a critique of national sentiment; the irony tends to be rather superficial. The author even admits openly that his aim is to help to “remember the legend of Melusine”.¹¹⁶ Another project from 1999 tries to adjust the national symbol to the changes in national discourse: she becomes the central element in a multilingual collection of literary pieces by different authors.¹¹⁷ Standing in 1944 for an exclusively Luxembourgian myth, she now has to help represent the open and multicultural character of Luxembourg that is deemed to have replaced the old nationalism and provides locals with the opportunity to indulge in a self-image of tolerance and open-mindedness.

In Luxembourg, Melusine has remained largely a literary issue. Foreign academic analyses of the medieval texts can be found easily, but local ones to a much lesser extent. Academic analyses of the modern stories are almost

¹¹² See: Frank WILHELM, *Dictionnaire de la francophonie luxembourgeoise*, p. 325-6.

¹¹³ “un mythe essentiellement luxembourgeois” Michel STOFFEL, *La Clef de Mélusine*, p. 9.

¹¹⁴ Franz BINSFELD, *Hémechtslant, meng Gottesburech. Rosengen àus zèit a geshicht*, p. 10. The title is very much untranslatable, but tends towards “Homeland, my God-castle”.

¹¹⁵ Et CLEMENT, *Melusina 2000*, p. 6.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

¹¹⁷ Gerd HEGER et al., *mélusina*, Luxembourg, 1999.

nonexistent.¹¹⁸ Most of the nineteenth century literature is romantic and descriptive, their principal aim to recount the story in prose or verse. With the early twentieth century the approach changed and so did the medium. First of all we perceive a growing number of plays and operas on the subject. With only very few exceptions they all have rather humorous intentions. Already in 1898, Felix Servais composed his *Boutade sur le conte de Melusine*, which was performed in the subterranean chambers of the Bock Rock. Lexi Brasseur and Pol Clement followed with a similar play in 1904. The performances were very popular and often sold out.¹¹⁹ The play also started the trend to put the piece into a modern setting, which was also taken up by two more recent pieces, Et Clement's play from 1993 and Camille Kerger's opera from 1995. Since the 1980s, the decline of Melusine's earnestness has been sealed, as the prime target audience of most pieces shifted towards children. Although Lucien Koenig had already made an attempt at this in 1937,¹²⁰ the process now clearly accelerated. One can name here the illustrated books by Sus Hierzig, Muriel Moritz, or the play by Jemp Schuster, which was dedicated to a family audience, or very recently a project from 2005-06 called *D'Siinchen* with music and stories for children. Prose literature also started to use her differently. In the works of the later half of twentieth century, Melusine increasingly embodies the love-hate relationship of the intellectual elite with their native lands.¹²¹ The idea emerges from some of the novels by Roger Manderscheid as discussed above and reappears even stronger in Rolph Ketter's *Melusinentraum*, which does not engage with the theme of Melusine at all, but entirely rests on the description of the author's inability to come to terms with his country's philistinism.¹²²

The significance of this development is as a demonstration of the figure's gradual movement into the world of folklore. Whereas nineteenth century poets were interested in padding out the details of the storyline, most twentieth century authors

¹¹⁸ An exception is Jean-Pierre Kauder's 'La légende de Mélusine. Contribution à l'histoire de la fée poitevine' from 1904, which anticipated the content of this very paper in many respects. The article by Pierre Lech is more up-to-date, but it only focuses on some contemporary authors who write in the German language. See: Pierre LECH, *La ville de Luxembourg vue par les écrivains luxembourgeois de langue allemande ou "le complexe de Mélusine"*, p. 437-447.

¹¹⁹ Jean-Pierre KAUDER, *La légende de Mélusine. Contribution à l'histoire de la fée poitevine*, p. 63.

¹²⁰ Lucien KOENIG, *D'Melusina-So*, Luxembourg, 1937.

¹²¹ See: Pierre LECH, *La ville de Luxembourg ...*, p. 437-447.

¹²² See also the review: Michel RAUS, *Psychogramme aus einem ungeschriebenen Roman*.

take the content of the tale for granted but concentrate on the meaning it has for them, play with the topic's connotations, use them for their comments on culture and society, transform it into a fairy-tale for children. The changing media and different forms used to present Melusine developed alongside national identity: the second half of the nineteenth century had to create the constituent elements of this and spread it among the population, while the early twentieth century could rely on that knowledge and bestow additional meaning on it. Contemporary works also tend to illustrate the profound changes to our understanding of national identities in recent decades, the classic approach becoming rejected as outdated.

Conclusion

One of the implicit suggestions of the medieval *Roman de Melusine* was a (fictitious) connection between the dynasty of Lusignan and the counts of Luxembourg. Although some humanist scholars were well aware of this, it remains speculative as to when exactly the legend became known in Luxembourg and when the story was re-embedded into a local context. From the mid-nineteenth century on, Melusine was associated with Count Sigefroid and became thus part of the founding myth of Luxembourg. As such, the use of the legend reflects the rise and changing character of national sentiment over the past century and a half. This emerges not only from many references within the different narrations, but also from the media employed. In the nineteenth century Melusine was a motif used mostly in poetry, some of it relatively high-brow. During the apex of nationalism in the first five decades of the twentieth century, she appeared in widely read literature and printed artwork, all of which took itself rather seriously. With the slow decline of nationalism in the last decades of the twentieth century, one perceives a trend towards satire, childrens' books and gimmickry. A similar change can be observed with respect to the geographic locations that she represents. Melusine emerged from within the fortress walls of the capital, but became part of a nationalist discourse that blurred the distinction between the history of the city of Luxembourg and that of the surrounding principality. Recently however, her most popular usages are initiated by the civic

authorities in the capital, for which she has become a mascot with very local connotations.

Melusine is not the only female figure to represent medieval Luxembourg. When Luxembourgian scholars attempted to link the protagonists of the medieval *roman* to historic figures, they recognised a real-life model for the fictional Christine of Luxembourg.¹²³ That sole heiress of Luxembourg, who married an outside prince had to stand for the thirteenth-century Countess Ermesinde. Even more so than Christine in the *roman*, Ermesinde was to stand for the link between the first dynasty of Luxembourg's counts and the late-medieval one. The next chapter will analyse this in more detail.

¹²³ See above.

CHAPTER 3

Ermesinde: the connecting link

Namur – 1186: Ermesinde is born into a world of political turmoil.¹ Small principalities had been developing within the wider area of the Southern Low Countries and their ruling dynasties, although largely linked by intermarriage, were rivalling each other in the expansion of their territorial power. Overseeing this development, the Hohenstaufen Emperors were unwilling to lose further imperial control, which had been declining for more than a century. As a result, most local quarrels also inserted themselves into the conflict between Papacy and Empire, and later between the Hohenstaufen and the Guelfs. Besides, some French magnates were only too willing to extend their influence into these neighbouring lands, adding thus a fourth layer to the complexity of the struggles. The situation intensified further in the power vacuum after the death of Ermesinde's father, Henry IV of Namur (†1196). Her fiancé, Henry of Champagne, to whom she had been promised at the tender age of three, had ventured to the Holy Land where he discovered a better match in the person of Isabella, queen of Jerusalem. At the age of ten, Ermesinde thus found herself stranded without a male protector, while Emperor Henry VI and

* Unlike the two previous chapters, the topic of this one does not constitute entirely virgin territory. Paul Margue has already offered an overview on Ermesinde's position in historiography and popular culture in 1994; see: Paul MARGUE, *L'image d'Ermesinde dans l'historiographie et dans la tradition populaire*, p. 311-324. It will be impossible to avoid any overlap, especially since his analysis is rich in examples (despite its brevity) and very precise in its arguments. My own presentation of the topic will therefore focus more on nationalist perspectives, expand further on how her memory is shared across the Belgian-Luxembourgian border and add an analysis of forgotten aspects. A summary of this chapter has been published: Pit PÉPORTÉ, *Ermesinde*, p. 61-66.

¹ The following passage is not based on my own research, but a summary of many other accounts, in particular: Michel MARGUE, *Ermesinde. Notice biographique*, p. 11-27; and: Michel MARGUE, *Ermesinde Gräfin von Luxemburg (1186-1247)*, p. 23-41.

Count Baldwin VI of Flanders shared the possession of her ancestral lands of Luxembourg and Namur respectively.

About a year later (1197/8), Thibaut of Bar decided to seize the opportunity offered by her claims and married the disinherited countess. In the following years he could be observed buying back his wife's rights over Luxembourg, riding unsuccessfully against Namur, but negotiating effectively for the counties of Laroche and Durbuy to the North. Thus when Thibaut died at Bouvines in 1214, the lands of Luxembourg had been largely regained and even some new territories added, although most of Namur seemed lost. The countess, however, now at the age of twenty-eight and without a male heir, found herself back in a vulnerable situation. She remarried after only three months of grieving. Her new suitor came in the person of Waleran (or Walram) of Limburg, a distinguished knight and twice a crusader, who had himself only recently become a widower.² Since he was a younger son, this marriage opened the appealing possibility of creating for himself a respectable territorial asset. After the death of his older brother, Waleran unexpectedly inherited all of his father's possessions, thus becoming the master of a large complex of lands, stretching from the Duchy of Limburg in the north to the County of Luxembourg in the south.

After the death of her second husband, Ermesinde kept her ancestral lands in addition to the marquisate of Arlon, the dowry from her second marriage.³ The Duchy of Limburg fell to Henry II, Waleran's eldest son from his first marriage. Since Waleran's eldest son with Ermesinde (also called Henry with the epithet of 'Blondel') was still underage, the county was administrated jointly by Ermesinde in her role as the countess, and her younger step-son Waleran of Montjoie as guardian. From the mid-1230s, the insurmountable differences in political style between the rash Montjoie and the more rational countess led her to associate her now mature son to power, to the disadvantage of the former. The following years of her political career were marked by attempts to enhance stability and consolidation within the county. The two major decisions in this respect were the installation of a noble

² For the biography of Waleran, see: Mike RICHARTZ, *Waleran de Limbourg (ca. 1165-1226). Le devenir d'un grand politique entre Meuse et Rhin*, Liège, 2000 (MA thesis, Université de Liège).

³ She had already passed on the dowry from her first marriage, the lands of Marville, as the dowry of her daughter from her marriage with Thibaut to Waleran's younger son of that same name from his first marriage.

council to aid in governing and the civic liberties granted to a number of locations, which established a stable political framework for the relations between count and towns to the benefit of both. Ermesinde died in February 1247, leaving her son, by now a well-trained politician, solely in charge. She was buried in Clairefontaine, in what was soon to become a Cistercian nunnery.⁴

The first two sections of this chapter will investigate the initiators of modern-day images that the countess is associated with: the liberal historians in the city of Luxembourg and a group of Jesuits in Clairefontaine, which had by then become a part of Belgium. A third section will explore how these two traditions nourished the nationalist view on Ermesinde in the grand-duchy, even though the latter developed alongside the importance attributed to her in Belgium shown in the fourth section. The last part of this chapter will investigate Ermesinde's position in the national historical narrative in Luxembourg, arguing that she has posthumously driven her husbands into relative oblivion.

The liberal leader

A first strand of importance in the formation of Ermesinde's memory was derived to some degree from older historiography and was nurtured for most part within the bourgeois circles of the city of Luxembourg. In the years 1844/45 the Archaeological Society⁵ was created by a number of historians, many of whom had a hungry interest in all remnants of Antiquity.⁶ Despite their amateur background, some of them developed a sharp acumen and an appetite for legal and administrative documents and their research created a basis from which historians still profit nowadays. Most of the Society's founding members held important positions within the government, the judicial system or administration.⁷ Théodore de la Fontaine (1787-1871) for instance had been governor under King-Grand-Duke William II and thereafter the

⁴ On the foundation of Clairefontaine, see: Georges DESPY, Le "testament" d'Ermesinde et la fondation de l'abbaye de Clairefontaine, p. 211-219.

⁵ See also my general introduction.

⁶ On the founding years of the Archaeological Society, see: Tony KELLEN, Die luxemburgische Geschichtsschreibung: ein Rückblick und ein Ausblick, p. 141-148; and: Joseph GOEDERT, *De la Société archéologique à la Section historique de l'Institut Grand-Ducal. Tendances, méthodes et résultats du travail historique de 1845 à 1985*, Luxembourg, 1987 (PSH 101).

⁷ Joseph GOEDERT, *De la Société archéologique à la Section historique ...*, p. 18.

first ever prime minister (*ministre d'Etat*) of the grand-duchy.⁸ François-Xavier Würth-Paquet (1801-1885), the first president of the learned society, had occupied all possible positions within the judicial system and was later a member of the government and chairman of the Upper House of Parliament (*Conseil d'Etat*).⁹ The political ideology of their circles was marked by Orangism¹⁰ and liberalism – this included the hope for political reform under William II, which was largely realised by the Constitutions of 1841 and 1849.¹¹

The aspect of Ermesinde's reign that they most emphasised was the liberties accorded to the towns. Even before the establishment of the society, local Orangist historians tended to favour these aspects.¹² In a note on medieval charters, De la Fontaine's assessment set the tone: although Count Sigefroid was undeniably the creator of the castle of Luxembourg,¹³ he did not find a single soul living on those grounds and thus populated the area with his serfs. But:

his descendant, Countess Ermesinde (...) has to be considered as the real founder of a town having become important only as a result of her charter of enfranchisement, which erased from its inhabitants the ignominy of servitude and imprinted them with the character of free and bourgeois men, at the same time she assured them this new position against the liberticidal impulses and aspirations of her descendants and successors.¹⁴

⁸ Jules MERSCH, Théodore de la Fontaine, p. 66-95.

⁹ Jules MERSCH, François-Xavier Würth-Paquet, p. 299-330.

¹⁰ Orangism refers to a royalist loyalty to the House of Orange. During the Belgian revolution (1830-39) most of the Grand-Duchy favoured joining the newly formed kingdom in the west, rather than staying under the rule of the Dutch monarchy, which it had since the Congress of Vienna (1815). The orangists only formed a small minority of the population and were predominantly found in the capital. N.B. Unlike Northern-Irish Orangeism, this one is spelled without an 'e'.

¹¹ For the historical background to the years 1839 to 1848, see: Christian CALMES, *Gründung und Werden eines Landes. 1815 bis heute*, p. 345-367.

¹² See: Jean-Pierre MÄYSZ, *Chronologische Übersicht der Geschichte der Stadt und des Großherzogtums Luxemburg. Nebst einer Topographie. Zum Gebrauche der vaterländischen Elementar=Schulen des Mittel=Unterrichts*, p. 10; or: Jean ULVELING, *Tableau analytique et chronologique des principaux faits de l'histoire du Grand-Duché et de la ville de Luxembourg*, p. 4-5.

¹³ See also my chapter on Sigefroid.

¹⁴ "ce fut sa descendante, la comtesse Ermesinde, qui doit être envisagée comme la véritable fondatrice d'une ville devenue importante seulement à la suite de sa charte d'affranchissement, laquelle effaça de ses habitants l'ignominie de la servilité et leur imprima le caractère d'hommes libres et de bourgeois, en même temps qu'elle leur assurait cette position nouvelle contre les caprices

Ermesinde is placed at the start of a continuity at whose end the author sees himself; not only is she the initiator of the “bourgeois” society, but the foundations she created also ensured its survival into the nineteenth century. When a couple of years later his colleague François-Xavier Würth-Paquet started his project of editing the medieval and early modern charters from the historic principality, he began with those from the reign of Ermesinde. He even seemed hesitant whether to continue afterwards with her successors or her predecessors.¹⁵ Some thirty years later, he started editing the charters of the city together with his disciple Nicolas van Werveke (1851-1926). They started not simply with Ermesinde’s reign yet again, but with her franchise charter of 1244. The point is revelatory. First of all, by tacitly equating the concepts of ‘urban’ with ‘civic’, they deny any urban character to the earlier settlement. This may not be too astonishing from today’s point of view, since historians have long been debating when exactly to start regarding the settlement as a town.¹⁶ However, and this is the second point, at the time Sigefroid was still generally accepted as the founder of the city, even by Würth-Paquet in one of his earlier writings.¹⁷ In addition, the authors also copied de la Fontaine’s introduction (as quoted above) word-for-word, not going through the inconvenience of acknowledging their source.¹⁸

As a result, the deed of the enfranchisement was also remembered by the municipality itself. It figures for instance as the main explanation on the plate of the street named after the countess. Furthermore, the same is celebrated on a large relief on top of the *Cercle Municipal*, the city’s prestige-building in one of the two central squares.¹⁹ Built between 1905 and 1909, the building was to accommodate not only municipal offices, but also rooms for more festive occasions, used for balls or public

et les velléités liberticides de ses descendants et successeurs.” Gaspard-Théodor-Ignace DE LA FONTAINE, *Chartes Luxembourgeoises*, p. 197.

¹⁵ See: François-Xavier WÜRTH-PAQUET, *Table Chronologique des Chartes et Diplômes relatifs à l’histoire de l’ancien Pays-Duché de Luxembourg et comté de Chiny [Règne d’Ermesinde]*, p. 66.

¹⁶ See: Michel MARGUE, *Du château à la ville: les origines*, p. 47-59.

¹⁷ See my chapter on Sigefroid.

¹⁸ François Xavier WÜRTH-PAQUET and Nicolas VAN WERVEKE, *Cartulaire ou Recueil des Documents politiques et administratifs de la Ville de Luxembourg de 1244 à 1795*, p. 3.

¹⁹ See figure 20 (Appendix 3). The initial name of the building was *Palais Municipal*, stressing its glamorous purpose. See: Elisabeth VERMAST, *Der Cercle. Ein Stück Stadtgeschichte*, p. 12-13.

exhibitions.²⁰ The countess, in the full process of donating the charter, appears to be watching over the granted ‘freedom’ from the top of the building. A hundred years later the municipality still keeps her in memory. The website of the municipal archives, for instance, depicts a photo of the original charter on its first page.²¹

The pious princess

It is in Clairefontaine that we need to look for another major strand that contributed to the moulding of Ermesinde as a *lieu de mémoire*: that of the pious princess. Clairefontaine is located in south-east Belgium, between the town of Arlon and the nearby border of the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg.

Ermesinde’s pious image is based on the traditional interpretation of the founding of Clairefontaine Abbey. According to the traditional interpretation it was Ermesinde herself who founded the abbey and who in her testament chose it as her final resting place. The authenticity of the document remained uncontested for centuries. Only in the late nineteenth century was it challenged by the Belgian historian Alphonse Wouters;²² while (another Belgian) Hippolyte Goffinet and the liberal Luxembourgian historian Nicolas van Werveke defended its authenticity.²³ Without intending to enter into this debate, it can be said that today there seems to be agreement that at least some major parts are genuine, but that her reference to Clairefontaine may well be a slightly more recent addition. It seems very likely that it was in fact her son Henry V who assured the creation of the religious house,²⁴ although one can of course speculate as to what degree the idea actually originated

²⁰ Elisabeth VERMAST, *Der Cercle. Ein Stück Stadtgeschichte*, p. 12-13.

²¹ See: http://www.vdl.lu/%C3%89v%C3%A8nements_+art+et+culture/Archives-highlight-archives-p-3810283.html (last visited: 26/09/2007).

²² Alphonse WOUTERS, Introduction, in: *Table chronologique des chartes et diplômes imprimés concernant l’histoire de la Belgique*, vol. 6, p. 11-13. See also his: *Le testament d’Ermesinde de Luxembourg*, in: *Bulletin de la commission royale historique*, 4th series, vol. 6, 1883, p. 236-248.

²³ Hippolyte GOFFINET, *Authenticité du testament d’Ermesinde, comtesse de Luxembourg*, in: *PSH* 37, 1884, p. 206-217; Nicolas VAN WERVEKE, *L’authenticité du testament d’Ermesinde*, in: *Luxemburger Land*, 6/01/1884, p. 5-6; 3/02/1884, p. 66-68; 10/02/1884, p. 82-86; 17/02/1884, p. 98-101; 24/02/1884, p. 115-118; 2/03/1884, p. 131-135.

²⁴ Michel MARGUE, *Politique monastique et pouvoir souverain: Henri V, sire souverain, fondateur de la principauté territoriale luxembourgeoise?*, p. 415.

with the countess, merely being executed by her successor.²⁵ The prominent position of their tombs within the old abbatial church suggest that Henry Blondel and his wife Margaret were indeed instrumental in transforming the location into a dynastic memorial.²⁶ Neither Henry VI, nor Henry VII, managed to find their burial place there; the body of the first was lost on the battlefield and that of the other remained in Italy where he had died. Nonetheless, nine more members of the family were buried there over time and even John of Bohemia regarded it as his natural choice for entombment, despite his important possessions in Central Europe.²⁷ Ermesinde not only represented the oldest dynastic member buried here, but seems from the start to have been (re)presented as the real founding figure of the abbey.

Two minor steps helped to preserve Ermesinde's memory in Clairefontaine before the nineteenth century. Firstly, the renovation of the church in the sixteenth century, which also involved a new cover stone for her tomb.²⁸ Secondly and more importantly, was a legend that described the detailed background of the foundation of the abbey. When exactly it emerged remains unclear. It is noteworthy that it cannot be found, either in Bertel's *Historia Luxemburgensis* from 1605, nor in the adjacent description of the duchy and its abbeys. In a letter to the author, the abbess of Clairefontaine confirmed that the founder was indeed the countess, but again no mention of any legend.²⁹ The first written reference to it is a note on the local chronicle from 1633, which mentions a very old painting or plate with the story.³⁰ Joset thus thought it must have originated in the fifteenth, or possibly the fourteenth century,³¹ but this is a feeble guess. A couple of handwritten notes by local nuns suggest that the foundation myth of the abbey only became firmly established from the second half of the seventeenth century.³²

²⁵ See: Andrée and Georges DESPY, *Les premières années de l'Abbaye cistercienne de Clairefontaine*, p. 1213-1214.

²⁶ Michel MARGUE, *Ermesinde Gräfin von Luxemburg (1186-1247)*, p. 38-39.

²⁷ See also my chapter on John of Bohemia.

²⁸ Nicolas GENGLER, *An der klaren Quelle. Clairefontaine einst und jetzt*, p. 16.

²⁹ Jean BERTELS, *Historia Luxemburgensis seu Commentarius*, p. 254-255.

³⁰ According to Jean-Pierre Mandy, the abbey's chronicle by Mathias de Vaulx was copied into the *Lilia Cersticii* of Chrysostomos Henriquez in 1633. See: Jean-Pierre MANDY, *Clairefontaine. Histoire des ruines de la vallée de Clairefontaine*, p. 113.

³¹ Camille-Jean JOSET, *Clairfontaine*, p. 25.

³² *Notes historiques du XVII-XVIIIè siècle*, Archives de l'Etat à Arlon 157.

In short, the legend tells how the countess goes for a walk in the area, when she lays down to rest in the proximity of a spring associated with the figure of St Bernard. As she falls asleep, a most beautiful woman appears in her dream, carrying a child in her arms. At her feet twelve immaculately white sheep with a black cross on their back and belly appear. The countess then wakes up, and intrigued by her vision whose divine origin she does not doubt, asks a local hermit for his interpretation. The recluse answers that the Virgin had appeared to her and instructs her to found a Cistercian Abbey on the location as symbolised by the white sheep. Independently of its precise origins, the miraculous story helped to cement Ermesinde's position as founder, and as we will see it was to become a popular subject in art and literature.

The Counter-Reformation laid the foundations for two more elements that would prove vital for the subsequent developments: the coming of the Jesuits and their successful promotion of the Cult of Our Lady. In the mid-seventeenth century pilgrimages to the Virgin started off in the two towns of Luxembourg and Arlon.³³ In Luxembourg this was closely linked to the establishment of the Jesuits, whereas in Arlon the initiators were the local Capuchins.³⁴ The Jesuits were suppressed by papal breve in 1773, but they were allowed to reform themselves in 1814 and gained in strength in the second half of the nineteenth century, a time marked by Ultramontanism and yet again a renewed interest in the Virgin. Whereas it took until 1895 for their return to the grand-duchy, Arlon saw the Society back about 1860.³⁵ It is this latter community that should prove a decisive force in spreading Ermesinde's fame and shaping her image.

The small community decided to buy a country house for their novices and found a suitable location in Clairefontaine. The old abbey had been destroyed by French Revolutionary troops and only ruins remained. The land had been handed to farmers and an industrialist who erected a foundry right next to the grounds of the

³³ Joseph MAERTZ, *Notre-Dame de Luxembourg, Consolatrice des Affligés vénérée pendant 300 ans dans la Province belge de Luxembourg*, p. 28-29.

³⁴ Pierre HANNICK, *Implantation éphémère des jésuites à Arlon, au XVII^e siècle*, p. 10-11.

³⁵ Paul DOSTERT, *Die schwierige Rückkehr der Jesuiten nach Luxemburg im 19. Jahrhundert und die seelsorgliche Tätigkeit der Patres im Großherzogtum bis 1941*, 231-235. There is no agreement about the exact date: Maertz states 1858 (Joseph MAERTZ, *Notre-Dame de Luxembourg ...*, p. 32), Dostert 1862 (Paul DOSTERT, *Die schwierige Rückkehr ...*, p. 231), and Kreins 1857 (Jean-Marie KREINS, *Les débuts difficiles de l'installation des jésuites à Arlon*, p. 231).

former nunnery. Despite the latter's ruinous condition, its sacral character and its history cannot have escaped the new buyers and are thus likely to have played a role in their local establishment. To what degree the memory of the medieval countess was of any importance cannot be said. However, two aspects must be noted. Firstly, despite the recent establishment of the congregation, quite a few of the Jesuits were of regional origin. They may thus have been aware of the detailed historical background to the site. The founder of the new house, Dom Eugene de Gerlache, was even the nephew of the last profess of the old Cistercian abbey, therefore maybe adding a personal attachment to the location.³⁶ Secondly, the fathers not only proceeded to build their country house, but in 1874 they also started buying the entire terrain of the old abbey.³⁷ This was followed by excavations, aimed especially at discovering any remains of the princely graves. When these remained fruitless, the idea was developed to create a chapel with two altars dedicated to the patron saints of Ermesinde and Henry V, indicating that there may well have been plans to exploit the memory of the site from the start. But then, as if by miracle, a novice excavated a chest and by analysing its content discovered old bones with a plate identifying them as belonging to the countess.³⁸ Anthropological analyses have buttressed this fact, claiming that they did indeed belong to a woman from the thirteenth century who died around the age of sixty, which refutes most suspicions of a fabricated miracle.³⁹

A year later the fathers employed the Luxembourgian architect Charles Arendt to design a neo-Romanesque chapel and a new sarcophagus for the reburial of Ermesinde. The result is a shrine to her memory. Although making use of contemporary architectural theory and material, Arendt created a Neo-Romanesque chapel with a medieval atmosphere. Due to budget constraints, the sarcophagus with a white effigy of the countess is entirely made of wood, but painted so to appear as

³⁶ Jean-Pierre MANDY, *Clairefontaine ...*, p. 69.

³⁷ Apparently the choir of the church escaped to them, since its owner, a local farmer, wanted to continue using the specific plot in question to access a crop field.

³⁸ Jean-Pierre MANDY, *Clairefontaine ...*, p. 73.

³⁹ It must be said though that the report from the 1997 analysis not only contains a circular argument, but also reflects some wishful thinking when it comes to the exact identity of the remains: "L'étude anthropologique et la datation C14 nous ont permis de confirmer qu'il s'agissait très certainement des restes d'Ermesinde. En effet, il a été démontré que ce squelette était bien celui d'une femme, se situant dans la même catégorie d'âge et ayant une morphologie extrêmement similaire à celle de la comtesse". See: Agnès MALAVEZ and Philippe MIGNOT, Arlon: l'abbaye cistercienne de Clairefontaine, nécropole comtale de la Maison de Luxembourg. Projet européen d'étude, p. 39.

marble. The stained glass window above her resting place celebrates her vision;⁴⁰ others depict Henry V and his wife Margaret, as well as former abbesses of the house. Furthermore, the chapel is dedicated to *Notre-Dame du Bel Amour*, again not only exploiting the traditional veneration of Our Lady, but also recalling Ermesinde's vision. The envisaged purpose seems twofold. By emphasising Ermesinde's role for the location, the Jesuits placed themselves into a religious continuity stretching back to the thirteenth century. The 'invented tradition' not only justified their local acquisition, but also allowed them to profit from the growing esteem for the countess. By emphasising her relationship to Our Lady, they used the combined appeal of both for the establishment of a pilgrimage to the *Notre-Dame du Bel Amour*, first taking place on Whit Monday in 1894. A year later a procession was added. These occasions became increasingly popular, attracting up to five thousand pilgrims in good years.⁴¹ As a result the occasion also represented an important source of income for the community.⁴² Although it was firmly centred on the Virgin, the countess was present, lying in the prominently placed chapel overlooking the old ruins.

The role of the countess can be further illustrated with the help of another medium. The pilgrimages were rendered more popular by short booklets on Ermesinde, particularly describing her miraculous vision, through which she had received a state of unofficial beatification. Some publications were general historical accounts of the surroundings, starting with the countess⁴³, while others firmly focus on her relationship with the Virgin and above all recount the story of her vision.⁴⁴ The fact that they tended to be published on both sides of the border⁴⁵ not only illustrates where the pilgrims were from, but also explains why the scene became

⁴⁰ See figure 21 (Appendix 3). For more information on that particular window see: Alex LANGINI, *Les moutons à croix noires d'Ermesinde*, p. 209-210.

⁴¹ Jean-Pierre MANDY, *Clairefontaine ...*, p. 135.

⁴² Jean-Marie KREINS, *Un épisode de l'expression de la foi dans le pays de Luxembourg. Le pèlerinage à Notre-Dame du Bel Amour vénérée sous le nom de Notre-Dame de Clairefontaine (1894-1947). Antécédents et culte contemporain*, p. 34 and 44-45.

⁴³ See for instance: *L'Ecole apostolique de Clairefontaine (près Arlon) dirigée par les Prêtres du Sacre-Coeur de Jésus*, Arlon, 1905.

⁴⁴ See for instance: Albert KNEPPER, *Unsere Liebe Frau von Clairefontaine*, Abbeville, 1894.

⁴⁵ See for instance: Thodore ZENNER, *Ermesinde. Historische Erzählung aus dem 12. und 13. Jahrhundert*, Eischen, 1928.

such a popular subject in art. Again, one major side-effect of these publications was the spreading of a predominantly pious image of the countess.

Until the second half of the twentieth century, the vast majority of publications on local history and the abbey were written by clergy with a local connection, some of them the Jesuits in Arlon,⁴⁶ others by the Sacred Heart congregation that settled in Clairefontaine from 1889.⁴⁷ The latter fact may not surprise greatly at first, however one must note that the two congregations did not always live in perfect harmony.⁴⁸ The Sacred-Heart friars showed minimal interest in the Jesuit initiated pilgrimages, even after the departure of the Society in 1968. On the other hand, the regular publications by the friars on the topic reflects that they could not escape the memory of the location.⁴⁹

Both Ermesinde and Clairefontaine became *lieux de mémoire* for people from the Belgian Province of Luxembourg, as well as from the grand-duchy. Their connotations, however, remain different on both sides of the border. Before we can explore this in more detail, we first need to turn to her image in the grand-duchy.

Towards a national trinity

Ermesinde's 'liberal' and 'pious' images both contributed to the nationalist interpretations of her life and deeds, which set her in line with the two other national 'mother figures', the Virgin Mary and Grand-Duchess Charlotte. In the latter case the comparison was of great political utility; styling the grand-duchess as a modern-day incarnation of the medieval countess helped legitimise a reign which had been contested at its start.

⁴⁶ See for instance: Camille-Jean JOSET, *L'Abbaye Noble de Notre-Dame de Clairfontaine 1216-1796*, Bruxelles, 1935; Joseph Brockaert, *Abbaye de Clairfontaine. Découverte du corps de la fondatrice*, [s.l.], 1936.

⁴⁷ See for instance: Jean LENZ, *Clairefontaine 1889-1964*, Pétange, 1964.

⁴⁸ The relationship of the two congregations is not yet analysed and cannot be done properly within the scope of this thesis. I am grateful to Jean-Pierre Mandy for sharing a couple of memories and thoughts about the issue. The differences were partly based on different social origins (e.g. the Jesuits tended to be of higher social background), changes in financial revenues (e.g. over time the Jesuits became poorer and the Sacred-Heart friars richer) and opposite affiliations during the World Wars (e.g. the Sacred-Heart community tended to have sympathies for the German occupation during World War One).

⁴⁹ See the occasional articles on the history of Clairefontaine in their journal *Heimat + Mission*, and especially the issue 1/2, 1997, which was entirely dedicated to the memory of the countess.

As in the case of the memory of Count Sigefroid, the historian Jean Bertholet (1688-1755) plays an important role in setting up the narrative foundations on which many subsequent historians based their presentations.⁵⁰ Bertholet accorded the countess a strong political authority, placing her beyond the shadow of the men in her life. The political deeds she is most praised for are the “liberation of towns”, the reform of administration, the foundation of religious houses and the territorial expansion of the count’s *demesne*.⁵¹ As with most other topics and figures, the first subsequent short attempts at writing a local narrative history did not change much of his perspective, only altering the emphasis slightly. Whereas Bertholet had filled many pages with a detailed account of her religious foundations, his successors tried to balance it more with emphasising the letters of the enfranchisement. However, the general structure of his account also survived the more careful re-evaluation by the nationalist camp and hence laid the basis for most representations to be found in the twentieth century. Furthermore, there is hardly any difference in the messages expressed by historiographic, literary and artistic sources – whereas historians attempt to account for ‘all’ facets of her political career, the other representations tend to focus on one specific aspect of her life.

The first of the aforementioned deeds made her a favourite among the bourgeois and has already been widely commented on. The scene is not only used in the self-representation of the municipal authorities, as noted above, but also by a wider array of artists. Pierre Blanc (1872-1946) presents us with one of the more famous examples – the same artist already drew the plan for the relief on the *Cercle Municipal*.⁵² Other artistic impressions of the moment can be found in Herchen’s history manual,⁵³ or, interestingly, in a book on the history of law,⁵⁴ where it figures as one of only very few illustrations. The displays of the scene are all very similar in their content: set in a large hall, the countess sits on her throne, or stands next to it and hands the charter to the townsmen, while the deed is witnessed by her noblemen

⁵⁰ A more detailed interpretation of early modern historiography will be given in the last section of this chapter.

⁵¹ Jean BERTHOLET, *Histoire Ecclésiastique et Civile du Duché de Luxembourg et Comté de Chiny*, vol. 4, p. 410-460, and: vol. 5, p. 1-75.

⁵² Georgette BILDORFF, Pierre Blanc, p. 32.

⁵³ Arthur HERCHEN, *Manuel d’Histoire Nationale*. 1918 edition: p. 34.

⁵⁴ Jean SCHAACK, *La comtesse Ermesinde remet aux bourgeois de la ville de Luxembourg la charte d’affranchissement (1244)*, p. 156.

standing to the side or in the background. To this can be added the political or administrative reform constituted in her involvement of the local nobility into the ruling of the county. Both together form the basis for the image of the ‘democratic princess’.⁵⁵ The politically liberal stance she is associated with is extended from her attitude to the towns onto the country as a whole.

The foundation of monasteries already received a certain degree of importance in the context of Clairefontaine. Though ignored to some degree by the Jesuits of Arlon, the numerous ‘other’ monastic establishments attributed to her were nonetheless pointed out frequently by Luxembourgian historians.⁵⁶ The pious image of the countess, solidly constructed by the friars of Clairefontaine, has thus been taken over by and incorporated into the Luxembourgian mainstream and has persisted up to our days.⁵⁷ This process of integrating Ermesinde’s pious sides into the national(ist) image of her coincided with the rise of the Catholic party to power. The first two decades of the twentieth century saw an intensifying in the struggle between left-wing liberals and the Catholic forces. As the Catholics grew in power, they also increasingly adopted nationalist values and presented themselves in a very monarchist light.⁵⁸ The specific scene of her miraculous vision provided inspiration for a certain amount of artistic expression in the first half of the twentieth century, in pieces of popular literature as well as visual art. The first artists making use of the scene were thoroughly Catholic, such as Michel Engels’s painting of 1894, or Guillaume Zorn, who published a poem in 1897.⁵⁹ Later poems, such as Nicolas Welter’s (1936)⁶⁰ or Franz Binsfeld’s (1946)⁶¹, illustrate how by then the scene had been adopted by the nationalist mainstream. The latter two examples are part of a

⁵⁵ See also: Michel MARGUE, *Ermesinde, comtesse de Luxembourg. Questions nouvelles pour une interprétation de son règne*, p. 194.

⁵⁶ These other foundations were Bastogne, Bonnevoie, Differdange, Holy-Spirit-Luxembourg Marienthal. They are mentioned in the following textbooks: Jean SHOETTER, *Geschichte des Luxemburger Landes nach den besten Quellen bearbeitet*, p. 38; Joseph MEYERS, *Geschichte Luxemburgs*, p. 61-62.

⁵⁷ See for instance an article on hiking in the region of Clairefontaine in a leftwing newspaper with traditional anti-clerical tendencies: “als tiefkatholische Adelige wurden während ihrer Herrschaft einige bedeutsame Klöster gegründet” Wandern auf den Spuren der Gräfin Ermesinde. Zwischen Eischen und Clairefontaine, in: *Tageblatt*, 26/08/1998.

⁵⁸ Daniel SPIZZO, *La nation luxembourgeoise. Genèse et structure d’une identité*, p. 247-260.

⁵⁹ Wilhelm ZORN, *Luxemburger Geschichtsbilder in metrischer Form. II. Die Gründung von Clairefontaine*, p. 62-63.

⁶⁰ Nikolaus WELTER, *Ermesinde*, p. 13.

⁶¹ Franz BINSFELD, *Ewig Luxemburg*, p. 30-31.

collection of poems which refer to a series of historical topics. Nonetheless, it is striking that the more 'pious' aspect of the countess gained such a presence. The reason is probably twofold: on the one hand, the vision has more narrative qualities than an imaginary ceremonial handing of the charter to one of the towns. On the other, it had become a well-known theme on which variations could be composed.

The territorial expansion that she was accredited for received increasing importance towards the end of the nineteenth century. At a public lecture held in the Luxembourgian capital in December 1897, Nicolas van Werveke thus extended his position as formulated with respect to the city to the whole country: Ermesinde gathered so many new vassals, that, with the exception of Vianden, the entirety of the country had now come under her dominance. Further:

By acquiring the castle, Sigefroid had become the founder of the comital family of Luxembourg; Ermesinde became its first sovereign, by having her authority recognised not only by the people of servile condition who lived on her lands, but also by the vast majority of the nobility.⁶²

This passage reflects that for its author the essence of the country exists outside time and independently of the monarch. From this perspective, Ermesinde brought the land closer to its perfection, to something like its true or ideal state. Again the message is repeated in the major works until the middle of the twentieth century. In addition it is often added that the expansion was a peaceful one. In Meyers's words from 1939: "She pursued no kind of forceful politics; during the long time of her personal government, no war was being led from Luxembourg".⁶³ The idea of a peaceful territorial expansion fits into the pious image of the countess, but it also helps Meyers to set Luxembourg firmly apart from its eastern neighbour, which at

⁶² "Sigefroid en acquérant le château, était devenu le fondateur de la famille comtale de Luxembourg ; Ermesinde en devint le premier véritable souverain, en faisant reconnaître son autorité non seulement par les gens de servile condition qui vivaient sur ses terres, mais encore par la plus grande partie de la noblesse" Nicolas VAN WERVEKE, *La Ville de Luxembourg. Conférence tenue dans la grande salle du casino le 7 décembre 1897*, p. 8.

⁶³ Joseph MEYERS, *Geschichte Luxemburgs*, p. 58. Again the idea goes back to Bertholet, see: Jean BERTHOLET, *Histoire Ecclésiastique et Civile ...*, vol. 4, p. 411.

that particular time was again provoking concerns of a military invasion into the grand-duchy.⁶⁴

A final aspect which completes the national image of the countess, not yet found in Bertholet, is the French influence attributed to her.⁶⁵ The argument is based on three foundations. Firstly, the enlargement of the principality to the west and north that took place during her life mainly added francophone areas to a county previously almost exclusively German-speaking. Secondly, quite a few of the political innovations attributed to her have French precedents, such as the liberation of towns. Finally, under her successors French started having a growing presence within administrative documents. Although the validity of this factual basis can be criticised on several points,⁶⁶ a general growth of French usage at court and an influence of French practices on politics cannot be denied.⁶⁷ One cannot ignore, however, that the ideas fit in well with the ideology of the *Mischkultur* arising at the beginning of the twentieth century and still latently perceptible, even if it has become largely absorbed by a pro-European ideology nowadays.⁶⁸ This line of thought endows Luxembourgian culture with a certain superiority, since it ostensibly combines the best of both the French and the German worlds.⁶⁹

As noted a large number of these ideas can be traced back to the historian Jean Bertholet. His opus reflects his vocation as a Jesuit and his status as a subject of Empress Maria-Theresa – the eight volumes of his history are marked both by his general favouring of religious aspects and his profound fondness of the ruling monarch.⁷⁰ The writer's views on Ermesinde were readily accepted during the nineteenth century; his pro-monarchical stance was shared by the liberal Orangists

⁶⁴ The antagonism toward Germany shall be further explored in my chapter on John of Bohemia.

⁶⁵ Archives de l'Etat de Luxembourg (ed), *La formation territoriale du pays de Luxembourg depuis ses origines jusqu'au milieu du XVe siècle. Exposition documentaire organisée par les Archives de l'Etat. Septembre – octobre 1963*, p. 66; Michel MARGUE, *Aux origines de l'Etat luxembourgeois. Le gouvernement de la Comtesse Ermesinde*, p. 11.

⁶⁶ For a detailed discussion see: Michel MARGUE, *Ermesinde, comtesse de Luxembourg ...*, p. 196-200.

⁶⁷ See for instance the *Tournoi de Chauvency* for a late thirteenth-century view on the French character of the Luxembourg comital court. See especially: Jacques BRETTEL, *Le tournoi de Chauvency*, v. 3416-3420; the passage describes the amusements of the ladies of Luxembourg at the barbaric French used by an Alsatian knight. They had grown up using a more refined French language.

⁶⁸ Claude D. CONTER, *Mischkultur*, p. 23-28.

⁶⁹ See my chapter on John of Bohemia for a more detailed example of how the idea of the *Mischkultur* influenced the perception of history.

⁷⁰ See my chapter on Sigefroid.

and the more conservative pro-clerical writers alike. His emphasis on the more pious sides of the countess also found approval, since it still fitted well into the common view of the proper conduct of a princess. In addition two further points play roles of growing importance. At the end of the nineteenth century, the majority of historians started to tend more towards a conservative perspective, practically leaving Nicolas van Werveke (1851-1926) as the remaining champion of its opposing liberal camp.⁷¹ Secondly, we see the renewal of the cult of Our Lady in Luxembourg and, tightly linked to the figure of Ermesinde, in Clairefontaine.⁷² This may also explain for a strong emphasis on of the particular scene of her vision in popular media. Furthermore, part of this is also the allegedly philanthropic character underlying her agenda. Again, the idea is borrowed straight from Bertholet, where the common well-being of her people is seen as a major motivating factor in her politics.⁷³ While being less emphasised in the middle of the nineteenth century, the idea re-emerged in the writings of Jean Schötter (1823-1881)⁷⁴ and subsequently Joseph Meyers (1900-1964).⁷⁵ Whereas Bertholet's comment is a reflection of his ideal of an enlightened despot, it had by the end of the nineteenth century been influenced by the tradition of the liberal-minded scholars, believing now in a genuine good-will of a proto-democratic ruler.⁷⁶ Importantly, the resulting image is that of a caring 'mother of the nation', a role she now shared with the 'national patron saint', the Virgin, and which was in the twentieth century increasingly also attached to the Grand-Duchess Charlotte.

⁷¹ Van Werveke's stance may have also had a personal dimension. Apparently he had problems getting along with Arthur Herchen, arguably the most highly regarded historian among those of conservative mindsets. See: Tony KELLEN, *Die luxemburgische Geschichtsschreibung ...*, p. 153-154 and 159.

⁷² See also the very personal testimony of the historian Joseph Meyers of his pilgrimage to Clairefontaine in 1939, as published in a magazine: "Wir sahen im Licht schwacher Kerzen, die unruhig flackerten, das Gesicht Unserer Lieben Frau, und das unserer toten Herrscherin gespenstisch aufleuchten; wir verbanden die beiden in einem mannhaften Bekenntnis zum hohen Ideal mittelalterlichen, christlich-abendländischen Frauentums." Joseph MEYERS, *Clairefontaine*, p. 448-449.

⁷³ "elle s'attacha à rendre ses peuples heureux" Jean BERTHOLET, *Histoire Ecclésiastique et Civile ...*, vol. 5, p. 56.

⁷⁴ "Während ihrer ganzen Regierung verfolgte Ermesinde einen doppelten Zweck, nämlich die Macht und den Glanz ihres Hauses zu vermehren und die moralische sowie die materielle Lage ihrer Unterthanen zu verbessern." Jean SCHOETTER, *Geschichte des Luxemburger Landes nach den besten Quellen bearbeitet*, p. 39.

⁷⁵ "Ermesinde war eine gütige und kluge Frau; das Wohl ihrer Untertanen lag ihr sehr am Herzen." Joseph MEYERS, *Geschichte Luxemburgs*, p. 58.

⁷⁶ Paul MARGUE, *L'image d'Ermesinde ...*, p. 312.

Charlotte had ascended to the throne at a difficult time for the monarchy. Her sister, Marie-Adelaide had ruled during the First World War, but the latter's alleged pro-German stance made her position untenable and she had to abdicate in 1919. That year was marked by many political uncertainties. The survival of the country's independence came under question, as did the form of government. Attempts at a socialist revolution erupted and were put down. In a general referendum the population then opted for national independence with a new grand-duchess as ruler.⁷⁷ Her position remained precarious despite popular approval. Social unrest continued during the first years of her reign,⁷⁸ her very young age and political inexperience an initial hindrance. Nonetheless, over time and especially after the Second World War, she managed to secure a practically unchallenged acceptance, having become a figure in which the country celebrated its tenacity in the struggle for freedom.⁷⁹

The link established between Ermesinde and Charlotte can be perceived on different levels. It appears most deliberately constructed in 1936, during the 700th anniversary of the first town enfranchisement handed to Echternach. The occasion was celebrated in that very town with great pomp. The high-profile guest list included the grand-duchess, the president of the parliament and members of the government, Belgian and French diplomats, local worthies, a number of mayors from other towns and representatives from areas once under the dominance of the counts of Luxembourg.⁸⁰ The length of the list and the origin of its members are telling. The celebration clearly not only had a local importance, but was endowed with a national character. The presence of a long list of mayors not only underlines this, but also once more indicates the liberal, 'franchising' tendencies of her image. The absence of any German delegation was no coincidence and also hints at the Francophile aspect attributed to the countess. At the same time, the envoys from 'formerly-Luxembourgian' localities reflect that it was also a commemoration of a past grandeur and territorial enlargement. However, the central character was the monarch. The speech of the mayor was full of praise for Ermesinde, but finished

⁷⁷ For the historical background, see: Christian CALMES, *L'étrange référendum du 28 septembre 1919*, Luxembourg, 1979.

⁷⁸ See: Christian CALMES, *Gründung und Werden eines Landes. 1815 bis heute*, p. 490.

⁷⁹ Paul MARGUE, *Grande-Duchess Charlotte*, p. 124.

⁸⁰ Stadt Echternach's siebente Jahrhundertfeier der Überreichung der Freiheitsurkunde, in: *Luxemburger Wort*, 27/07/1936, p. 4.

with triple acclamation of the modern day ruler. In his speech, Prime Minister Joseph Bech began by extolling the peaceful and democratic character of Ermesinde's reign: the charter of enfranchisement was not issued as the result of a popular revolt, but on the initiative of the countess. Again he finished by creating a link to the present, expressing how "wonderful" it was that the newly inaugurated plaque unites the name of Ermesinde and that of Charlotte.⁸¹

In the name of our country, I can only confirm the profound sense of this link and relationship: that today as well, in these severe times, our princess only lives for the good of the country! She is our best charter of enfranchisement and the guarantee so that we remain what we are: a free country, a country of freedom!

The passage contains two main ideas. Firstly, that at both the beginning of Ermesinde's reign and at the present moment the country lived through phases of hardship. In the former case the potential loss of the county to 'outside' rulers, such as Otto of Burgundy,⁸² certainly had come to the speaker's mind.⁸³ In the latter case he may have referred to the possible danger in an increasingly volatile international situation, marked by the rise of fascist regimes in Germany and Italy, and the only recently commenced Spanish civil war. Part of it may also have been the perception of an atmosphere of danger, used as a pretext one year later by Bech in his attempt to ban the Communist Party.⁸⁴ Secondly, he expressed the hope that yet again the ruler would save the people with her goodwill. Charlotte is presented as a modern-day incarnation of Ermesinde – as her uncontested successor.

⁸¹ A German summary of the speech had been published in: *Ibid.*, p. 4-5; for the original Luxembourgian version of his speech see: 700. Jahrfeier in Echternach, in: *Luxemburger Wort*, 28/07/1936, p. 4.

⁸² Otto, Count of Burgundy and fourth son of Frederick Barbarossa, was put in charge of Luxembourg by Emperor Henry VI after the question of succession arose after the death of Ermesinde's father, Count Henry IV.

⁸³ See the earlier parts of his speech: Stadt Echternach's siebente Jahrhundertfeier der Überreichung der Freiheitsurkunde, in: *Luxemburger Wort*, 27/07/1936, p. 4.

⁸⁴ See: Gilbert TRAUSSCH, Il y a cinquante ans ... le "Maulkueref", in: *d'Letzeburger Land* 23, 1987, p. 8-9.

The ceremony also saw a historical parade with the early thirteenth-century rulers and their guards in medieval costume, followed by a re-enactment of the issuing of the charter. Interestingly the dressed-up countess handed the charter's replica not to the townsmen of Echternach, but to the grand-duchess, as the representative of all the people of Luxembourg.⁸⁵ The moment illustrates the transfer of the civic element to the national level, or further a monarchical one. In addition it again presented the modern day ruler as an inheritor of Ermesinde's philanthropy and kindness; the medieval ruler placing the well-being of her subjects into the hands of her 'successor'. It is doubtful that the civic dignitaries were aware of the irony of their actions.

At yet another moment of the ceremony, the bard Isi Comes performed one of his pieces, specially crafted for the occasion.⁸⁶ He placed the content of the speeches into a more romantic tone: again the countess is celebrated for the freedom and peace she brought; she is then applauded by her subjects who have gained their liberty:

And as if on command, the hands to the heavens they raise:
Our noble Queen, long, long shall she live,
Our countess of peace, who God leads,
so she rules land and people for their good!
Never shall that name go into oblivion,
Her and her House keep in your Grace!⁸⁷

In this passage the ambiguity as to whom really is addressed is important. On one level the medieval subjects applaud their countess. On another, the link to the contemporary grand-duchess can be perceived in the reference to the good monarch and by mentioning "her House". Although technically not a direct descendant of the medieval dynasty, there had been many attempts at presenting the contemporary

⁸⁵ See figure 22 (Appendix 3).

⁸⁶ Isi Comes, *De Fraibre'if vun der Greewin Ermesindis vu Letzeburech un l'Echternach, 1236. Festgedicht*, in: *7^e Centenaire de la Remise de la Charte d'Affranchissement à la Ville d'Echternach par la Comtesse Ermesinde le 26 Juillet 1936. Programme des fêtes.*

⁸⁷ "A we'i op Urder t'Hänn ge'int Himmel si erhi'ewen: / 'Ons i'edel Kinnigin, lânt, lânt soll sie li'ewen, / Ons Friddensgreewin, de'i de Härgott fe'er, / dass Land a Vollek sie zum Gléck reje'er! / Nie soll deen Nu'em an de Vergi'eß geroden, / Sie an hirt Haus erhâl an dénge Gnoden!"

dynasts as such.⁸⁸ On a third level, the passage is also an oblique invocation to Our Lady. The raising of the hands towards the heavens can be seen as a first indication, but so is the address of “Queen”, which is almost unsuitably elevated for the countess. Furthermore the title of “countess of peace” (*Friddensgreewin*) resembles closely “queen of peace” (*Friddenskinnigin*), yet another name for the Virgin and used in one of the traditional chants in the local dialect, traditionally sung during the Spring pilgrimage (*Octave*) to the statue of Our Lady in the capital.

The link between Ermesinde and Charlotte survived the celebration. When Camille Wampach attempted a new scientific re-edition of the medieval charters, he started the project in the Merovingian period, unlike Würth-Paquet. Nonetheless, his volume that includes the charters from the times of Ermesinde is, unlike the previous one, specifically dedicated to the then ruler Charlotte. He even explicitly linked the two leaders and hoped that “Ermesinde’s genius should rule over her country and her noble successor”.⁸⁹ Again the statement also reflects Wampach’s very positive view of the countess, probably not much different in its connotations from that of his predecessors. In 1954 Joseph Meyers introduces his biography of Ermesinde pondering about her relationship with the small territory, the feeble sex and how female rulers managed to overcome great dangers.⁹⁰ The generalising character of his remarks leaves it ambiguous as to whom exactly he refers, but they seem to imply once more a parallel between the reigns of both figures. Even as late as 1990, the historian Gilbert Trausch published a short pamphlet with the biographies of Ermesinde and Charlotte presented in parallel.⁹¹ He justifies his attempt by pointing out that “at two important moments in the history of Luxembourg – but seven centuries apart – two women have by their presence alone, weighted decisively, but inadvertently on the destiny of the country.”⁹² The date of publication coincides with

⁸⁸ See also my chapters on Melusine and John of Bohemia.

⁸⁹ UQB, vol. 2, p. 16.

⁹⁰ “La plupart de nos princesses régnantes ont été des femmes de grande valeur (...) La petitesse de notre territoire, qui était symbolisée en quelque sorte par une personne du sexe faible, grâce à celle-ci cessait d’être un danger ; elle devenait une force, d’un genre sans doute spécial, mais qui n’en déterminait pas moins les voisins puissants du Luxembourg à user à l’égard de celui-ci, plus d’une fois, et à son profit, d’une mesure particulière.” Joseph MEYERS, *Ermesinde 1186-1247*, p. 3.

⁹¹ Gilbert TRAUSCH, *Ermesinde et Charlotte. Deux grandes souveraines du Luxembourg*, Luxembourg, 1990.

⁹² “A deux moments importants de l’histoire du Luxembourg – mais à sept siècles de distance – deux femmes ont, par leur seule présence, pesé de façon décisive mais inattendue sur le destin du pays”

the fifth anniversary of the grand-duchess's death and the erection of a large bronze statue in her honour in the centre of Luxembourg City. Both factors may have contributed additionally, though maybe subconsciously, to the author's choice of subject.⁹³

The perceived parallel between both monarchs may also have been aided by their physique. As commonly pointed out, the only 'contemporary depiction' of Ermesinde is the image on her seal: a slim, elongated woman in a long robe, holding a sceptre and wearing a *fillet* on her head.⁹⁴ Although a stereotypical feminine depiction with the aim of representing the holder's power and standing, the image was long accepted as a faithful illustration of the countess.⁹⁵ As a result, almost all representations of Ermesinde tried to imitate the female shape on her seal.⁹⁶ Charlotte was fortunate enough to have grown into that exact shape of a feminine ideal.⁹⁷ Together with what was perceived as a natural elegance and a distinguished kindness,⁹⁸ the grand-duchess thus fulfilled the attributes associated with her medieval counterpart on a personal level, a fact that most certainly facilitated a comparison of the two rulers.

The relationship that was manufactured between Ermesinde and Charlotte was intended, especially in the 1930s, to establish a parallel between the contemporary event and the Middle Ages. As a result the monarch becomes more than a simple successor, but the heir of country and nation. This not only adds to the grand-duchess's legitimacy, which as we recall was not uncontested at the start of her rule in 1919, but also promotes the idea of a continuous existence of the nation, with both reigns as crucial moments in its historical development.

Generally speaking, the nationalist view on Ermesinde combined different strands of tradition, producing a multi-layered image of the countess. They were held

⁹³ I am grateful to Gilbert Trausch for elucidating the background of that publication to me. The choice of its topic was indeed his own and not imposed by the editor, the "Banque du Luxembourg". Likewise he claimed not to be aware of a direct influence of any of the current anniversaries on his pamphlet.

⁹⁴ See figure 23 (Appendix 3).

⁹⁵ See for instance: Thodore ZENNER, *Ermesinde ...*, p. 27; Camille-Jean JOSET, *Ermesinde (1186-1247). Fondatrice du Pays de Luxembourg*, p. 78.

⁹⁶ One of the best examples is her representation in the stain-glass window in the cathedral of Luxembourg. See figure 26 (Appendix 3).

⁹⁷ See figure 24 (Appendix 3).

⁹⁸ Paul MARGUE, *Grande-Duchess Charlotte*, p. 125.

together by their focus on the territory of the grand-duchy and its monarch. In this respect they were entirely different from the images of the countess that persisted across the border in Belgium.

A shared memory

The Belgian Revolution (1830-39) led to a splitting of the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg, a fate it shared with the province of Limburg to the north.⁹⁹ In the case of Luxembourg the agreed division was to take place along the linguistic border; accordingly the French speaking area joined the new kingdom of Belgium as the 'Province of Luxembourg', leaving the Germanic part under the dominance of the Dutch king again as a de jure independent grand-duchy. An exception was made for the Germanic-speaking region of Arlon; since the region was so loosely populated that no other urban settlement in the area was believed large enough to function as a provincial capital, it too was to become officially Belgian.

At the time of the Belgian Revolution the smelting of ore still only had a minor economic impact and mainly took place in small private foundries.¹⁰⁰ One of these belonged to François Simonet in Clairefontaine, whose father had acquired some parts on the site of the former monastery. When it was clear that Clairefontaine would be (re-)allocated to the grand-duchy, Simonet was afraid that the shrinking iron market would expose him further to the competition in Eich and Septfontaine. Together with a couple of other local industrialists, he turned to a friend, the influential Belgian(-Luxembourgian) politician Jean-Baptiste Nothomb (1805-1881), who had been born in the area.¹⁰¹ It is claimed that as a result the border was 'adjusted' so that the location became part of the Belgian kingdom.¹⁰² Simonet's action was to no avail. The industrialist had failed to foresee that his remoteness from the main Belgian routes of transport and the rise of the large industrial foundries would ultimately lead to his rapid financial downfall.

⁹⁹ Christian CALMES, *Gründung und Werden eines Landes. 1815 bis heute*, p. 351.

¹⁰⁰ From the second half of nineteenth century on, iron was the substance that primarily fuelled the economies of Lorraine and Luxembourg for over a hundred years. See appendix 1.

¹⁰¹ Gilbert TRAUSCH, Jean-Baptiste Nothomb et la question du Luxembourg, p. 34-51.

¹⁰² Adolphe BELOT, Grenzziehung von 1839-1843, p. 26; Nicolas KAYSER, *Clairefontaine*, p. 54; Jean-Pierre MANDY, *Clairefontaine ...*, p. 159.

Clairefontaine was to remain within the Belgian State, whereas the villages immediately to its east remained with the grand-duchy. However, the cultural divide was not as clear-cut as the political border. While the Jesuits had acquired parts of the abbey and constructed a chapel and a country house, a group of Dominican sisters bought the remains of Simonet's old factory in 1882. After some struggles with the local population, they left for Luxembourg four years later.¹⁰³ In 1889 a congregation of Sacred-Heart Fathers took over the buildings and established an apostolic school. Again, they tended to emphasise the frontier character of the location. The founders of the local community were Father Jacques Herr, a Frenchman with Luxembourgian origins, and his German disciple.¹⁰⁴ The vast majority of the congregation was recruited from Luxembourg and Germany, and likewise their school was attended by pupils from diverse origins.¹⁰⁵ Although on Belgian territory, the convent also has an official Luxembourgian postal address; although within the ecclesiastical province of Namur, the local friars have regularly acted as parish priests across the Luxembourgian border, amongst others in Steinfort. The expression of this ambiguous, or rather double character, of the location is at its clearest in the memory of Ermesinde.

As already noted the Jesuits managed quite successfully to organise a yearly pilgrimage to the *Notre-Dame du Bel Amour*, making good use of Ermesinde's memory to enhance the allure of these occasions. These pilgrimages certainly saw their pinnacle in 1947. The 700th anniversary year of her death was remembered, not in Luxembourg in February (the purported month of her death), but in Clairefontaine and Arlon, throughout spring and summer.¹⁰⁶ The anniversary was celebrated with processions, concerts, conferences and so on. The central element was a festive mass on 17 August with the coronation of the statue of Our Lady, followed later by a play on the life of Countess Ermesinde performed by about two hundred actors and singers in front of an audience of five thousand spectators.¹⁰⁷ The celebrations stood under the patronage of the Belgian Prince-Regent Charles, the Queen Mother

¹⁰³ Jean LENZ, *Clairefontaine 1889-1964*, p. 14-15.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 20. See also: See also : Jean LENZ, *Gründer und Gründung*, p. 132-140.

¹⁰⁵ Jean LENZ, *Clairefontaine 1889-1964*, p. 23-24.

¹⁰⁶ For the detailed programme see: *Clairefontaine 1247-1947*, Arlon, 1947.

¹⁰⁷ See: Jean-Marie KREINS, *Un épisode de l'expression de la foi ...*, p. 48-50; Joseph GROBEN, *Clairfontaine – Abbaye noble et mausolée princier. Commémoration du 750^e anniversaire de la mort d'Ermesinde (1186-1247)*, p. 4.

Elisabeth and the grand-duchess of Luxembourg, who also attended the celebrations with a large crowd from both sides of the border.¹⁰⁸ A recording and broadcasting of the events by Radio Luxembourg guaranteed an even wider attendance.¹⁰⁹ The subsidies came from both governments, although Belgium contributed about 5/6 of the required 300,000 Belgian francs.¹¹⁰ The religious service was led by bishops from a wider area and included the French bishops of Verdun and Metz. Likewise all three national anthems, Belgian, French and Luxembourgian, were played at the end of the day, leading thus the media to regard it as a celebration of the friendship between these three countries.¹¹¹

That the occasion should receive a glamorous attendance from Luxembourg should at this point come as no surprise. The high-profile Belgian approval and the choice of location on the other hand may appear rather odd. In Belgium Ermesinde never developed anything comparable to the national importance and symbolism she did for the eastern neighbour. Nonetheless, she represents a *lieu de mémoire* for the region, albeit that the latter was imprecise in size. The tone of the occasion was thus very different from the ‘national’ celebrations in Echternach twelve years earlier. The jubilee provided the opportunity for a couple of publications, which shall illustrate the point: one by Michel Georis¹¹² and two landmark texts by Camille Joset,¹¹³ who was also responsible for orchestrating the celebrations.¹¹⁴ Georis writes a biography drenched in romantic language, reviving the existing myths such as the “democratic princess” and the miraculous vision; she is “mum of the people” (*maman du peuple*).¹¹⁵ The author leaves the strong impression that he sees himself as a descendant of these people. He calls himself “ardennais”,¹¹⁶ from the Ardennes,

¹⁰⁸ After the Second World War the King Leopold III was heavily contested because of his reaction to the German invasion in 1940, when he had refused to leave the country despite his government’s insistence. The king and his offspring thus remained in exile in Switzerland, until his eldest son Baldwin returned in 1950 to be take over the crown. In the meantime the realm was officially governed by the Prince-Regent Charles.

¹⁰⁹ Ermesinde-Feier in Clairefontaine, *Luxemburger Wort*, 19/08/1947, p. 4.

¹¹⁰ Jean-Marie KREINS, *Un épisode de l’expression de la foi ...*, p. 51.

¹¹¹ Ermesinde-Feier in Clairefontaine, *Luxemburger Wort*, 19/08/1947, p. 4.

¹¹² Michel GEORIS, *Ermesinde de Luxembourg*, Brussels / Paris, 1947.

¹¹³ Camille-Jean JOSET, *Clairfontaine*, Arlon, 1947; *Ibid.*, *Ermesinde (1186-1247). Fondatrice du Pays de Luxembourg*, Arlon, 1947. The former is practically a re-edition of his: *L’Abbaye Noble de Notre-Dame de Clairfontaine 1216-1796*, Bruxelles, 1935.

¹¹⁴ See: Ermesinde-Feier in Clairefontaine, *Luxemburger Wort*, 19/08/1947, p. 4.

¹¹⁵ Michel GEORIS, *Ermesinde de Luxembourg*, p. 47, 50, and 56.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

but his centre of attention lies further south “on the banks of the Semois”, i.e. around the town of Arlon.¹¹⁷ He thus seems to hold her up as a local ruler who should be remembered in the whole (Province) of Luxembourg. He compares the countess to her descendant John of Bohemia and concludes that the latter may well be “the most illustrious” of “our sovereigns”, but the former remains “the most loved”.¹¹⁸ The point clearly confirms that he identifies with a ‘Luxembourgian’ identity, but it remains ambiguous as to how this interlinks with the ‘national’ identity across the border. Although Joset does at no point refer to Georis, his biography of the countess may offer additional clues: he reminds the reader that the contemporary grand-duchy only represents a quarter of the *Pays de Luxembourg* and that beyond its border “there is still Belgian Luxembourg, a French Luxembourg, a German Luxembourg”.¹¹⁹ According to him the whole province from the upper Ardennes down to the region of Arlon has the consciousness of being Luxembourgian and its people would meet the “monopolistic claims” of their ‘grand-ducal’ “friends” with difficulties.¹²⁰ Throughout the book he tries to avoid the denomination of “County of Luxembourg” and uses “Pays de Luxembourg” wherever possible, which from a constructivist perspective implies that the author actually creates an identity rather than describing medieval affiliations. The “basis of the Luxembourgian soul” is the Catholic faith and a devotion to the Virgin;¹²¹ in consequence Ermesinde through her own devotion to Our Lady already qualifies as an archetype.¹²² It may be helpful to point out that Joset’s strong devotion was probably additionally nourished by his Jesuit affiliation. On the other hand, the ideas of both Georis and Joset have a precedent. By 1880 already, the well-known Belgian historian Godefroid Kurth (1847-1916) had published a brief note in the tomb of the countess on demand by a local who likes his “*patrie Luxembourgeoise*”;¹²³ and likewise he talks of Sigefroid as “the first of our counts”,¹²⁴ manifesting his own identification with the region.¹²⁵

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 10, 23 and 55.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

¹¹⁹ Camille-Jean JOSET, *Ermesinde ...*, p. 7.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² See: *Ibid.*, p. 12.

¹²³ Godefroid KURTH, *Le tombeau d’Ermesinde à Clairfontaine*, p. 5.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 8-9.

¹²⁵ Kurth had been born in Arlon in 1847. He was also one of the initiators of the “Verein für Rege und Pflege der Deutschen Mundart”, which aimed at a recognition of the German language spoken in

Interpreting these authors' stances as attempts to distance themselves from a Belgian identity would be too simplistic, neglecting the possibility for multiple identities. Likewise one should not be tempted to regard this as a willingness to join the grand-duchy politically. What they seem to express is their need for an additional regional identity, which links them both to a larger area and a concrete medieval past.¹²⁶ Among their *lieux de mémoire*, Ermesinde's Clairefontaine thus plays an eminent role, together with the veneration of the Virgin; as with many other cases, their contemporary importance is being transposed back into the past:

In front of the mausoleum of their great countess, the pilgrims, who during six centuries entered into the abbatial church of Notre-Dame of Clairefontaine acquired the sense that they were Luxembourgers.¹²⁷

It is also in this light that Joset's most influential terminological coinage is to be seen: Ermesinde as "the founder of the *Pays de Luxembourg*". The historic existence of Sigefroid is acknowledged, but in comparison to the national historiography across the border, his role is diminished: he laid the foundations, and since Ermesinde's father was more interested in Namur than Luxembourg, it was therefore not until her reign that the *Pays de Luxembourg* really came into existence.¹²⁸ On the one hand, the idea is nourished by the aforementioned trend in historiography to make her responsible for extending her sovereignty over new vassals. On the other, it is through her marriage that the March of Arlon comes under the dominance of the counts of Luxembourg, until firmly integrated into the Duchy of Luxembourg in 1353.

the region of Arlon as the third national language of Belgium. See: Jean-Marie TRIFFAUX, 1839-1989: 150 ans d'évolution linguistique en Pays d'Arlon, p. 28-29.

¹²⁶ Their attitude can therefore also illustrate the inability of most Belgian historians and politicians to create a common, national, past that starts before the rise of the Burgundian Low Countries. See my general conclusions for more on this.

¹²⁷ "Devant le mausolée de leur grande comtesse, les pèlerins, qui six siècles durant ont pénétré dans l'église abbatiale de Notre-Dame de Clairefontaine, ont pris conscience qu'ils étaient luxembourgeois." Camille-Jean JOSET, *Ermesinde ...*, p. 75.

¹²⁸ Camille-Jean JOSET, *Ermesinde ...*, p. 9-10.

It may be unnecessary to point out that the individual historiographic traditions never exist independently of each other, but that there is generally a certain amount of cross-pollination. Joset's idea of the 'founder' was adopted across the border, although when looking closely one could argue that it has been receiving more of a mixed welcome. While some authors have acknowledged the possibility of recognising her as a 'founder of Luxembourg' without being very definite on the subject, others seem to have more problems.¹²⁹ The traditional standing of Sigefroid led to Joset's term being most widely integrated under the form of "second founder" of Luxembourg.¹³⁰ Rather than sharing Joset's point that Ermesinde amassed the different constituent territories, this viewpoint holds that the territory had almost been lost after the death of Henry IV and was then regained by his daughter. Rather than representing a 'founder', she stands as the warrant for the survival of the territorial integrity.¹³¹ This furthermore implies an aspect of continuity to which we shall come back in the following section. An exception to the rule may constitute the author Lex Roth, who is famous for his nationalist stance. Ermesinde appears to him as the main figure responsible for the survival of Luxembourg and therefore also the true origin of all subsequent glories.¹³² His argument is above all a rhetorical one: since Ermesinde is at the origin of the State of Luxembourg, he denies the existence of any national Belgian interest in keeping her memory alive. As a result it should also be the role of the Luxembourgian State to take care of her tomb and the whole of Clairefontaine.¹³³ Thus the differences on both sides of the border existed not only in relation to the perception of time, but also space. In the nationalist perception, the Province of Luxembourg was part of the lost territories, leaving the grand-duchy as the only true remnant.¹³⁴ Whereas Joset perceived himself as part of a people sharing the same 'Luxembourgian' consciousness across several national borders, the dominant view in Luxembourg has focused not on the people but on the land: not the

¹²⁹ See for instance: Joseph GROBEN, *Clairfontaine ...*, p. 4; or: Lex ROTH, *Ermesinde ... vu Stengefort?*, p. 21.

¹³⁰ See for instance: Léon N. NILLES, *Ermesinde V-Fau des SD*, p. 11. See also: Michel MARGUE, *Aux origines de l'Etat luxembourgeois. Le gouvernement de la Comtesse Ermesinde*, p. 8.

¹³¹ Jean SCHOOS, *Le développement politique et territorial du pays de Luxembourg dans la première moitié du XIII^{ème} siècle*, p. 136.

¹³² Lex ROTH, *Ermesinde? Abbee jo!*, p. 33.

¹³³ Lex ROTH, *Ermesinde ... vu Stengefort?*, p. 21.

¹³⁴ Guy THEWES, *Les trois démembrements*, p. 35-37.

potential ‘brothers and sisters’ living in another state, but the destroyed territorial integrity.¹³⁵ Although irredentist calls for a ‘return’ of the province to the grand-duchy in its totality were practically non-existent (also for economic reasons), the situation is slightly different for the specific location of Clairefontaine. One author suggested that probably no one would object if the State of Luxembourg attempted to acquire at least parts of the location, assuming sufficient compensation.¹³⁶ In 1996 again, the wish for annexation of the “few acres” was expressed.¹³⁷ A different proposal asked for the repatriation of the bones to the cathedral of Luxembourg.¹³⁸ These attitudes mainly reflect the opinions of a few individuals; nonetheless they are rarely vehemently opposed in the press, which may indicate tacit approval.

Belgian opinions on the topic differ and mainly ask for a common sovereignty over the territory. The Belgian writer Pierre Nothomb (1887-1966), grand-nephew of the politician Jean-Baptiste Nothomb, made one such call in 1947, suggesting also that John of Bohemia should be reburied here as the king himself had wished in his testament, so to shape Clairefontaine as a common *lieu de mémoire* for a wider Luxembourgian identity.¹³⁹ Whereas Nothomb’s ideas can be set in the context of both post-war striving for peace and the momentary celebration of Ermesinde’s anniversary and Belgian-Luxembourgian friendship, more recent similar projects embed themselves into a European context and that of the Greater Region.¹⁴⁰ One of the envisaged art projects for the year 2007, when Luxembourg and the Greater Region received the status of European Capital of Culture, attempts to create the “Free Republic of Clairefontaine” from May until December 2007. According to the organisers the project is meant both as a reaction to the “absurdity

¹³⁵ Ibid. N.B. From a nationalist Belgian perspective, it is of course the grand-duchy that was lost to the Dutch king.

¹³⁶ Adolphe BELOT, *Grenzziehung von 1839-1843*, p. 26.

¹³⁷ Lex ROTH, *Mise au point ... ou au pilori*, p. 27.

¹³⁸ Although published in a satirical magazine, the suggestion appears only semi-ironic in its context; see: Gräfin Ermesinde, in: *De neie Feierkrop*, 9/09/1994.

¹³⁹ Pierre NOTHOMB, *Les tombeaux de Clairefontaine*. This stands somewhat in contrast to his position after the First World War, when he had lobbied in Paris for the plain annexation of Luxembourg by Belgium; see: Gilbert TRAUSSCH, *La stratégie du faible. Le Luxembourg pendant la Première Guerre mondiale (1914-1919)*, p. 71.

¹⁴⁰ The Greater Region (*Grande-Région*) around Luxembourg varies depending on definition. The first attempt in the area was formed by the Saarland (D), Lorraine (F) and the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg and imposed itself under the name of Saar-Lor-Lux. More areas have joined so that since 1985 it encompasses the entire Wallonia (incl. the German speaking community of Belgium), Lorraine, Saarland, and Rhineland-Palatinate. It is this later definition of the Greater Region that received the European Cultural Capital status in 2007.

of the notion of frontier as such” and the constant debates about Ermesinde’s last place of rest.¹⁴¹ The ‘republic’ questions the components of the nation-state, endowing itself with a flag, coat of arms, anthem,¹⁴² passports and a foundation myth involving Ermesinde.¹⁴³ In addition, the form of republican government it promoted was at odds with the mainly pro-monarchic tendencies she had been associated with so far. However, at the same time the art project can be seen in line with the liberal tradition that Ermesinde has been symbolizing: the idea of a democratic princess. Finally, the fact that a project with this agenda centres on the location of Clairefontaine and the medieval countess confirms once more their *inter-national* character, thus fitting well into the schema of the European Capital of Culture in general and its 2007 concept in particular.

This international character given to the location also emerged from the developments taking place during the 1990s. By February 1994, the coffin with the bones of the countess had vanished from the sarcophagus. A year later they were handed to the local Sacred-Heart congregation, and after some major refurbishment to the chapel, they were reburied there on Whit Monday 2000. The exact details of the events probably make an exciting mystery story, but are of less interest to our purpose here.¹⁴⁴ What is of more relevance is why the remains of countess had been stolen in the first place and the reactions that followed.

The people responsible for her disappearance remain unknown, but they most likely came from the grand-duchy. The chapel and its contents had not attracted much interest for several decades and their condition had decayed over time. By 1992, Roger Thill from Steinfort, right across the border from Clairefontaine, complained about their desolate state in a letter to the editor of a major Luxembourg newspaper,¹⁴⁵ but he received only a little moral support. He seems not to have been the only one feeling strongly about the state of the chapel, since the vanishing of the

¹⁴¹ Luc CAREGARI, Kropemann, le frontalier, in: *Woxx* 26/05/2006.

¹⁴² The anthem “Qui mëcht la guerre fait nët l’amour”, composed by Jean Portante, is a multilingual song mixing Luxembourgian, French and German words and playing with some traditional stereotypes about the inhabitants of the grand-duchy.

¹⁴³ I am indebted to Jerry Frantz for sending around this information by email.

¹⁴⁴ For a more detailed account on the events, see: Roger THILL, *Chronologie vun 3 Joër Ermesindegeschicht 1992-1995*, p. 191-193.

¹⁴⁵ Roger THILL, Eng „grouss“ Dame oder verspéit Allerséilegedanken, in: *Luxemburger Wort*, 14/11/1992, p. 23.

coffin seems to have taken place for that same reason: as a protest against the neglect of the countess.¹⁴⁶ It was only returned under the condition that it would be placed in a more worthy setting. Initially the incident saw a reaction of downright indifference, but since the moment was well chosen this was to change. The 750th anniversary of the enfranchisement of the town of Luxembourg in 1994 had led to a renewed interest in Ermesinde inside the grand-duchy. The occasion was celebrated with a large conference on her life and reign, public talks, an exhibition and the resulting attention of the media. In consequence the episode in Clairefontaine overlapped with a moment of heightened sensitivity slowly leading to reactions in the media on both sides of the border,¹⁴⁷ and also forcing political responses.¹⁴⁸ It is telling that the Luxembourg government took the initiative. After two years of planning and negotiating, it agreed to assure the complete renovation of the chapel, while the Belgian region of Wallonia agreed to sponsor some new archaeological excavations on the site.¹⁴⁹ The contribution required from Luxembourg was not wastefully extravagant, but it amounted nevertheless to between 12 and 13 million Belgian francs (now roughly equivalent to between 300,000 and 325,000 Euros) and illustrates the relative importance given to the project.¹⁵⁰

After these political guarantees, the body of the countess was handed to the Sacred-Heart congregation in 1996, in whose church she rested for a few brief years. In June 2000 on the day of the traditional yearly pilgrimage to the local statue of Our Lady, Countess Ermesinde was laid to rest once more, now in the crypt of the chapel in Clairefontaine. The ceremony was attended by political and religious dignitaries from both nations, including the Luxembourgian Minister of Culture. After a solemn mass in the church of the Sacred-Heart convent held in two languages, the coffin was

¹⁴⁶ See: Roger THILL, *Chronologie vun 3 Joër Ermesindegeschicht 1992-1995*, p. 192. More than one person has suggested to me that Roger Thill may have been involved in the disappearing; Mr Thill himself denies any such allegations and refers instead to a group of right-wing activists.

¹⁴⁷ See for instance: Roger THILL, *Ermesinde 1994*, in: *Luxemburger Wort*, 18/06/1994, p. 21; *Spurlos verschwunden. Wo sind die sterblichen Überreste der Gräfin Ermesinde?*, in: *Luxemburger Wort*, 29/08/1994, p. 4; and: *Ermesinde envolée. Mystère ou canular?*, in: *Arlon Carrefour*, 7/09/1994.

¹⁴⁸ See for instance: Jean ASSELBORN, *Ermesinde*, p. 29.

¹⁴⁹ See: Roger THILL, *Chronologie 1996-1997*, p. 211-213. According to Georges Calteux (the former director of the *Service des Sites et Monuments Nationaux* in Luxembourg) the initial promise of the Belgian authorities included a budget of roughly 45 million Belgian francs (equivalent to more than one million Euro) to be spent on a museum and a visitors centre on the site. In the end none of this was realised. I am grateful to Georges Calteux for sharing this information.

¹⁵⁰ Roger THILL, *Ermesinde 1994*, p. 21.

led in a procession down the road to the chapel, carried on a vehicle of the Belgian army covered with the national flag of Luxembourg and standing on those of Belgium and the European Union. The coffin was then set in front of the nineteenth-century sarcophagus, remaining covered with the flag of Luxembourg and a wreath with the same flag donated by the Luxembourg government.¹⁵¹ It is noteworthy that up to this day the national flag of Luxembourg stands next to the sarcophagus.¹⁵² It represents a further illustration of the ambiguous position of Clairefontaine as officially and uncontestedly on Belgian territory, but claimed also by Luxembourg, although in a cultural sense and because of the memory of the location. While the presence of any national flags must already appear as utterly anachronistic in reference to a medieval countess, the usage of the European Union flag is even more excessively so. However, it also demonstrates how the European level in fact offers a perspective that resolves the divergent needs across the border by integrating them into a larger framework.

The forgotten: Limburg

The princely balcony in the cathedral of Luxembourg covers the left side of the choir. It was added to the cathedral with the new choir during the major extension works of 1938/9.¹⁵³ Although the grand-ducal family has for many years preferred to leave its elevated tribune in order to sit closer to the altar and the people, it still remains in its possession and is closed to the general public. However, even when standing on the ground level of the choir, one can recognise the four sets of stain glass windows placed above it.¹⁵⁴ They depict the glorious medieval ‘Luxembourgers’ who shaped country and Europe, the first set starting with Sigefroid and the last one ending with Wenceslas I, son of John of Bohemia. The selection seems to have been based on two major criteria: first of all it reflects the traditional nationalist narrative that had emerged by then, starting with Sigefroid as

¹⁵¹ Les ossements ont été réintégrés dans la crypte rénovée, in: *La Voix du Luxembourg*, 13/06/2000, p. 3.

¹⁵² See figure 25 (Appendix 3).

¹⁵³ See: Simone WENY, *D’Kathedral*, p. 191 and 194-195.

¹⁵⁴ For a detailed description of the windows, see: Marcel OSWALD, *Die Fenster der Fürstentribüne im Liebfrauentempel von Luxemburg*, p. 164-179; and p. 196-211.

the founder and leading on to the grand rulers of the fourteenth century.¹⁵⁵ Secondly, in recognition to the setting, the choice is also a pious one, mixing in St Cunigunde, the daughter of Sigefroid, and the most influential clerical figures originating from the territory, the archbishops Baldwin of Trier and Peter of Mainz.

The second set is the most relevant here. It shows three counts: Conrad I standing on the left, Ermesinde in the middle window, with her son Henry V Blondel to the right.¹⁵⁶ The reason why Ermesinde was chosen should be clear by now; Conrad probably gained his place for founding the monastery of Altmünster, while Henry Blondel mainly figures here as the successor of his mother and a link to his descendants' imperial glories.¹⁵⁷ However, more important than who is depicted at this point is the question as to who is missing from the picture. The three apparent candidates are Ermesinde's father, Count Henry IV of Namur and Luxembourg, and her two husbands, Thibaut and Waleran. One could argue that despite Henry's very long reign, marked by extremely active politics, and that despite Thibaut's fundamental impact on the regaining of his wife's territorial heritage, neither of them created much of a dynastic tradition in the County of Luxembourg.¹⁵⁸ In the case of Waleran the situation however is very different: after all he was the head of a dynasty and, what has so far been neglected in all research, he was remembered as such among his successors. The imperial dynasty of "the Luxembourgs" identified itself with its Limburg ancestor and they were also perceived as 'Limburgs' by writers from outside the county, as shall be proven in the first part of this section.¹⁵⁹ The remaining parts will argue that despite the importance of this Limburg ancestry for the medieval counts, it was increasingly ignored, starting with Jean Bertholet, and replaced by a stronger historic role attributed to Ermesinde. The main reason for this was the aim of presenting a continuous narrative of local medieval history, starting with Sigefroid and ending with Ermesinde's last direct male descendants.

First let us turn to the medieval counts' perception of their own family. The dynastic rupture was marked by two symbolic political actions taken by Henry V

¹⁵⁵ See also my general conclusions.

¹⁵⁶ See figure 26 (Appendix 3).

¹⁵⁷ Count Henry VI remains in memory (if at all) as the loser in the battle of Worringen, thus being disqualified from these honours.

¹⁵⁸ See genealogy 2 (Appendix 2).

¹⁵⁹ A large part of what follows is based on the research undertaken for my unpublished MSc thesis on "Identity in Later Medieval Luxembourg" (University of Edinburgh, 2002).

himself. The first one is his adoption of the Limburg heraldic emblem: the red lion.¹⁶⁰ As a member of the cadet branch he added azure bars to the traditional argent background as a *brisure*, leaving the plain background to his elder half-siblings.¹⁶¹ The second action was the foundation of Clairefontaine Abbey.¹⁶² By establishing it as the dynastic place of rest, Henry openly broke with the tradition of Altmünster as created by Conrad I for himself and his direct descendants. It has even been noted that the location for this new monastic house was of symbolic value, being almost exactly on the border of his mother's territorial inheritance and the dowry handed to her by his father.¹⁶³

The identification with Limburg persisted for another few generations. Jacques Bretel described the tournament in Chauvency organised by Louis of Looz, count of Chiny, in 1285.¹⁶⁴ The tournament appears like one large family gathering, since the participating noble families – Looz, Avesnes, Luxembourg, Flanders, Ligny etc. – were all closely interrelated. The count of Luxembourg, Henry VI, grand-son of Waleran and Ermesinde, plays a prominent role at the gathering. He represents Chiny's powerful neighbour and leads one of the largest contingents of knights. Interestingly he and his entourage are not referred to as 'Luxembourgers', but as "Lamborgois", i.e. Limburgers,¹⁶⁵ and likewise their war cry is "Lambour"¹⁶⁶. This holds even true for the case of Waleran of Ligny. Although his territories were part of the French *mouvance* and held as a vassal of the count of Bar, he was a direct descendant of Waleran and Ermesinde. In consequence Waleran also fought within the Luxembourg ranks and not with one of the French groups.¹⁶⁷ The fact that his family ties were the dominant factor is also shown by his usage of the very same motto of "Lambour". The same can be perceived for another member of the same

¹⁶⁰ Jean-Claude LOUTSCH, *Origine des armes de la maison de Luxembourg*, p. 365.

¹⁶¹ This theory is contested by most older heraldicists and shall be discussed in more detail.

¹⁶² Michel MARGUE, *Les Tombeaux de Comtes de Luxembourg à Clairfontaine: Naissance et Affirmation d'un Lignage Princier*, p. 19 and 22.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹⁶⁴ Jacques BRETEL, *Le tournoi de Chauvency*. Edited by: M. DELBOUILLE, Paris, 1932. At the time Chiny was small county, bordering to the ecclesiastical principality of Liège on the west, the county of Bar in the south and the county of Luxembourg in the east. The county was taken over by the counts of Luxembourg under Wenceslas I of Luxembourg and Brabant.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, v. 77, 1115, 3340, 2682, 2919, 3472, 3823.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, v. 1859, 1884-7.

¹⁶⁷ A detailed, although slightly flawed analysis of the tournament can be found in: Heinz THOMAS, *Nationale Elemente in der ritterlichen Welt des Mittelalters*, p. 372-396; and: Juliet VALE, *Edward III and Chivalry. Chivalric society and its context 1270-1350*, p. 8-10.

generation using a completely unrelated source. Henry VI's sister Philippa had married John of Avesnes, count of Hainaut, and was buried next to him in the Franciscan convent in Valenciennes, like almost all their direct descendants.¹⁶⁸ Here her tombstone specifies that she was “born of Limburg”, not Luxembourg as one could suspect.¹⁶⁹ Another reason for cherishing the memory of the Limburg ancestry was that the dynasty had good reason to hope for a succession to the Duchy of Limburg, especially in the 1280s. In the end, the count of Luxembourg was opposed in this endeavour by the duke of Brabant, who won the decisive battle at Worringen in 1288, leaving Count Henry VI, his brother and his two half-brothers dead on the field. Contrary to what one would expect, Limburg remained an important reference point for Henry's descendants.¹⁷⁰

A generation later, the *topos* of Limburg reappears in the epos of the *Voeux de l'épervier* or *Vows of the Sparrowhawk*, a poem embedded in the *Chroniques de Metz*.¹⁷¹ The poem was probably written by Jacques of Languyon around 1313 and tells the tale of how Thibaut of Bar, bishop of Liège, joins Henry VII on his Italian expedition and died in Rome.¹⁷²

Thibaut died in Rome, with a Limburger,
Who was emperor, by the name of Henry,
Of Luxembourg was count and an eminent knight.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁸ See: Jean DUGNOILLE and Michel DE WAHA, Valenciennes et les tombes des comtes de Hainaut (1304-1417), p. 479.

¹⁶⁹ “Chy gist Philippe de Senée / Que jadis fut extraite & née / De Lambourg comme en recorde” as found in: Jean BERTHOLET, *Histoire Ecclésiastique et Civile du Duché de Luxembourg et Comté de Chiny*, vol. 6, p. 341.

¹⁷⁰ For the political contexts to the battle see: Jean-Louis KUPPER, Herzog Johann I. von Brabant und das Fürstentum Lüttich vor und nach der Schlacht bei Worringen, p. 87-98; Michel MARGUE and Michel PAULY, Luxemburg vor und nach Worringen. Die Auswirkungen der Schlacht von Worringen auf die Landesorganisation sowie die Territorial- und Reichspolitik der Grafen von Luxemburg, p. 111-174.

¹⁷¹ Jacques D'AIX, *Chronique de Metz*. Edited by: G. WOLFRAM as: *Die Metzger Chronik des Jaique Dex (Jacques D'Esch) über die Kaiser und Könige aus dem Luxemburger Hause*, Metz, 1906 (Quellen zur lothringischen Geschichte 4). The *Voeux de l'épervier* can be found, p. 18-59.

¹⁷² For an analysis of the context, see: Michel MARGUE, Der Kaiser und sein Bischof. Kaiser Heinrich VII. und seine “besten Ritter” im Epos der “Voeux de l'épervier” (kurz nach 1313), p. 253-278; Michel MARGUE, Les voeux sur les oiseaux. Rite chevalresque et culture courtoise, p. 159-163.

¹⁷³ “Tybaus fu mors a Romme, avec .I. Lembourgis / Qui emperers ert, si ot a non Henris, / De Luxembourg fut quens et chevaliers eslis.”

It clearly shows that the memory of the Limburg origin of the counts of Luxembourg was still alive in the second decade of the fourteenth century, when the poem was written. This can further be backed-up by the *Jugement du roy de Behaigne* (ca. 1330), in which Guillaume de Machaut describes his master's war cry as "Lembourc".¹⁷⁴ The latest known references to Limburg by a member of the dynasty is used by Henry VII's brother Baldwin, uncle of John of Bohemia. Baldwin (ca. 1285-1354) had become archbishop of Trier, a position that on the one hand enabled him to help support the family's imperial schemes and politics, but on the other proved annoying to his nephews whenever he defended Trier's territory or attempted to expand it. In the *Gesta Treverorum* he is introduced not as a member of the House of Luxembourg, but as a descendant of Waleran of Limburg, who is presented as father of the dynasty.¹⁷⁵ Interestingly, the reference is found in the same passage that describes the struggle between Luxembourg and Brabant for the succession of Limburg, culminating at Worringen. The counts of Luxembourg and their relatives certainly did not make any attempts at hiding what had been one of the most devastating defeats in battle. The fact that they even stressed their ancestral roots in this context suggests that the dynasty – now more powerful than ever before – had not given up its claims to the northern duchy. On the other hand, it is difficult to judge whether the reference should have been merely political in nature. Baldwin's identification with his Limburg ancestry went deep, as can be illustrated with the help of his epitaph. The line referring to his origins describes the archbishop as "Luczenburch, Lymburch (...) generatus".¹⁷⁶ Apart from confirming once more his ancestry's origin, it is actually one of only very few places using the name of 'Luxembourg' in reference to its dynasty. Indeed, the name of the territory mainly appears as such and joined to the title of the local count, e.g. "l'empereur Hanrey, quien de Luczembourg",¹⁷⁷ similar to the way the rulers appear in all administrative

¹⁷⁴ "Sire, s'enseigne / Crie Lembourc, et est roys de Behaigne, Fils de Henri, le bon roy d'Allemagne ..." Guillaume DE MACHAUT, *Le Jugement du roy de Behaigne*, ll. 1336-38.

¹⁷⁵ *Gesta Treverorum*. Edited by: Johannes H. WYTTENBACH and Michael F.-J. MÜLLER, *Gesta Treverorum integra*. vol. 2, ch. CCXXIV, p. 190. "Avus ejus eodem nomine Henricus, dictus Blondel, gloriosi domini ducis Walrami, ducis Limburgensis, filius noscitur fuisse...". Emil ZENS, *Die Taten der Trierer. Gesta Treverorum. Band V. Balduin von Luxemburg 11307-1354*, ch. CCXII, p. 16-17.

¹⁷⁶ Although the physical epitaph is now lost, its content is preserved in the *Gesta Treverorum*; see: W-M, ch. CCLIX, p. 271. The precise passage is missing in Zens.

¹⁷⁷ Jacques D'AIX, *Chronique de Metz*, ch. XXXVII, p. 304.

documents. Very rare are those occurrences where this general rule is broken, such as in the passage in the *Chroniques de Metz* where Henry approaches Rome and its citizens hail him with “Harrey de Lucembourg”,¹⁷⁸ while he then also uses the name of his territory as his war cry.¹⁷⁹

As demonstrated above, even John of Bohemia kept his Limburg ancestry in memory. After his marriage to Elizabeth of Bohemia however, the counts and dukes of Luxembourg generally appear in most narrative sources as “of Bohemia”. Again the *Chroniques de Metz* are symptomatic: throughout its different texts John is referred to as “king of Bohemia”,¹⁸⁰ and there is only one single reference that calls him “of Luxembourg”¹⁸¹. The same applies to John’s son “Charle de Bahaigne”¹⁸² and even his grandson who appears as “Wainchelas de Bahagne”¹⁸³, although in his case it is additionally specified that he was actually lord “du duchie de Lucembourg”¹⁸⁴, or as later “duc de Lucembourg et de Brabain”¹⁸⁵, but never simply as “de Lucembourg”. The last direct descendant in the male line, Emperor Sigismund, appears as “Symon de Hunguerie”.¹⁸⁶

Although the Limburg ancestry had most probably not been forgotten, it stopped being of much significance after the reign of John, mainly for two reasons. Firstly, the dynasty’s new lands and titles in Central Europe eclipsed their comparably mediocre origins in the West, reducing the worth of highlighting them. Secondly, the political question of Limburg had been solved by then. Even though Count Henry VI of Luxembourg had lost his life and any claims over Limburg to Brabant, only his grandson John of Bohemia settled the matter once and for all. For an enormous indemnity paid by Brabant, he renounced formally any claims made by him or his descendants.¹⁸⁷ Thereafter, recalling the Limburg ancestry did not promise

¹⁷⁸ Jacques D’AIX, *Chronique de Metz*, ch. VIII, p. 16.

¹⁷⁹ “ait Lucembourg s’ensigne rescrie” *Ibid.*, ch. IX, l. 378, p. 44.

¹⁸⁰ The spelling changes from “roi de Boeme” to “roy de Behaigne”, or even Latin “rex Boemi”; see: *Ibid.*, ch. XX, l. 247, p. 186; ch. XXII, l. 24, 100 and 211, p. 209; ch. XXV, § 15, p. 230.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, ch. XXV, § 14, p. 231.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, ch. XXXVII, p. 302.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, ch. XLVIII, p. 324.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, ch. XLVIII, p. 325. See also: *Ibid.*, ch. XXXVII, p. 302-303.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, ch. XXXVIII, p. 308; ch. XLV, p. 316.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, ch. XLVI, p. 317; with the possible variant “de Honguerie”. In ch. XXXVI, p. 302, he appears as “roy de Hunguerie”.

¹⁸⁷ Winfrid REICHERT, *Johann der Blinde als Graf von Luxemburg*, p. 178-179.

a major political advantage within the Low Countries anymore.¹⁸⁸ In fact, Charles IV cherished more his Brabantian ancestors (his father's maternal ancestry), since they allowed him to prove his Carolingian descent.¹⁸⁹

With an absence of both a local medieval chronicle and a dynastic tradition, within and outside the duchy, early modern historiography was forced to recreate a coherent account of the Luxembourg rulers. Richard de Wassebourg (†1567) seems particularly at a loss when it comes to pinpointing the dynastic succession, presenting differing alternatives. On the one hand he offers the possibility of seeing Ermesinde as the wife of first Thibaut, then Waleran.¹⁹⁰ On the other, he also presents a theory that has Henry V stemming directly from the first house of Luxembourg, being the son of Count Conrad III and Henry of Namur's sister.¹⁹¹ In the course of the events he battles with Thibaut of Bar for the supremacy of the county. It is however important to notice that in both his versions Ermesinde does not play an active role: it is her husband Thibaut who stands completely in the foreground. Jean d'Anly bases his account on Wassebourg, as marked in the margin of the manuscript, but rids it of the less plausible second theory.¹⁹² Again Thibaut is the central figure, who only occasionally is joined by "his wife". After his death Waleran took Ermesinde as his spouse, and after his own death, their son Henry "took the title of Luxembourg during the life-time of Ermesinde, his mother".¹⁹³ She plays a role in the background of the political stage and represents a passive means of politics rather than an active protagonist. Based on Wassebourg and d'Anly, Jean Bertels's account (1605) stands as no exception to this narrative either.¹⁹⁴ Was this because the male chronicler of the

¹⁸⁸ Maybe one case that would deserve a closer attention in future research is Wenceslas, duke of Luxembourg and Brabant, who as such also ruled Limburg.

¹⁸⁹ Eugen HILLEBRAND, *Vita Caroli Quarti. Die Autobiographie Karls VI*, p. 39 and 80.

¹⁹⁰ Richard DE WASSEBOURG, *Premier Volvme des Antiquitez de la Gaule Belgique, Royaulme de France, Austrasie, & Lorraine. Avec l'origine des Duchez & Comtez, de l'ancienne & moderne Brabant, Tögge, Ardenne, Haynau, Mozelane, Lotreich, Flandre, Lorraine, Barrois, Luxembourg, Louvain, Vvaudemont, Iainuille, Namur, Chiny. Et autres Principautez extraites sous les Vies et Euesques de Verdyn, ancienne Cité d'icelle Gaule*, fol. 337v-338r.

¹⁹¹ Richard DE WASSEBOURG, *Antiquitez de la Gaule Belgique ...*, fol. 338r+v. His Conrad III is identical to the second Conrad, according to the established genealogy. The author saw the first count of that name as two distinct persons; see my chapter on Sigefroid.

¹⁹² Jean D'ANLY, *Recueil ou Abrégé de plusieurs histoires contenant les faitz & gestes des Princes d'Ardenne, spécialement des Ducs & Comtes de Luxembourg et Chinÿ avec d'autres entremesléz, dignes de memoire & remarquables*, fol. 30r.

¹⁹³ "Henry (...) print le tiltre de Luxembourg du viuant d'Ermenson sa mere" Jean D'ANLY, *Recueil ou Abrégé de plusieurs histories ...*, fol. 34v.

¹⁹⁴ Jean BERTELS, *Historia Luxemburgensis seu Commentarius*, p. 66-70.

period simply could not envisage a powerful female figure? They certainly respected that male primogeniture took precedence over female descent and presented the succession of counts accordingly.

André Du Chesne (1584-1640) changed the perspective slightly. Unlike Wassebourg, for instance, he is not merely interested in the proper succession of rulers, but follows a more genealogical approach. His chapter headings thus also include those figures through which the territorial heritage is passed on. In consequence his chapter on the counts of Luxembourg also includes a long passage on Ermesinde the Elder, through which the territory entered into the family of Namur,¹⁹⁵ and finishes with a short passage on her grand-child Ermesinde, who passed it on to Limburg.¹⁹⁶ His book then spends a chapter on the entire lineage of the dukes of Limburg, including Waleran, then to continue with a chapter on “the Counts of Luxembourg and Lords of Ligny from the House of Limburg”¹⁹⁷. The structure of his account thus already carries a message that presents a dynastic rupture. At the same time he adds the potentially misleading comment that Henry V and his brother Gerard took the name (*urnom*) of Luxembourg because of their mother, leaving that of Limburg to the offspring of Waleran’s first marriage.¹⁹⁸ The sources that he adds to support his claim are nothing but charters confirming that the younger branch signs as counts of Luxembourg and the elder as dukes of Limburg.¹⁹⁹ What he is referring to is that the brothers inherited their mother’s lands, whereas Limburg remained in the hands of Waleran’s *primogenitus*. One could argue that with Du Chesne, the memory of the Limburg ancestry had resurfaced.

François Pierret (1673-1713) kept up the established tradition of focusing on the male rulers; he even went one step further and presents his countess as rather a weak figure. Although the chapter is named after Ermesinde, it is mostly an account of her husbands’ deeds, focused largely on Waleran. She starts off as a disinherited orphan, whom Thibaut takes into his care.²⁰⁰ After his death, it is the fear that her

¹⁹⁵ André DU CHESNE, *Histoire généalogique des maisons de Luxembourg et de Limbourg. Ivstifiée par chartes de diuverses Eglises, Tiltres, Histoires, & autres bonnes Preuves*, p. 31-37.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 39-41.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 87-88.

¹⁹⁹ See: *Ibid.*, p. 67 and p. 69.

²⁰⁰ François PIERRET, *Essay de l’Histoire de Luxembourg*. p. 141.

daughter would herself be disinherited that pushes her into the next marriage.²⁰¹ There is no mention of her during the description of Waleran's rule, succeeded then by that of their son. Although the author does mention that Henry ruled under her tutelage, she is again not mentioned in any of the unfolding events.

A strictly alternative version is created by Eustache of Wiltheim (1600-1678), a local nobleman who wrote about fifty years earlier than Pierret. Although certainly not the lengthiest of all accounts, Ermesinde actually constitutes the central protagonist, her husbands both having died after the first pages. A much larger emphasis is put on her widowhood, when she assured "the government of the County of Luxembourg".²⁰² There are probably two reasons as to why exactly Wiltheim changed tone so radically. The first one is rather scholarly in character and based on a reinterpretation of the administrative sources. Wiltheim is one of the first to mention Luxembourg's charter of enfranchisement from 1244.²⁰³ As president of the Provincial Council, he had access to the archives in Luxembourg and was probably aware not only of Ermesinde referring to herself as countess, but also of her issuing most documents at the time under her own name, rather than that of her son. The second reason is more ideological in nature. Wiltheim spent the first two decades of his life under the regime of the Archdukes Albrecht and Isabella. Here he experienced a princess ruling at the side of her husband and having a presence on the political scene. Even more importantly, Archduchess Isabella continued ruling the Southern Low Countries from the death of her husband in 1621 until her own in 1633.²⁰⁴ Wiltheim's image of Ermesinde's political widowhood was thus probably marked by the world of his own time. This also shows to what degree previous attitudes were based on an ideology that presupposed women unfit for rule, rather than a mere unawareness of the sources.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

²⁰² Eustache OF WILTHEIM, *Kurzer und schlichter Bericht und Beschreibung des Hauses, Schlosses und Landes Luxemburg sammt dessen Fürsten und Herren Ursprung und Herkommen was sich auch bei deren Regierung im gemelten und anderen ihren Landschaften verlaufen und zugetragen*, p. 577.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 578.

²⁰⁴ A detailed study of Isabella's rule during her widowhood is still lacking. For a recent study on the archdukes see: Werner THOMAS and Luc DUERLOO (ed), *Albert & Isabella. 1598-1621. Essays*, Brussels / Leuven, 1998.

In any case Wiltheim's view started to tip the balance: although Pierret did not tend to share his viewpoint,²⁰⁵ all other later writers did. At this point we arrive at the already mentioned Jean Bertholet (1688-1755). He did by no means ignore the impact of her husbands, with Waleran especially praised for his life-style and dynastic legacy.²⁰⁶ His true "heroine", however, was the countess.²⁰⁷ In complete contrast to Pierret's vision, Ermesinde is politically active, even during the life-time of her husbands,²⁰⁸ and during the minority of her son she proceeds in taking the reins over the Luxembourg domains herself, initiating all the policies for which she is praised in the subsequent centuries. Bertholet's choice was an extended variation on Wiltheim and had similarly founded motivations. His Ermesinde is to stand as a historic parallel for the idealised vision of the monarch that he writes for: Empress Maria-Theresa.²⁰⁹ Like Eustache of Wiltheim, Bertholet could well imagine a powerful female ruler: he was witnessing one in action. It is above all here that we find the roots for Ermesinde's absolutist approach to exerting power, her benevolence to her people as expressed in her enlightened, liberal policies and again her deep devotion to religion.

When a hundred years later the next synoptic views of a political history appear, many are influenced by Bertholet. As shown above, his presentation of her political deeds still fitted well into the current context. Furthermore, he provided the grounds for claims to an established tradition. Around the turn of the twentieth century, her contribution to a national narrative became an equally important factor; again Waleran had to lose out to her for this purpose. Although Jean Schoetter (1823-1881) continued to emphasise the rule of Ermesinde in comparison to her husbands, he still saw in Waleran the "founder (*Stammvater*) of the so powerful and glorious Limburg-Luxembourg dynasty".²¹⁰ Less than a generation later the phrasing changed in favour of Ermesinde who "by her union to Waleran of Limburg, (...) was the dynastic stem (*tige*) of our third dynasty of Luxembourg-Limburg, which was to

²⁰⁵ The memory of Archduchess Isabella as an active female ruler seems to have faded by Pierret's times.

²⁰⁶ See for instance: Jean BERTHOLET, *Histoire Ecclésiastique et Civile ...*, vol. 4, p. 315 and 374.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 410.

²⁰⁸ See for instance: *Ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 327 or 366.

²⁰⁹ Paul MARGUE, *L'image d'Ermesinde ...*, p. 312-314.

²¹⁰ Jean SCHOETTER, *Geschichte des Luxemburger Landes nach den besten Quellen bearbeitet*, p. 36.

have such brilliant destinies”.²¹¹ Herchen, who is quoted here, does acknowledge a succession of different dynasties, but it is important here to note how “Limburg-Luxembourg” changed into “Luxembourg-Limburg”. It is the latter name which remained almost exclusively in use in Luxembourg throughout the twentieth century.²¹² The dynastic double-name is clearly a historiographic invention without precedent in any medieval source, which as shown above emphasised the Limburg ancestry. Furthermore, the dynasty could technically even have been named ‘Limburg-Namur’, a thoroughly heretical thought in the age of nationalist history writing.

Neither Waleran nor the Limburg origins of the dynasty could be completely ignored and they are not missing from most historiographic sources. In the presentation and structure of these later accounts, however, Ermesinde comes first and her husbands or the name of the new dynasty only fill a second rank. Two closely related reasons helped to keep Ermesinde in memory and put Waleran into the background. By stressing the ‘Luxembourg’ side and neglecting the ‘Limburg’ ancestry, the dynasty is made a local one; it was integrated rather than presented as a foreign import. As a result the imperial glories and vast territorial powers of Blondel’s descendants became part of Luxembourg’s ‘national’ past, rather than merely the achievements of the younger branch of the House of Limburg. Secondly, the perspective allows Ermesinde to be presented as the joint between ‘national’ origins at the time of Sigefroid and its first great apogee under John of Bohemia.²¹³ By accentuating her role, the medieval history of Luxembourg becomes a continuous whole. The intended result is accentuated in material dedicated to a very general public; whereas historiographic texts predominantly attempted to leave some nuance

²¹¹ Arthur HERCHEN, *Manuel d’Histoire Nationale*, 1918: 37, 1972: p. 66. The 1918 edition even refers to the “second dynasty” instead of the “third”, presenting thus Ermesinde as a direct descendant of Sigefroid. See also the speech of Joseph Bech at the Echternach celebrations in 1936: “Du gouf sie d’Mamm vun der Familjen Letzebuerg-Limbuerg, déi dozou betsemmt war der ganzer Welt de Léiw vu Letzebuerg am däitsche Keeserfendel ze weisen.” 700. Jahrfeier in Echternach, in: *Luxemburger Wort*, 28th July 1936, p. 4.

²¹² See also for instance: Alfred LEFORT, *La Maison souveraine de Luxembourg*, p. 27; Camille WAMPACH, *Die Hohe Frau von Clairefontaine. Ermesindis, Gräfin von Luxemburg und Laroche, Markgräfin von Arlon (zu ihrem 700. Todestage)*, p. 6; or: Joseph MEYERS, *Geschichte Luxemburgs*, p. 62; interestingly Meyers does opt for “Limburg-Luxembourg” in his strictly academic writings, see: Joseph MEYERS, *Ermesinde 1186-1247*, p. 24.

²¹³ See my chapters on Sigefroid and John of Bohemia.

in their presentation, popular culture has been much blunter.²¹⁴ It is therefore also from this point of view that the cathedral windows need to be understood. Ermesinde links the dynasties of Conrad I and Henry V; Waleran would keep them apart.

Because of the uncontested Limburg origins of the heraldic red lion, heraldic scholars tended to be among the more affirmative groups in regards to the dynastic caesura. Yet, during the central decades of the twentieth century, the most prominent of their members tried to level out the break as well. The azure-argent barry they claimed were not a *brisure*, but inherited from the first line of Ardenne counts, or the counts of Namur respectively, and passed on through Ermesinde to her offspring.²¹⁵ The theory contains some major flaws. First of all, there are no local heraldic representations of any form before the reign of Henry V.²¹⁶ As a consequence, every claim about a possible heraldic figure remains speculation. Likewise there are also no known heraldic emblems for the House of Namur; for the reign of Henry IV none is known and the count had of course no male offspring that could have carried them on. Furthermore, one needs to wonder why the emblem of the counts of Luxembourg should have been passed to Henry Blondel via two female successions, bypassing the counts of Namur. The theory seems to be based more on wishful thinking than any solid scientific evidence. On the other hand, we notice that the theory is entirely in line with Ermesinde's role in historiography: she represents the connecting link between the two dynasties. As such, she not only saves the name of the dynasty and the territorial integrity of the lands from disappearance, but also the old heraldic symbols. The interpretation is entirely coherent, though only within the nationalist framework.

²¹⁴ See for instance the page on local history on the website of the Luxembourg City Tourist Office, which does not see any dynastic break whatsoever, http://www.lcto.lu/html_en/history/ (last visited: 26/09/2007): "Siegfried was present at the very birth of the House of Luxembourg, a dynasty which, during the 14th. Century and the first half of the 15th. Century, was to provide four Emperors to the Empire and four Kings to Bohemia."

²¹⁵ See: Louis WIRION, *La maison de Luxembourg et son blason*, p. 25; Louis WIRION, *Le Lion luxembourgeois à travers les âges*, p. 13; Jean-Claude LOUTSCH, *Origine des armes de la maison de Luxembourg*, p. 368; Jean-Claude LOUTSCH, *Armorial du Pays de Luxembourg*, p. 28-29.

²¹⁶ Jean-Claude Loutsch claims that a banner to be seen on the seal of Count William shows the stripes of a heraldic barry, and therefore proves that its origins are to be found in the House of Ardenne. See: Jean-Claude LOUTSCH, *Le cimier au dragon et la légende de Mélusine*, p 190. In my opinion the stripes are just a generic way of representing a banner on that very small seal, rather than presenting a heraldic device. If the latter were the case, it would represent one of the very first heraldic symbols in Europe!

At first sight, the use of ordinals after the comital names also seems to correspond with the attempts to wipe out the dynastic change. Again and as for all other regions in Europe, there is no medieval precedent, every count using only his name and title on charters, seals and coins alike. Only early modern historiography (and in consequence monarchs themselves) introduced them in order to distinguish between the individual rulers. In Luxembourg ‘Henry’ was the only name that reoccurred more than twice and for members of all three medieval dynasties.²¹⁷ It took until the start of the twentieth century for the current system to impose itself. This, however, was less due to historiographic manipulation, than to lack of knowledge. Bertholet saw in Henry of Namur the first count of that name in Luxembourg and in consequence Henry Blondel as the second.²¹⁸ Only at the end of the nineteenth century did one discover three earlier Henrys and the ordinals were corrected accordingly.²¹⁹ Nonetheless, the choice is in line with the general perception of local history: it starts with Sigefroid making his son Henry I, and it does not take into account dynastic breaks with the result of numbering Henry ‘IV’ of Namur and Henry ‘V’ Blondel.²²⁰

Conclusion

When trying to present a general analysis of Ermesinde’s memory imprint, one first needs to take into account variations over time. She only started to gain in historiographical importance with Eustache of Wiltheim and Jean Bertholet. Outside academic circles she only emerged as a popular subject in the decades around 1900, due to pilgrimages to Clairefontaine on the one hand, and her significance to the municipalities and the emergence of a national narrative in Luxembourg on the other. The peaks in Ermesinde’s popularity are formed by three anniversaries: 1936, 1947 and 1994-97. It is however noteworthy that these moments of high sensitivity are counter-pointed by the other extreme. In the period from 1912 to 1936, we see very

²¹⁷ The two Conrads were both members of the House of Ardenne; the two Wenceslas of the House of Limburg-Luxembourg (Namur).

²¹⁸ See: Jean BERTHOLET, *Histoire Ecclésiastique et Civile ...*, vol. 3, p. iv-viii.

²¹⁹ The earliest usage of the contemporary ordinals (known to me) can be found in: Jean SCHOETTER, *Geschichte des Luxemburger Landes ...*, Luxembourg, 1882.

²²⁰ In English history, for instance, the Norman Conquest marks a break after which the counting of kings started anew.

little of her and likewise for most of the second half of the twentieth century, which also parallels the decay of the chapel in Clairefontaine. From 1992 to 2000, and especially from 1994 to 1997, she again became omnipresent topic in public talks, the press and academic publications. Ermesinde has seen again a rather sharp decline in presence thereafter, principally because of strong competition from Sigefroid and John of Bohemia with regard to representing the medieval spearhead. Although still widely known among the population, she came behind these two in recent awareness polls.²²¹

The second variation happens in space: she has been representing a *lieu de mémoire* for the two Luxembourgs (the grand-duchy and the Belgian province). The style in which she is remembered however changes across the political border. In this respect we only need to compare the two ceremonies in 1936 and 1947. Whereas the first celebrated a national icon and firmly linked her to the monarch of that period, the second one was void of any nationalist tendencies, trying instead to locate itself in cross-border friendship. The former stressed the countess's political deeds; parades and speeches formed its central elements. The latter emphasised her religious sides, with the central moment a solemn mass in honour of the Virgin. Neither of the two traditions can be fully understood when ignoring the other and neither developed independently. At the same time, the shades of her character vary depending from where she is observed.

Historiography in the past twenty years has changed the perspective slightly. She is still central, as can be illustrated by the titles of the publications, but at the same time her two husbands receive more attention.²²² Similarly, her politics now tend to be placed in a more long-term context. For example, her urban politics are regarded more as a continuation of similar moves attempted by her father, rather than

²²¹ See: Ilres-Tageblatt Umfrage zur Luxemburger Geschichte, in: *Tageblatt*, 18/04/1989, p. 4; and: the poll commissioned by Fernand Fehlen and his the research project FNR/02/05/06 based at the University of Luxembourg, which was realised in November and December 2004. See also my general introduction and conclusions.

²²² The point holds true for publications focusing on Ermesinde; there are still only very few publications featuring her husbands as their central theme. Even an article on Thibaut by Michel Parisse (Thiébaut, comte de Bar et de Luxembourg, p. 161-177.) is part of a larger publication on Ermesinde. One aspect of Waleran's politics in Luxembourg has been analysed in: Michel MARGUE and Michel PAULY, *Das erste Spital in Luxemburg: Eine unerforschte Quelle zum Wirken Walrams von Monschau-Limburg und zur Geschichte der Stadt Luxemburg (1221)*, p. 15-42. A publication offering a wider view is still lacking; this criticism has already been voiced by Mike Richartz, see his: *Waleran de Limbourg (ca. 1165-1226) ...*, p. xviii and 138.

an innovative approach of her creation.²²³ In the same way ‘her’ monastic politics are increasingly attributed to her son. In addition Michel Margue has attempted to break the main “clichés” about her reign, by re-assessing her traditional roles as “founder of (...) Luxembourg”, “democratic princess”, “pious princess” and “French princess”.²²⁴ Although some elements of his perspective have already reached a wider audience,²²⁵ it is too early to gauge its long term impact on popular perceptions. Will the traditional views find renewed vigour, or will these new ideas even help to generate a new master narrative for the globalised world?

As seen Ermesinde’s place in the national historical narrative is that of creating a transition from the founding dynasty to the later Middle Ages. She provides the period with its unity and creates a continuity of progress; from the nationalist perspective, Luxembourg is supposed to have reached its first apogee in the fourteenth century. No-one embodies this better than the national hero, John of Bohemia, who shall be presented in the following chapter.

²²³ Michel PAULY, *Der Freiheitsbrief der Stadt Luxemburg: herrschaftlicher Machtanspruch oder bürgerliches Emanzipationsbestreben?*, p. 236-237.

²²⁴ Michel MARGUE, *Ermesinde, comtesse de Luxembourg ...*, p. 183-200.

²²⁵ See: Joseph ADAM, *Ermesinde, Gräfin von Luxemburg (1186-1247)*, p. 3-15.

CHAPTER 4

John of Bohemia: the national hero

In 1296, an heir was born to Count Henry VII of Luxembourg.¹ At the time the dynasty was still recovering from the disastrous battle of Worringen against Brabant (1288), which smashed hopes of acquiring the ancestral lands of Limburg and left an entire generation of male family members dead on the field, their bodies lost. The arrival of the child heralded the rise of a new, young and vigorous generation. Count Henry was only eighteen at the time; he would be elected King of Romans in 1308 at the age of thirty, facilitated by his brother Baldwin, archbishop of Trier from 1306 when he was around twenty years old. The son was named John after his maternal grandfather the duke of Brabant who had been the victor of Worringen.

After his appointment as king of the Romans, Henry installed his underage son as count of Luxembourg. The job as emperor elect offered further opportunities. Following the death of King Wenceslas III, the last Přemyslid, Henry decided to resolve the contested succession in the kingdom of Bohemia to the benefit of his own family. In 1310, John was married to Wenceslas's sister Elizabeth in Speyer and endowed with the lands of the Bohemian crown. Henry then left on his Italian journey, from which he would never return, and John made for his new lands in the East, where he had to impose his rule against Henry of Carinthia. His politics in Bohemia regularly saw fierce opposition from the local nobility, on whom John

* A summary of this chapter has been published as: Pít PÉPORTÉ, *Jang de Blannen*, p. 67-72. In 1997 Jacques Maas published an article that touched on many of the issues raised here: Jacques MAAS, *Johann der Blinde, emblematische Heldengestalt des luxemburgischen Nationalbewußtseins im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, p. 597-622.

¹ For the biography of John of Bohemia, see: Jean SCHOETTER, *Johann, Graf von Luxemburg und König von Böhmen*, 2 vols., Luxembourg, 1865; Raymond CAZELLES, *Jean l'Aveugle. Comte de Luxembourg, Roi de Bohême*, Bourges, 1947; Jiří SPEVÁČEK, *Král diplomat*, Prague, 1982; Michel MARGUE and Jean SCHROEDER (ed), *Un itinéraire européen*, Luxembourg, 1997.

never entirely managed to impose his own authority. After years of struggle, they merely established a *modus vivendi*. His position in Luxembourg received greater approval, but in all of his lands the nobility was increasingly involved in their administration and thus steadily increased in power. This process gained some momentum, initially because of the ruler's youth, but continued to do so because the extent of the ruler's holding meant that he was absent from individual territories for long periods.

Nevertheless, John's territorial and family politics saw regular successes: he added Silesia to the Bohemian complex, held Tyrol for a couple of years, consolidated and expanded the county of Luxembourg. He made use of a vast array of means, pairing diplomatic negotiations with the borrowing of money, creating pressure on neighbours through new castles, building a wide network of matrimonial alliances, buying rights and titles while mortgaging other lands and spicing it all with the odd campaign when required. In addition, practical politics was combined with the prestige that came from an enthusiastic indulgence in the chivalric way of life, which found its strongest expression in repeated participation in tournaments and his crusades against the Lithuanians. John never managed to repeat his father's feat and gain the imperial title, supporting instead Louis of Bavaria's election against the Habsburg candidate Frederick. Louis failed to live up to John's expectations and after he had regained some concessions made to the king of Bohemia for his support in the battle of Mühldorf (1334), John initiated his own imperial policies. He adopted the imperial privilege of intervening in Lombardy on two occasions and further established cordial ties with Pope John XXII in Avignon, very much in opposition to the emperor elect. These foundations and the large bribes pressed out of his territories helped in securing the imperial title for his son Charles IV (1346). John's royal title also enabled him to expand the dynasty's ties with the court in Paris. It is in his function as a vassal of the French crown that John of Bohemia died at the battle of Crécy in 1346, against Edward III of England, who won the day.²

² The name 'John of Bohemia' will be given preference over other forms. In Luxembourg the form 'John the Blind' has established itself, although this is a historiographic construct emerging only in the seventeenth-century (see below) and little used in other countries, except France and occasionally Germany. The Czech tradition prefers 'John of Luxembourg' (*Jan Lucemburský*), which can lead to confusion with the fifteenth-century count of Ligny, who won fame by capturing Joan of Arc in Compiègne. The form 'John of Bohemia' is preferred due to three reasons: it unmistakably refers to

Unlike most other figures so far explored, John attracted much commentary from his contemporaries. The first section of this chapter will therefore explore the medieval foundations of the modern *lieu de mémoire*. As we will see, most later images of John will be built on the two main types of medieval precedents: the chivalric hero and the high-tempered ruler. The second section will argue that John's tomb in the city of Luxembourg was an important factor in keeping his memory alive in Luxembourg, while at the same time it explores how the medieval king is presented by early modern history writers. The following sections show how John of Bohemia was used for political purposes: how he was presented as a Luxembourgian ruler and hero, held up as a symbol against the expansion of Prussia, and how he was attributed with a sense of Francophilia. Another section pursues this development up to the proto-European role he has been endowed with since 1996. Finally, a comparison with his 'forgotten' grand-son, Emperor Sigismund, will further help to clarify why John of Bohemia has received his standing in Luxembourgian collective memory, while the other had lost out.

The creation of the hero

In the early fifteenth century a long list of the greatest-ever knights was composed. The author was most probably the Bavaria Herald from the entourage of the Wittelbachs of Hainaut-Holland. The very first name to appear on this list is that of John of Bohemia.³ Even though the prince had been dead for about sixty years by that time, his name nonetheless still had denoted an exemplary knight and chivalrous prince.

John had cultivated this image already during his lifetime. His fondness of tournaments and the participation in the Teutonic crusade have already been mentioned. Furthermore he fostered the idea to recreate the Arthurian Round Table in Prague, a plan that failed.⁴ All of this was part of a lavish lifestyle and colourful

this one historic person; it is the dominant form in all medieval sources; it deliberately breaks with the traditional Luxembourg-centric view described in the ensuing pages.

³ Werner PARAVICINI, *Armoriaux et histoire culturelle. Le Rôle d'armes des "Meilleurs Trois"*, p. 361. One should however add that the list limits itself pretty much to the Low Countries and the Rhine region – there are for instance only two English knights on it.

⁴ See: Peter OF ZITTAU, *Chronicon Aulae Regiae*, p. 252.

display, an expression of knightly *largesse*. His patronage of literature – the medium that allowed chivalric deeds to be memorialised – can be placed into this context as well. *The Vows of the Heron* show how widely known John’s knightly image had already become during his own lifetime. During a feast at the English Court, he is referred to *in absentia*, but presented as a tough opponent for those who strive to prove their valour and worth. The earl of Suffolk pronounces an oath to go out and fight the king of Bohemia, defeat him and take his horse. John of Beaumont immediately steps up and claims that the earl could not possibly overpower the noble king, also because John of Beaumont himself would not allow it and side with the king against the earl.⁵ It was a number of such literary works that developed and perpetuated this facet.

Some of the earliest and most decisive literary accounts referring to John of Bohemia are those of Guillaume de Machaut (ca. 1300-1377), who served the king in several capacities. It is generally agreed that he entered John’s services in 1323,⁶ but little is known about the exact circumstances.⁷ He remained with the king until at least 1337⁸ and maybe until John’s death in 1346.⁹ With the hiring of Guillaume de Machaut, John was to prove himself fortunate. Not only did he make a career within John’s administration, but he also turned into one of the greatest poets and musicians of his time. It is doubtful that John could have foreseen the full talent of his clerk – although he turns up in documents with the titles of *clericus*, *notarius*, and later *secretarius*,¹⁰ he may in the end have mainly worked as a poet.¹¹

⁵ *Les Voeux du Hainon*, ch. VII, l. 289-314.

⁶ Albert PRIOULT, *Un poète voyageur. Guillaume de Machaut et la “Reise” de Jean l’Aveugle, roi de Bohême, en 1328-9*, p. 13; Kevin BROWNLEE, *Poetic Identity in Guillaume de Machaut*, p. 4; Frank KIRSCH, *Mécénat littéraire à la maison de Luxembourg*, p. 323.

⁷ Anne-Marie Pasquet supposedly identified Guillaume de Machaut’s complete background and had even detected the precise events that lead up to the first encounter between the future poet and the prince. (Anne-Marie PASQUET, *Chalette au cœur de l’histoire*, p. 34-5.) However, Antoine Thomas convincingly refuted all her arguments. (Antoine THOMAS, *Extraits des archives du Vatican pour servir à l’histoire littéraire*, p. 326-9.) Lawrence Earp thinks that John has probably paid for Machaut’s studies and that the latter entered the king’s services straight thereafter. (Lawrence EARP, *Guillaume de Machaut. A Guide to Research*, p. 12.)

⁸ Nigel WILKINS, *A pattern of patronage: Machaut, Froissart and the houses of Luxembourg and Bohemia in the fourteenth century*, p. 259.

⁹ Albert PRIOULT, *Un poète voyageur ...*, p. 13; K. BROWNLEE, *Poetic Identity in Guillaume de Machaut*, p. 4; Lawrence EARP, *Guillaume de Machaut. A Guide to Research*, p. 12.

¹⁰ Albert. PRIOULT, *Un poète voyageur ...*, p. 15; Lawrence EARP, *Guillaume de Machaut ...*, p. 9.

¹¹ Lawrence EARP, *Guillaume de Machaut ...*, p. 11.

Independent of Machaut's judgment on John, the latter must have had a very strong influence on the development of his protégé. One can assume that both the prince and the poet were of roughly the same age,¹² probably facilitating communication between the two. Given Guillaume's young age, John must have been his first patron and the period of patronage lasted during an important period of his life: from his mid-twenties to his (mid-)forties. Moreover he joined his patron on many of his long travels, most notably on John's crusades of 1327-9,¹³ which certainly had some impact on his personal and artistic development.

The two major literary pieces that Guillaume de Machaut composed under John's patronage were the *Dit dou Vergier*, dating from around 1330, and the *Jugement du roy de Behaigne*, written during the following decade.¹⁴ He continued to refer to John in his later writings, most of them written long after the king's death: a sign of the deep impact made by the prince. There are also other reasons for his enduring loyalty. The poet relied not only on the grants that he probably gained for his duties in princely services, but also on ecclesiastical prebends which John managed to procure for him using his close ties to Pope John XXII.¹⁵ Machaut retained some of these revenues until the end of his life and one can therefore imagine that he remained grateful to his former patron. Secondly, Guillaume never left the wider Limburg-Luxembourg family. After John's death, he entered the service of John's daughter Bonne, married to the duke of Normandy, the later King John II of France. After Bonne's death he changed service to Charles II of Navarre; thereafter spending his remaining years at the court of John, duke of Berry.¹⁶ Charles of Navarre was married to Bonne's daughter Jeanne, while John of Berry was himself Bonne's third child.¹⁷ It is obviously more difficult to judge what his motives were for staying close to descendants of John of Bohemia, but whatever the reason, his textual references to their common ancestor were certainly not unfavourable.

¹² We have quite precise indications for John's year of birth (1296); Guillaume de Machaut's is based on guesses.

¹³ Lawrence EARP, *Guillaume de Machaut* ..., p. 8.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹⁵ Albert PRIOULT, *Un poète voyageur* ..., p.15.

¹⁶ Kevin BROWNLEE, *Poetic Identity in Guillaume de Machaut*, p. 4.

¹⁷ See my chapter on Melusine for a more detailed analysis of John of Berry's perception of his maternal ancestry.

Guillaume de Machaut's way of presenting the king is structured around several chivalric virtues that John is associated with. On many occasions the author presents us with the image of an ideal prince, who embodies virtually all chivalric virtues to their full degree. This appears especially in the *Jugement du roy de Behaigne*. John is introduced as surpassing the Great Alexander in *largesse* and outdoing no less a figure than the archetypical Hector in prowess.¹⁸ The *Confort d'Ami* exalts him as the best king since Charlemagne, using another figure often regarded as one of the Nine Worthies. In the *Jugement*, John holds court at the castle of Durbuy, where he is surrounded by the sixteen virtues who stand readily available for the king's counsel and are described as his "household" (*maisnie*); although he only requests the advice of Loyalty, Love, Youth and Reason at this instance.¹⁹ In the *Prise d'Alixandre*, John's name is linked to honour, virtue, gentility, courage and generosity.²⁰ The poet also cites concrete examples displaying these qualities: on his expeditions John protected women from being raped by his men.²¹ In the *Confort d'Ami*, he concludes that in a state of mortal sin, John would not have rested and taken up arms until he had sought for and received divine pardon,²² so that in his *Fontaine amoureuse*, Guillaume could safely assume that God must hold John's soul in His good company.²³

At second glance we see however that some virtues reappear more frequently than others. A regular feature is John's generosity (*largesse*). This does not say anything about the prince's wealth as such, but Machaut makes it clear in the *Jugement du roy de Behaigne* that John is indeed wealthy by describing the opulent décor of Durbuy castle, and specifically pointing out the exotic "*tapis norrois*".²⁴ Nonetheless, John does not keep his riches for himself, but shares them out: his two guests at Durbuy are being hosted for a whole week and leave supplied with horses, suits of armour, jewels, gold and silver.²⁵ This contrasts with the *Confort d'Ami*, in

¹⁸ Guillaume DE MACHAUT, *Le Jugement du roy de Behaigne*, l. 1296-7.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, l. 1621-2 and 1990-5.

²⁰ "sonneur son bien sa gentillesse / son hardement et sa largesse" Guillaume DE MACHAUT, *La Prise d'Alixandre*, l. 787-8.

²¹ Guillaume DE MACHAUT, *Le Confort d'Ami*, ll. 3415-26.

²² *Ibid.*, l. 3430-2.

²³ Guillaume DE MACHAUT, *Le livre de la Fontaine amoureuse*, l. 143-4.

²⁴ Guillaume DE MACHAUT, *Le Jugement du roy de Behaigne*, l. 1970.

²⁵ "chevaux, harnois, joyaux, or et argent", *Ibid.*, l. 2037-40.

which John leads a rather ascetic lifestyle while on campaign: he is not interested in material goods, but in honour alone.²⁶ The gold and silver he accumulated in war are given to his men,²⁷ while he leads a simple life himself, refuses to eat any sophisticated dishes and decides to sleep uncomfortably.²⁸ Guillaume seems to preach here a similarly ascetic type of chivalry as Geoffroy de Charny, who urged knights to fast often and drink modestly, to sleep little and get up early and even to accept bad horses.²⁹ Both Guillaume de Machaut and Geoffroy de Charny present an ideal in the tradition of earlier Arthurian literature. In the *Queste del Saint Graal*, for instance, only the humble knights such as Perceval or Bors make it to the end of their journey, while all those with a more lavish lifestyle fail utterly.³⁰

While the *Jugement* briefly mentions John's prowess, the *Confort* actually presents a long list of his chivalric deeds in battle: he subdued a rebellion in Bohemia, he seized Frederick of Austria by his helmet in the middle of the battle of Mühldorf, he conquered Poland, rode from the "kingdom" of Krakow "*par les glaces*" to Lithuania and was victorious in Northern Italy.³¹ Historically, the author is not always entirely wrong, but overdid it slightly. One notices that the *Confort d'Ami* puts a particular emphasis on John's itinerant life, possibly nowhere better set in verse than in the following much quoted lines:

Follow the example of the good king of Bohemia
 Who in France and Germany,
 In Savoy and in Lombardy,
 In Denmark and in Hungary,
 In Poland, Russia and Krakow,
 In Masovia, in Prussia and in Lithuania
 Did venture to win glory and honour.³²

²⁶ "Briefment, il n'avoit d'argent cure, ne riens qu'onneur ne desiroit", Guillaume DE MACHAUT, *Le Confort d'Ami*, l. 2950-1.

²⁷ "Or, argent; riens ne retenoit fors l'onneur; ad ce se tenoit", *Ibid.*, l. 2931-2.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, l. 2957-66.

²⁹ Richard BARBER, *The Knight and Chivalry. Revised Edition*, p. 139; Michel MARGUE, Jean de Luxembourg, prince idéal et chevalier parfait: Aux origines d'un mythe, p. 15.

³⁰ *La Queste del saint Graal*. Edited by Albert PAUPHILET, Paris, 1949.

³¹ Guillaume DE MACHAUT, *Le Confort d'Ami*, ll. 2989-97, 3007-15, 3022-8, 3031-2 and 3054-60.

³² "Pren garde au bon roy de Behaigne / Qui en France et en Allemagne, / En Savoie et en Lombardie, / En Dannemarche et en Hongrie, / En Pouleinne, en Russe, en Cracoe, / En Masouve, en Prusse, en

By listing many different geographic locations in very few lines, Machaut not only sums up the extent of his patron's activities, but also conveys a feeling of restlessness: John seems nowhere truly at home. Thus he largely fulfils the stereotype of the knight-errant, an image that Machaut strengthens by attaching descriptions of deeds and adventures, and mentioning especially John's travel to Prussia and Lithuania, thus alluding to the crusade.³³ Participation in the latter was the reverie of many amongst Machaut's noble audience.³⁴ As Michel Margue has argued, these long travels should not only be taken in a literal sense, but also a metaphorical one: the chivalrous ideal of the Arthurian knight-errant in quest of the Grail.³⁵

The *Confort d'Ami* therefore contrasts quite strongly with the older *Jugement du roy de Behaigne*. In the latter John holds court at his castle of Durbuy,³⁶ hidden away in the Northern Ardennes; the story is very much set in a legendary context for which Durbuy creates its "historical *ambiente*".³⁷ The setting remains Arthurian in style, but far from representing a simple knight of the Round Table, he stands for King Arthur himself. John is the cultivated sovereign and courteous prince – generous in his hospitality, just in his verdict and authoritative on matters courtly.³⁸

The difference between the rich, settled and just king in the *Jugement* and the restless, ascetic knight-errant in the *Confort*, can be explained by the different purposes of the texts. The *Jugement* was written for John himself and Guillaume certainly intended to flatter his patron by presenting him as a new Arthur. The *Confort* however was intended to advise the king of Navarre and shapes John accordingly. Guillaume de Machaut promoted very much the ideal of an active monarch, who does not sit back and reign from a throne, who does not fear to take up

Letoe / Ala pris et honneur conquerre"; *Ibid.*, l. 2923-9. [The above translation is taken over from Robert Barton Palmer, except for the word "Masouve", which I have replaced with the more common English 'Masovia']

³³ *Ibid.*, l. 2928, 3032, and 3051.

³⁴ Claude GAUVARD, *Portrait du Prince, d'après l'œuvre de Guillaume de Machaut*, p. 31, n. 34.

³⁵ Michel MARGUE, *Jean de Luxembourg, prince idéal et chevalier parfait: Aux origines d'un mythe*, p. 15.

³⁶ See: Guillaume DE MACHAUT, *Le Jugement du roy de Behaigne*, ll. 1385-92.

³⁷ Ernst VOLTMER, *Johann der Blinde in der italienischen und französischen Chronistik seiner Zeit*, p. 46.

³⁸ Paul IMBS, *Le Voir-Dit de Guillaume de Machaut*, p. 115; Laurence DE LOOZE, *Pseudo-Autobiography in the fourteenth century*. Juan Ruiz, *Guillaume de Machaut, Jean Froissart, and Geoffrey Chaucer*, p. 69.

arms and dares to go out on adventure. For these purposes he uses John of Bohemia, who by then was well known for all his chivalric feats. As a result he presents John in a “secular hagiography”,³⁹ hoping that Charles of Navarre would take up these ideals, emulate the achievements and overcome his Valois adversaries.⁴⁰

Most subsequent literary images of John are variations on Guillaume de Machaut’s themes, even though it seems more likely that other poets draw their ideas from the general stock of chivalrous writings. Interestingly, not many subsequent writers use a setting similar to that of the *Jugement du roy de Behaigne*. The song *Minne und Gesellschaft*, which probably originates from the Rhineland, is rather an exception.⁴¹ It describes a debate between John of Bohemia and twelve knights, set at John’s court and with him as the highest authority on the matters at hand. Much more frequently one observes parallels to the knight-errant image of the *Confort*. The essential sources in this respect show up after John’s death at Crécy, the key event that ignited his fame. Due to his royal title, John heads most lists from England to Italy of fallen nobles.⁴² Many of these take the form of eulogies on fallen champions. Their purpose was to praise their protagonist and to uphold his memory; they sometimes include descriptions of their coat of arms, sometimes also a prayer. The vast majority of them seem to have been written by heralds, the guardians of the nobility’s memory.

Jean de Batory’s *Li dis des VIII blasons* is a eulogy for the eight most prominent victims of the battle of Crécy. In the poem, they are presented and mourned in turn by eight allegories. The poet does not state any names for the eight heroes and the only way to recognise them is by their coat of arms, whose very detailed descriptions fill a major part of the rhymes. The lament also includes Charles of Alençon, the count of Flanders and Raoul of Lorraine, among others, but the first to appear is John, presented by Lady Prowess, who bemoans the loss of her

³⁹ Guillaume DE MACHAUT, *Le Confort d’Ami*, p. lv.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. lv-lvi.

⁴¹ Adolf BACH and Dieter BERGER, *Vom Publikum rheinischer Gelegenheitsdichtungen des ritterlichen Lebenskreises*, p. 83.

⁴² Ernst VOLTMER, *Johann der Blinde in der italienischen und französischen Chronistik seiner Zeit*, p. 60; Geoffrey H. MARTIN, *John the Blind: the English narrative sources* p. 89.

dear friend.⁴³ John is described as a famous jousting knight, taking part in tournaments and battles.⁴⁴ Jousts and tournaments normally took place in the context of lavish court feasts and do not quite accord with the image of the ascetic knight of the *Queste del Saint Graal*; nonetheless they leave the impression of an active knight travelling from court to court and amenable to any adventure. Similarly, Colin d'Hainaut⁴⁵ lets John be lamented by several *dames*: the allegories of Prowess, Generosity, Loyalty, Courtliness, Joy and Nature,⁴⁶ referring thus to the different virtues John supposedly lived up to. His poem works very much along the lines of Batery's. Likewise Colin's image is much influenced by the *topos* of the knight-errant: John ventured around Europe, from Lombardy to Austria (*Osterice*) to Prussia, taking part in wars, tournaments and jousts.⁴⁷ Most of these laudations were constructed along the same scheme. The Belgian scholar Jaap Tigelaar has recently discovered another anonymous poem composed shortly after Crécy and originating most likely from the entourage of the ducal court in Leuven.⁴⁸ Beginning by reminding its audience of this valiant combatant in tournaments, attracting the eyes of many ladies,⁴⁹ the poet reflects on John's virtuous character and concludes that he was full of honour.⁵⁰ The point is proven with the help of some historical examples: first we read about his bravery at the battle of Mühldorf⁵¹ and then his many travels, although the author mainly mentions locations in Central Europe, along with Lombardy.⁵² These locations seemed more exotic than his destinations in France and Western Germany. While Lombardy might recall the achievements of Frederick I, for wars in Northern Italy were normally associated with emperors, the reference to Prussia probably again alluded to the crusade. This crusading image also prevails in a ballad by Peter

⁴³ Jehan DE BATTERY, *Li dis des VIII blasons*, l. 64.

⁴⁴ Jehan DE BATTERY, *Li dis des VIII blasons*, l. 94-5.

⁴⁵ He was probably part of John of Hainaut's entourage and as such likely present at the battle of Crécy himself. See: Gustav GRÖBER, *Geschichte der mittelfranzösischen Literatur. I. Vers- und Prosadichtung des 14. Jahrhunderts, Drama des 14. und 15. Jahrhunderts*, p. 118; Arthur DINAUX, *Trouvères Brabançons, Hanuyers, Liégeois et Namurois*, p. 166.

⁴⁶ Arthur DINAUX, *Trouvères Brabançons, Hanuyers, Liégeois et Namurois*, p. 172-3.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

⁴⁸ See: Jaap TIGELAAR, *Dese es van Behem coninck Jan. Een onbekende ererede over Jan de Blinde, graaf van Luxemburg, koning van Bohemen (1296-1346)*, p. 146-161.

⁴⁹ *Dese es van Behem coninck Jan*, l. 10-25, and l. 16.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, l. 41-4.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, l. 50-73.

⁵² *Ibid.*, l. 74-80.

Suchenwirt,⁵³ and even more so in that of the Liégeois herald Jean d'Outremeuse.⁵⁴ The latter describes John's expedition to Lithuania as having culminated in an epic duel with the local prince Margalis.⁵⁵ The piece is set again in a context where the real and mythical worlds meet. Moreover, the situation recalls not only the Arthurian knight-errant, but again manages to connect it more directly to the crusades. The Lithuanians were very much the North European Saracens of the time, and thus John's dealings with Margalis allude to other historic or legendary events, such as the Lionheart's rivalry with Saladin.

John's chivalrous image was constructed during his lifetime and spread all over Western Europe in the aftermath of his death. The intent of most of these early sources was to keep John's memory alive; however, this changed in the second half of the fourteenth century when the motivation for alluding to the king of Bohemia transformed more into pointing towards an example to follow. Since its origins, chivalry had to reinvent itself constantly. In the fourteenth century it redefined itself to emphasise its aristocratic exclusiveness, while living through a crisis as a military force.⁵⁶ The social status of the older nobility was threatened by the rising bourgeoisie, who started to possess the financial means to challenge the chivalrous life-style. Furthermore, just as knighthood had emerged from the military technological development, new changes in warfare started to challenge its *raison d'être*. Cavalry lost its importance to heavy infantry, archery and artillery;⁵⁷ and the feudal army was increasingly replaced by mercenaries.⁵⁸ Chivalry had to justify itself increasingly through its legendary past and a specific way of life. Within this changing world of chivalry, John was lionised as a symbol of a golden age. Who else in his time managed to incarnate the image of the chivalric king? John had gone on crusade, which so many kings had vowed to without ever meeting their pledge. Likewise, his journeys and his death in battle were made to express an ideal that few monarchs managed to fulfil. As seen above, this idealisation already found its expression in the late Machaut and it appears even more so among his successors.

⁵³ Peter Suchenwirt, *Von hern Friedreichen dem Chreuzpekch*, p. 43-8

⁵⁴ Alphonse SPRUNCK, *La légende de Jean l'Aveugle*, p. 19.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁵⁶ Franco CARDINI, *Le guerrier et le chevalier*, p. 112.

⁵⁷ See: *Ibid.*, p. 125.

⁵⁸ Most of these phenomena started in the twelfth century already, but their social repercussions only fully developed in the later Middle Ages.

Eustache Deschamps (ca. 1345-ca. 1405), a pupil and protégé of Machaut,⁵⁹ lets the Bohemian king appear in one of his ballads.⁶⁰ In his case it is difficult to judge whether his presentation of John is based on general knowledge or rather on ideas transmitted by his master. In any case, the poet uses him to represent a lost age of glory, joy and courtly life.⁶¹ “The valiant king of Bohemia” is praised for his prowess, his many travels and chivalrous behaviour in war.⁶² While using John as a counter theme to the rather negative atmosphere of the rest of the ballad, Deschamps shows a very nostalgic sentiment towards the early half of the fourteenth century, the time before the wars with England that affected his lifetime so deeply and horrifyingly. One can wonder to what degree the veneration of John as the paragon of a golden age was shared in the writings of Jean Froissart (ca. 1337-ca. 1405).

Froissart had an immense share in perpetuating John’s image as an ideal knight. He takes up the image of him as a famous jousting knight and presents him as a chivalrous prince of great renown: John of Beaumont, for instance, asks to leave the English Court and take part in a tournament, so as to meet “the most noble and most gentle king in largesse who reigned at the time, the good king Charles of Bohemia”.⁶³ One could further argue that Froissart also saw in him an example of loyalty. Whenever John helps to fill the French ranks as a representative of highest nobility, it is for his allegiance to the French crown.⁶⁴ Froissart describes how Edward III first sees John as a possible ally, but then decides against asking him, very aware that he would not possibly break his older allegiance.⁶⁵ While his initial role is marginal, he becomes an important protagonist during the battle, where he sacrifices his life for his French overlord, fulfilling his onerous duty while perishing on the field. Not only is he loyal to the French king, but he manages to motivate his

⁵⁹ Ian S. LAURIE, Eustache Deschamps: 1340(?)–1404, p. 2–3; Jean-Patrice BOUDET and Hélène MILLET (ed), Eustache Deschamps en son temps, p. 11.

⁶⁰ Eustache DESCHAMPS, Balade CCCX; see especially ll. 177–206.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, ll. 197–206.

⁶² “A ses amis fut piteus ... a ses ennemis crueuls.” *Ibid.*, ll. 189 and 192.

⁶³ “le plus noble et plus gentil roy en larghèce qui regnast à ce temps le gentil roy Charlon de Behagne”, Jean FROISSART, *Chroniques*. Edited by: Peter F. AINSWORTH and George T. DILLER, §21, p. 106. From the context it is clear that he mixed up the names and actually means John, rather than his son, Charles. The mistake is already present in very early manuscripts and it therefore most likely Froissart’s own rather than that of a scribe. I am indebted to Godfried Croenen for this information.

⁶⁴ See for instance: *Ibid.*, p. 230, p. 236, §126, p. 314.

⁶⁵ “(...) li rois de Bahagne ne fu point priiés ne mandés, car on savoit bien qu’il estoit conjoins au roi de France, par le mariage de leurs deus enfants”.

own vassals to follow him into death; the unity of the king and his men is symbolised by the ropes that tied their horses together.⁶⁶ This provides him with an almost Arthurian aura: he was still capable of gathering his men around him, while in most of Europe rulers were finding it increasingly difficult to raise troops using traditional vassalic ties. The question is however to what degree Froissart saw him as an example to follow, or actually criticises him for his bold folly.

The traditional interpretations continue in a positive tone and let Froissart praise John's bravery and his glorious death.⁶⁷ He is last mentioned in the *Chroniques* when shortly after the battle the king of England and his sons hear about his death and mourn for the loss of the "valiant king".⁶⁸ Froissart probably based this passage on the *Vie du Prince Noir* by Chandos Herald, who describes how Edward visits the battlefield at night, finds John's body, puts him in a coffin and covers him with golden cloth.⁶⁹ The author allowed the English crown to express some courteous behaviour while paying tribute to a worthy opponent; their reverence enhances the status of the Bohemian king reciprocally, exceeding all 'national' pride. At a time when heavy cavalry was still the most prestigious part of the army, but without having a decisive role in battles, the theory behind chivalry had to stress its cultural, and in Froissart's case, its moral code.⁷⁰ John provided a means.

Godfried Croenen has recently challenged this view. According to him Froissart tends to be generally critical of superfluous or fortuitous displays of chivalrous prowess.⁷¹ Croenen builds his reading on two aspects: the first one is a difference between 'preux' and 'vaillant', the former standing for true greatness and the latter more ambiguously for brave action independently of their degree of sanity. The second important element to mark the hero is therefore 'sagesse' – in contrast to the literary authors of the twelfth or thirteenth centuries, Froissart advocated a much

⁶⁶ Philippe CONTAMINE, *La Guerre au Moyen Age*, p. 412. Peter F. DEMBOWSKI, Chivalry, Ideal and Real, in the Narrative Poetry of Jean Froissart, p. 7. Michel MARGUE, Jean de Luxembourg, prince idéal et chevalier parfait: Aux origines d'un mythe, p. 20.

⁶⁷ Georg JÄGER, *Aspekte des Krieges und der Chevalerie im XIV. Jahrhundert in Frankreich. Untersuchungen zu Jean Froissarts Chroniques*, p. 236-237.

⁶⁸ Jean FROISSART, *Chroniques*. Edited by: Peter F. AINSWORTH and George T. DILLER, §286, p. 589.

⁶⁹ *La Vie du Prince Noir*, I, 365-72.

⁷⁰ Kenneth FOWLER, Froissart, Chronicler of Chivalry, p. 51.

⁷¹ He presented this idea in his paper 'Knighthood, Chivalry and the Heroes of the Hundred Years War' presented in Edinburgh on 14 May 2005. I am very grateful to Godfried for further discussions of his ideas in several email correspondences.

more careful type of warfare and success-oriented campaigns, rather than a suicidal seeking of honour. If read under this light, John's venture changes quite radically. In all the versions John asks his men to be taken into the centre of the melee so that he could strike a blow with his sword ("*férir un cop d'espée*"). In the early Amiens manuscript of the *Chroniques*, the passage is very short: the king, described as "*preux*", takes his decision right after the start of battle and off they ride.⁷² In the more detailed passage of the 'seconde rédaction', his order is described as "*une grant vaillandise*" – if we read what follows, i.e. John finding a quick death at the English hands, Froissart may well have intended to strike a rather ironic note. The author describes that "for their honour, they rode forward preferring to die rather than being reproached a villainous flight".⁷³ The passage ends with the laconic comment that the king and all those that had accompanied him were found dead the following day. The later Rome manuscript then completes the picture. John takes his decision only after he hears that the battle is on the brink of being lost. At this point, the author also mentions that the king was actually completely blind (*tous aveugles estoit*),⁷⁴ which may also be understood metaphorically and thus contributes to the foolish character of his action. If Croenen's interpretation reflects Froissart's real intentions, most of the later Luxembourgian nationalist readings of the *Chroniques* ironically turned these on their head, for they saw true heroism in his deed.

Looking at Froissart's main patrons does not help to add more certainty to how to interpret the description of the Crécy battle scene. Philippa of Hainault, together with her husband Edward III of England, were the poet's first important patrons; since both Philippa and Froissart originated from Hainaut, she was possibly also the person who introduced him to the English Court. Queen Philippa, however, was also John of Bohemia's niece, a consequence of a double-marriage between the Houses of Limburg-Luxembourg and Avesnes.⁷⁵ This would support the theory of a more favourable image. After Philippa's death in 1369, Froissart entered the service

⁷² Jean FROISSART, *Chroniques*. Edited by: George T. DILLER, vol. 3, §511, p. 19-20.

⁷³ Jean FROISSART, *Chroniques*. Edited by: Kervyn DE LETTENHOVEN, *Oeuvres de Froissart*, vol. 5, p. 54.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

⁷⁵ See: Michel MARGUE, *Luxemburg und Avesnes. Territorialpolitik und Ritterideal (1250-1350)*.

of John's son Wenceslas, duke of Luxembourg and Brabant.⁷⁶ He remained in Wenceslas's service until the duke's death in 1383. Like John of Bohemia and Guillaume de Machaut, Wenceslas and Jean Froissart were of the same age and probably even born in the same year. Again it is difficult to judge how much of an impact this had on Froissart's writing, especially since no version of the *Chroniques* was part of the work commissioned by the Court in Brussels. Furthermore, the later versions of the *Chroniques*, those most critical according to Croenen's reading, were written only after the author had been in Wenceslas's service. On the other hand, Froissart also mentions John in his *Prison Amoureuse*, which was indeed commissioned by Wenceslas. In its first part, the poet praises his patron's ancestor in glowing terms, playing on the themes of courtliness, itinerant life and *largesse* as set up by Machaut.⁷⁷ Likewise its short passage on Crécy is certainly approving.⁷⁸

One could imagine that John's siding against the English would undermine his image north of the Channel. On the contrary, English chroniclers generally thought highly of him, largely due to his intervention on behalf of the earls of Salisbury and Suffolk. Both had been captured at Lille and John saved them from execution by Philip of France.⁷⁹ Likewise his death did not go unnoticed, although without eliciting long commentaries.⁸⁰ The most long-lasting legacy attributed to John in England and Wales, was the three ostrich feathers and the motto *ich dien* (or *ich dene*) adopted by Edward the Black Prince. They remain the emblems of the Prince of Wales to this day. In his biography of the Black Prince, Richard Barber concludes that it is doubtful, but nonetheless entirely possible, that Edward took over John of Bohemia's motto and feathers after the latter's death at the battle of Crécy.⁸¹ The arguments against the story seem to weigh more strongly, though. The most

⁷⁶ Augste LOGNON, *Meliador. Roman comprenant les poésies lyriques de Wenceslas de Bohême, duc de Luxembourg et de Brabant*, vol. 1, p. lxvi.

⁷⁷ "Li bons rois que je nomme chi / C'est chils qui remest à Crechi, / Qui tant fu larges et courtois / Que, de Prusse jusqu'en Artois, / Non, jusqu'en Constantinnoble / N'i eut plus large ne plus noble." Jean FROISSART, *La Prison Amoureuse*, edited by Anthime FOURRIER, Paris, 1974, ll. 65-70. Interestingly he still refers to John as Charles ("Karle, le roi de Behagne"); ll. 61.

⁷⁸ "Vaillamment remest a Cresi, / Car, ens ou plus fort del estour, / L'espee au poing, les siens autour, / Ala ses ennemis combatre / Et li ens es plus drus embatre." *Ibid.*, ll. 96-100.

⁷⁹ Adam MURIMUTH, *Continuatio Chronicarum*, p. 105; Geoffrey LE BAKER OF SYNEBROKE, *Chronicon*, p. 67-68.

⁸⁰ See for instance: John of READING, *Chronica*, p. 100; Geoffrey LE BAKER OF SYNEBROKE, *Chronicon*, p. 85.

⁸¹ Richard BARBER, *Edward, Prince of Wales and Aquitaine: A Biography of the Black Prince*, p. 68-9.

important source of the time is the treatise on haemorrhoids by John of Arderne, which can be dated to around the time of the Black Prince's death in 1376. It does not provide much detail on the event, but does indeed present the story in its usual short and concise form.⁸² The problem is that there is no historiographical report from the time that mentions the moment, not in Froissart's most detailed account, nor any other. Neither does the earliest written reference to the Black Prince's plumes, the poem *Winner and Waster*, refer to how he received them.⁸³ Even more importantly there is no evidence that John possessed any motto himself, let alone *ich dien*.⁸⁴ Similarly, the feathers on his crest were not white ostrich feathers, but the black feathers of a vulture, which possibly stemmed from the old Bohemian royal dynasty.⁸⁵ Finally, any attempts at locating the origin of both motto and feathers may point in the direction of the Low Countries, but away from Luxembourg. The motto *ich dene* may be from Gelderland, where Edward III's sister Eleanor got married to Reinald the Black in 1331.⁸⁶ Likewise it has been speculated that the ostrich feathers could be linked to the county of Ostrevent in Hainaut, which was one of Philippa of Hainaut's appanges.⁸⁷ Although these arguments are speculative and the product of what may be regarded as outdated literature, as yet there exists no sound and convincing alternative.

Chivalric aspects unite all the sources mentioned so far, possibly unsurprisingly, since with the exception of some of the English monastic chronicles they were all specifically intended for a courtly audience. They also share similar geographical origins, ranging from England over the Low Countries to the

⁸² "Et nota quod talem pennam albam portabat Edwardus primogenitus filius Edwardi Regis Angliae, super crestam suam. Et illam pennam conquisivit de rege Boëmo, quem interfecit apud Cresse in Francia. Et sic assumpsit sibi illam pennam quae dicitur 'Ostrich fether', quam prius Dominus Rex nobillissimus portabat super crestam suam et eodam anno quo Dominus strenuus et bellicosus Princeps migravit ad Dominum, scripsi libellum istum manu propria, viz. anno Millesimo cccclxxvi." JOHN OF ARDERNE, *Treatise of Fistula in Ano, Haemorrhoids, and Clysters*, p. xxvii-xxviii. n. 1.

⁸³ See: *Wynner and Wastoure*, l. 115-118.

⁸⁴ Guillaume de Machaut is the only author who attributes him with a war cry, in this case 'Limburg', see my chapter on Ermesinde.

⁸⁵ See: René KLEIN, *Réflexions sur les armoiries de la Famille Grand-Ducale*, p. 321, and: Jean-Claude LOUTSCH, *Les armoiries de Son Altesse Royale le Grand-Duc de Luxembourg*, p. 6, n. 1.

⁸⁶ Israel GOLLANCZ, *Ich Dene. Some observations on a manuscript of the life and feats of arms of Edward Prince of Wales, the Black Prince: A metrical chronicle in French Verse by the Herald of Sir John Chandos: Presented by members of the University of London to H.R.H. Edward Prince of Wales, K.G., on the Fifth of May, 1921*, chapter 2.

⁸⁷ James R. PLANCHÉ, *Observations on the Mottoes "Houmout" and "Ich Dien" of Edward the Black Prince*, p. 69-71; taken over by: John HARVEY, *The Black Prince and his age*, p. 84.

Champagne and the Rhineland. They differ from the chronicles of Bohemia, which propagated a somewhat different image of their king.

The most important Bohemian source for the reign of King John is certainly the *Chronicon Aulae Regiae* by Peter of Zittau (ca. 1275-1339); it is contemporary and offers by far the most detailed account. Peter had joined the Cistercian abbey of Zbrastlav (*Königssaal* in German and therefore *Aula Regia* in Latin), that had only recently (1292) been founded by King Wenceslas II.⁸⁸ That he became the abbey's chronicler already shows his prominent standing within the monastery, in which he was later to become the second abbot. In political terms, Peter of Zittau was above all concerned with the general good of the realm (and furthermore the interests of his own abbey). It was for this reason that he refused to accept the election of Henry of Carinthia as king of Bohemia, joining instead the delegation to the King of the Romans Henry of Luxembourg in order to pledge for a different solution to the Bohemian question.⁸⁹ During the negotiations, Peter seems to have been one of those in favour of handing the crown to Henry's own son, certainly because he assumed the new king would profit from the strength of the Empire. The first years of John's reign are thus described with much acclaim and hope. The young king makes a triumphant entry into Prague in 1310, leading his opponents to "flee confusedly" to the local castle "at the face of the magnificent King John".⁹⁰ He is hailed by the population as the bringer of peace and justice, and while "all violence fled with the duke of Carinthia", John extended peace into Moravia.⁹¹ He stands here more as a symbol of a new dawn than as an individual with a personality; again Peter lets 'the people' voice his own opinion: "[t]his king is tender and delicate and of elegant disposition, rather an angel than comparable to any humans."⁹² After this initial honeymoon, the chronicler returned to dire reality. In 1316, John went to Luxembourg (*sua comicia*), after having failed to agree with most of the nobility.⁹³ In consequence the peace within the realm breaks down altogether; Henry of Leipa's

⁸⁸ Peter HILSCH, *Königssaal*, col. 1325.

⁸⁹ Marco INNOCENTI, *Peter von Zittau*, col. 1168-1170.

⁹⁰ Peter OF ZITTAU, *Chronicon Aulae Regiae*, p. 172.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 174 and 178.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 175.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 228-232.

men plunder parts of the country.⁹⁴ As he had not yet reappeared in 1317, the Bohemians begged for his return;⁹⁵ alas, their demands remain unanswered. The definite turning point was reached in the year 1319, when John broke with his wife. His chastisement of her is described in most negative terms and the author concludes:

In the past years, John's life had been good,
Now it is deformed, for it is tainted by stain,
The nature of the growing child becomes apparent in adolescence,
No-one can know, [but] it often comes to pass:
That an angelic child is iniquitous in later age.⁹⁶

One also needs to note that to Peter, Elizabeth had provided John's reign with legitimacy, since she was "the true heir of Bohemia" (*vera heres Boemie*).⁹⁷ Similarly, he presents Charles IV not as the successor of his father, but the inheritor of his mother.⁹⁸ By breaking with Elizabeth, the king thus also rejected his responsibilities as the successor of the Přemyslid kings. When the queen died in 1330, the author reacted with pages of very moving lamentations,⁹⁹ revealing of his nostalgia towards the time of King Wenceslas II – an era whose last remnants seemed to have died with her.¹⁰⁰ His stance is not only fuelled by political ideals, but also by the fact that Elizabeth had been an important benefactor of his abbey.¹⁰¹

After 1319, Peter's criticisms become harsher: not only does John ignore his kingdom politically, but he also abuses his power increasingly to fill his own pockets, leading the chronicler to summarise: "not only did the king come to cast

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 234.

⁹⁵ "Si rex solus venerit, solus continuo interit; plus, inquit, regi expedit venire cum potencia, ut exterminari valeat subito pars adversa." *Ibid.*, p. 243.

⁹⁶ "Preteritis annis fuerat bona [vita Johannes], / Nunc est perversa, quia stat sub labe respersa / Qalis adhuc crescens fiat posthec adolescens, / Nemo potest scire, solet illud sepe venire: / Quod puer angelicus post in senio sit iniquus." *Ibid.*, p. 251. The last line seems to be a variation on the widespread proverb: "angelicus iuvenis senibus satanizat in annis". I am indebted to Helen Brown for pointing this out to me, and polishing my English translation of the passage.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 318.

⁹⁹ E.g.: "Cor meum conturbatum est in me, sensus ebet hec recolligens, manus trepidat ista scribens, miratur oculus, quod non rubricatur calamus, eo quod virtus mea deficit et a centro cordis effluit sanguis meus." *Ibid.*, p. 303.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p.304.

¹⁰¹ Peter HILSCH, *Johann der Blinde in der deutschen und Böhmisches Chronistik seiner Zeit*, p. 26; Volker HONEMANN, *Peter (Petrus) von Zittau, Zisterzienser des Klosters Königsaal*, p. 233.

eyes upon the queen, but also to extort money from everyone.”¹⁰² Peter did not stop here. John’s actions enticed further criticism: firstly the king spent much of his income in the west and not for the benefit of his kingdom,¹⁰³ and secondly he dared to extract additional money from Peter’s own monastery of Zbraslav.¹⁰⁴ In fact, John’s collection of taxes and funds, sometimes by very dubious means, continued as a major reoccurring theme throughout the remainder of the chronicle.¹⁰⁵ All along, the realm slipped into deeper chaos.¹⁰⁶ He even uses John’s knightly lifestyle to denounce and ridicule his aspirations. When the king attempted to recreate the Arthurian Round Table in Prague, none of the invited foreign knights appeared, allowing for mockery about his king’s pretensions.¹⁰⁷ During a tournament that John had organised at the market square in Prague, he fell off his horse and was injured; the author commented that “some lamented this miserable spectacle, some actually applauded”.¹⁰⁸ His stance only changed whenever the king’s deeds led to successes abroad. Thus he compares the spirit of prowess (*spiritus fortitudine*) that awoke in John at the battle of Mühlhof to that of Samson,¹⁰⁹ or takes pride in his king’s quick conquests in Northern Italy.¹¹⁰

Peter of Zittau wrote a political commentary from a clerical perspective. It was his expectation that John would replicate the golden age of Wenceslas II, by subduing the nobility and by reigning, not only for the benefit of the realm, but also for the monastery of Zbraslav. John failed to live up to this; he did not manage to subdue the noble faction and therefore re-oriented much of his policy to other regions, notably Luxembourg, and even drove away his Přemyslid wife. Peter’s origins from outside the courtly world also set him apart from the majority of

¹⁰² “Venit autem non solum ob hoc rex, ut reginam cerneret, sed ut pecuniam ab omnibus extorqueret.” Peter OF ZITTAU, *Chronicon Aulae Regiae*, p. 273.

¹⁰³ See: *Ibid.*, p. 273, 285 and 331.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 333.

¹⁰⁵ See for instance: *Ibid.*, p. 284, 331.

¹⁰⁶ “Hoc anno [1326] sicut et annis prioribus propter regis Johannis absenciam iusticieque carenciam fere in omnibus regni Boemie partibus pauperum fit oppressio, villarum, oppidorum desolacio et de habitacione hominum vasta in locis pluribus efficitur solitudo.” *Ibid.*, p. 280.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 252.

¹⁰⁸ “Ad hoc miserabile spectaculum aliqui fecerunt planctum, aliqui vero plausum.” *Ibid.*, p. 257.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 262.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 307.

western writers, arguably causing him to show little esteem for John's chivalric behaviour.¹¹¹

The wealth of information contained in the *Chronicon Aulae Regiae* led it to be used as a basis for many history writers, including the other Bohemian sources of the time. Thus Francis of Prague (ca. 1290-1362) replicated quite a few passages, some almost literally and with them Peter of Zittau's views.¹¹² His conclusions however remain sometimes even cruder: "he is not a real king, but a tyrant".¹¹³ Peter of Zittau died in 1338 or 1339 and left it to his successors to comment on Crécy. Reflecting on the king's death Francis of Prague suddenly changed his tone entirely and started celebrating the king's reign.¹¹⁴ Similarly, the chronicler Benes of Weitmil (†1375) took much inspiration from both Zittau and Francis of Prague; in contrast to the latter his account is more favourable again. Specifically, his description of Crécy is comparable to Froissart's, if not in length, then at least in style: for example, when John heard that the French started to flee, he demanded to be lead to the noisiest part of the battle.¹¹⁵ Thereafter the chronicler makes Edward III comment on the death: "[t]oday the crown of chivalry died, nobody was comparable to this king of Bohemia".¹¹⁶ Unlike Froissart, who presents Charles IV as a coward, Weitmil first describes him as having fought valiantly, but then reluctantly guided off the battlefield after having been wounded. This also provides a clue to his overall lenient portrayal, as Benes's work had most probably been commissioned by Charles and maybe thought it wise not to denigrate the father's image too much.¹¹⁷

Emperor Charles IV (1316-1378) himself offered insights on his father's life in his autobiography. These are not all too different from the images presented of John in (other) Bohemian sources.¹¹⁸ John neglects his realm, which deteriorates in consequence, only to be restored under the auspices of Charles, during his time as his father's representative.¹¹⁹ The people loved the crown-prince, which ignited John's

¹¹¹ Peter HILSCH, Johann der Blinde in der deutschen und Böhmisches Chronistik seiner Zeit, p. 25.

¹¹² See for instance: "Venit eciam rex (...) non solum ob hoc, ut reginam videret, sed ut pecuniam ab hominibus extorqueret." Francis OF PRAGUE, *Chronica*, p. 398. Compare with Peter of Zittau above.

¹¹³ "(...) non esset verus rex, sed tyrannus (...)." *Ibid.*, p. 398.

¹¹⁴ "Et bene regnavit, ac terre pacem procuravit." *Ibid.*, p. 443.

¹¹⁵ Benes OF WETMIL, *Chronica*, p. 514.

¹¹⁶ "Hodie cecidisset corona milicie, nunquam fuit similis huic regi Boemie." *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Peter HILSCH, Johann der Blinde in der deutschen und Böhmisches Chronistik seiner Zeit, p. 30.

¹¹⁸ One can of course speculate to what degree the source should be regarded as Bohemian itself.

¹¹⁹ Charles IV OF BOHEMIA, *Vita Caroli Quarti*, p. 116-118.

jealousy and led him to remove all responsibilities from his son. Independent of the veracity of these claims, the impression is given that Charles uses this criticism of John in order to promote a favourable image of his own political talent. He, too, goes as far as to undermine his father's chivalric reputation. One of John's crusades failed because he was more concerned about playing dice with the king of Hungary and the count of Holland;¹²⁰ after their game the crusaders abandoned their plans, having being surprised by the cold weather and returned home. Although Charles acknowledges John's capacities in defending his kingdom and protecting his vassals,¹²¹ he nonetheless criticises how his father wasted his income, with a core of self-interest apparent: John distributed some of his gold with his men from the Rhineland and Hainaut instead of sharing it with his sons.¹²²

Bohemian writers, a group in which I shall include Charles IV, always sided with John in battle, yet condemned most of his domestic politics. In addition and very much in contrast to western sources, they either neglect his chivalric virtues or ridicule his knightly display, both in the context of what they see as his flawed personality. In turn, these are ignored by the western writers. One must therefore differentiate between strictly literary works, mainly intended for a courtly audience, and chronicles that contain a political message. While the former present John as the shining example of chivalric life, Peter of Zittau saw him as part of the turbulent decades after the magnificent reign of Wenceslas II. His successors extended the idea, suggesting an undistinguished interval of Bohemian kingship until the rebirth of glory under Charles IV, a portrayal which the latter himself willingly contributed to.

The rise of a *local hero*

In early modern views of John's life, the chivalric image that had so predominated attitudes in fourteenth-century Western Europe was largely replaced by a more negative perception. This change was underpinned by the literary writers falling out of fashion and the cult of chivalry slowly diminishing, especially among the intellectual élites. Historiographers preferred to base their texts on other chronologic

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 182-184.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 188-192.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 196.

narratives. In the case of Eneo Silvio Piccolomini (1405-1464) (who later became Pope Pius II) for instance, the source of preference seems to have been Peter of Zittau. In consequence he perceives John's reign as characterised by internal divisions of the Bohemian realm and his marriage marked by "grave dissentions".¹²³ Richard de Wassebourg (†1567) wrote from a Western perspective, but likewise a clerical one, and his brief passage on the king describes how intervention against the bishopric of Metz rendered John unpopular.¹²⁴ In both accounts, his death at Crécy only merits a short mention.¹²⁵ As a result, Jean d'Anly, who used both Piccolomini and Wassebourg for his redaction, provides very similar descriptions.¹²⁶ Meanwhile, Jan Dubravius (1486-1553), bishop of Olomouc in Bohemia, paints again a rather discrediting picture, describing John as a drunkard fixated on earthly pleasures and obsessed with enriching himself.¹²⁷ Of course, all of these authors were also writing in a clerical context, rather than a courtly one, and thus from the onset closer to the position of Zittau.

Though Jean Bertels (1544-1607) wrote in their tradition, he was also the first to offer a view from within the Duchy of Luxembourg. Interestingly he has a rather more positive vision. In his introduction he quotes the famous cartographer Sebastian Münster (1488-1552), who praised the count's good deeds in favour of his inhabitants,¹²⁸ thus setting off on a more optimistic tone. Likewise he mentions his vast political activities and travels, while focusing on his successes rather than his failings.¹²⁹ Furthermore he even apologises at length for not being able to expand

¹²³ Eneo Silvio PICCOLOMINI, *De Bohemorum et ex his Imperatorum aliquot origine ac gestis, ad Illustrissimum Principem Dominum Alfonsum Regem Aragonum Historia*, p. 52.

¹²⁴ Richard DE WASSEBOURG, *Premier [et second] Volume des Antiquitez de la Gaule Belgique, Royaulme de France, Austrasie, & Lorraine. Avec l'origine des Duchez & Comtez, de l'ancienne & moderne Brabant, Tōgre, Ardenne, Haynau, Mozelane, Lotreich, Flandre, Lorraine, Barrois, Luxembourg, Louvain, Vvaudemont, Iainuille, Namur, Chiny. Et autres Principautez extraites sous les Vies et Euesques de Verdvn, ancienne Cité d'icelle Gaule*, f. 405r.

¹²⁵ Eneo Silvio PICCOLOMINI, *De Bohemorum ...*, p. 52; Richard DE WASSEBOURG, *Antiquitez de la Gaule Belgique ...*, p f. 413r.

¹²⁶ E.g. "Il eut des grandes querelles avec sa femme, a l'instigation des Barons du pais ...", Jean D'ANLY, *Recueil ou Abrégé de plusieurs histoires contenant les faictz & gestes des Princes d'Ardenne, spécialement des Ducs & Comtes de Luxembourg et Chinÿ avec d'autres entremesléz, dignes de memoire & remarquables*, f. 42v.

¹²⁷ Jan DUBRAVIUS, *Historia Bohemica ab origine gentis, per diuersas temporum & familiarum vices, vsque ad Ferdinandi Imp. & Regis auspicia, deducta*, as quoted in: Jean BERTHOLET, *Histoire Ecclésiastique et Civile du Duché de Luxembourg et Comté de Chiny*, vol. 6, p. 178.

¹²⁸ Jean BERTELS, *Historia Luxemburgensis seu Commentarius*, p. xvii.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 79, 87-90 and 95.

further on the king's many glorious achievements.¹³⁰ His account is again bare of all chivalric exaltations and John's involvement in the battle of Crécy is only worth a brief mention, but unlike his predecessors Bertels adds that the English found his body and honoured him with a funeral, thus stressing the king's 'international' reputation. Since the French sources are quiet about this event, it can be supposed that Bertels heard about it (in)directly from Benes of Weitmil, yet another Bohemian source.¹³¹

Shortly thereafter, John seems to have received his epithet 'the Blind'. The name as such appears in no medieval source, even though Froissart clearly pointed out the king's blindness in his description of Crécy.¹³² Whereas most authors from the fourteenth to the early seventeenth century seem to have been aware of the king's physical handicap, it was still far from becoming his main attribute. Only Aubert Le Mire (1573-1640) refers to him as "Ioannes Coecus".¹³³ Eustache of Wiltheim (1600-1678) does not, although he states that "he was usually called the blind king".¹³⁴ This could point towards a possible origin of the name 'John the Blind' from outside the duchy, further illustrating its relatively slow emergence. Moreover, Aubert Le Mire's chronicle seems not based on any original research, being instead a compilation of existing knowledge.¹³⁵ The style of his opus therefore suggests that he found the name in yet another source, although this one is unlikely to be much older. By the eighteenth century, the name had fully established itself: both François Pierret (1673-1713) and Jean Bertholet (1688-1755) officially title "John, called the Blind",¹³⁶ while Bertholet makes it clear that the phrase "John the Blind" (*Jean*

¹³⁰ "Patravit insuper egregia admodum, eademque numero sat frequenti opera Ioannes Bohemiae rex: quae omnia huc conferre si anniterer nimium hoc meum excresceret chronicum, quod tamen contractum malui, et in compendium redactum in publicum emittere." *Ibid.*, p. 94-95.

¹³¹ Benes OF WETMIL, *Chronica*, p. 514. This argument rests on the basis that the English chroniclers were comparably obscure and unknown to Bertels.

¹³² "tout aveugles estoit", see above.

¹³³ Aubert LE MIRE, *Rerum Belgicarum Chronicon ab Ivlii Caesaris in Galliam adventu vsque ad vulgarem Christi Annvm M. DC. XXXVI*, p. 333.

¹³⁴ Eustache of Wiltheim, *Kurzer und schlichter Bericht und Beschreibung des Hauses, Schlosses und Landes Luxemburg sammt dessen Fürsten und Herren Ursprung und Herkommen was sich auch bei deren Regierung im gemelten und anderen ihren Landschaften verlaufen und zugetragen*, p. 186.

¹³⁵ Born in Brussels, Aubert Le Mire was the librarian of his uncle, the bishop of Antwerp, before becoming the librarian of the Archdukes Albrecht and Isabella in 1617. See: Reginald DE SCHRYVER, *De eruditie. Betrouwbaarheid door geleerdheid*, p. 54.

¹³⁶ François PIERRET, *Essay de l'Histoire de Luxembourg*, p. 289; Jean BERTHOLET, *Histoire Ecclésiastique et Civile ...*, vol. 3, p. viij.

l'Aveugle) was in common usage.¹³⁷ Nonetheless, the *Ancien Régime* writers still generally prefer to name John with his titles, referring to him as the *Roi de Bohême*, or John of Luxembourg. The vast majority of nineteenth and twentieth-century authors, on the other hand, predominantly used the epithet.¹³⁸ This widespread usage had probably become linked to a belief in its authenticity.

It is interesting to notice that the prevalence of the epithet increases alongside the awareness and even use of the direct quotation of Froissart's Crécy battle scene. Sebastien Münster seems to be aware of Froissart's account, since he uses the very same phrase when referring to the king's blindness.¹³⁹ Though d'Anly quotes Froissart as a source,¹⁴⁰ his account of Crécy is extremely superficial, as already indicated above. Among his contemporaries, only the Parisian court historian Nicolas Vigner (1530-1596) leaves the impression of having had knowledge of the *Chroniques*.¹⁴¹ On the other hand, Pierret, and in consequence also Bertholet, start making ample use of that medieval source, quoting and paraphrasing the juiciest passages.¹⁴² The 'rediscovery' of Froissart thus had in the end a double impact: firstly it helped shape the naming of the 'blind' king; secondly the re-introduction of John's chivalric image helped towards a more positive perspective of his life. Pierret starts by enumerating John's many travels, concluding that "he was one of the most restless and involved [princes] of his century, sometimes in Germany, sometimes in Italy, sometimes finally in Poland."¹⁴³ His account is bare of all criticisms: his marital problems are ignored and the view on his Bohemian politics rather the opposite of Peter of Zittau's or Eneo Silvio's. John purges Bohemia of bandits and in consequence "reigned peacefully in his estates".¹⁴⁴ Bertholet's account sticks close to Pierret's, which probably served him as a major inspiration. Nonetheless, Bertholet

¹³⁷ Jean BERTHOLET, *Histoire Ecclésiastique et Civile ...*, vol. 6, p. 126.

¹³⁸ See for instance: Pierre-Albert Lenz, *Jean l'Aveugle, Roi de Bohême, Comte de Luxembourg, Marquis d'Arton. Esquisse Biographique*, Ghent, 1839; Philippe KNAFF, *König Johann der Blinde. Biographische Skizze*, Luxembourg, 1872; or: Raymond CAZELLES, *Jean l'Aveugle. Comte de Luxembourg, Roi de Bohême*, Bourges, 1947.

¹³⁹ "lequel estoit tout aveugle", Jean BERTELS, *Historia Luxemburgensis ...*, p. xvii.

¹⁴⁰ Jean D'ANLY, *Recueil ou Abrégé de plusieurs histoires*, f. 46r.

¹⁴¹ See: Nicolas VIGNER, *Histoire de la maison de Luxembourg*, p. 101.

¹⁴² François PIERRET, *Essay de l'Histoire de Luxembourg*, p. 315-16; Jean BERTHOLET, *Histoire Ecclésiastique et Civile ...*, vol. 6, p. 174-175.

¹⁴³ "(...) qui estoit le plus remuant et le plus inquiet [prince] de son siècle, tantôt en Allemagne, tantôt en Italie, tantôt aux Paysbas, tantôt enfin en Pologne (...)" François PIERRET, *Essay de l'Histoire de Luxembourg*, p. 320.

¹⁴⁴ François PIERRET, *Essay de l'Histoire de Luxembourg*, p. 290 and 292.

did not simply copy, but on many occasions goes beyond the descriptions of his predecessor. He focuses even more strongly on chivalric deeds, such as John's heroic feats at the battle of Mühldorf, the "rapid conquests" during his crusades in Prussia, or his ravaging of Limburg.¹⁴⁵ While his account proved to be influential for the re-establishment of John as a chivalrous prince, it is not void of any criticism. He uses an expedition into Germany to prove that John's conduct showed "more temerity than wisdom, and more ambition than zeal for the Church" and thus "he is beaten at several encounters and forced to return to Luxembourg".¹⁴⁶ Nonetheless, his overall account is a positive one, rejecting vehemently Dubravius's view of John as a drunkard and *bon-vivant*.¹⁴⁷ On a different note, but equally important, Bertholet also started presenting John as a 'patriotic' ruler, again initiating an idea that, as we will see in more detail, was to acquire stubborn longevity. John loves returning to "his dear Luxembourg"¹⁴⁸ and distinguishes himself by reigning only for its good.¹⁴⁹

Another re-occurring theme introduced by Pierret and copied by Bertholet refers to the changing destinies of John's earthly remains. Having stressed again the vagrant character of the king's life, Pierret could not stop himself from noticing that his posthumous fate was similar.¹⁵⁰ The comparison is quite evidently somewhat unbalanced: from autumn 1346 until 1946, the body never travelled more than 80 kilometres from the Luxembourgian capital. The story of John's posthumous wanderings has been told many times and will not be reiterated in detail,¹⁵¹ but there are two specific points to mention.

Most importantly, John's changes of sepulchre in the city of Luxembourg were an essential ingredient to the survival of his memory and his long-lasting esteem. However, what has never been stressed enough is the fact that John's tomb

¹⁴⁵ Jean BERTHOLET, *Histoire Ecclésiastique et Civile ...*, vol. 6, p. 16-18, 81 and 101.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. 6, p. 124.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. 6, p. 178.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. 6, p. 49, and 118.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. 6, p. 320.

¹⁵⁰ François PIERRET, *Essay de l'Histoire de Luxembourg*, p. 320. Bertholet paraphrases the passage, see: Jean BERTHOLET, *Histoire Ecclésiastique et Civile ...*, vol. 6, p. 177-178.

¹⁵¹ For the details see: Jean SCHOETTER, *Johann, Graf von Luxemburg und König von Böhmen*, vol. 2, p. 284-320; Jean SCHOETTER, *Sépulture de Jean de Luxembourg, Roi de Bohême*, p. 515-521; Tony KELLEN, *Die Irrfahrten des toten Königs. Die Schicksale der Gebeine Johanns des Blinden, des Königs von Böhmen u. Grafen von Luxemburg. Zur Erinnerung an die Beisetzung in Castell an der Saar (1838)*, Luxembourg, 1938; Paul SPANG, *Die Grabstätten Johanns des Blinden*, p. 217-234; Michel MARGUE and Jean SCHROEDER (ed), *Un itinéraire européen*, p. 192-194.

was the only surviving princely tomb in the town of Luxembourg after the destruction of the Altmünster-Abbey. One could argue the fact that his tomb survived and was moved to the Franciscan monastery already reflects the importance given to the personage. This would however ignore other parts of the picture. Even before the destruction of Altmünster, John was one of probably only few counts ever buried there, the only king and the only member of the Limburg dynasty. The graves of Conrad I and Conrad II were over 200 years older; one can only guess what state they were in, but they certainly did not possess the same gothic splendour as John's.

As mentioned before,¹⁵² John had wished to be buried in Clairefontaine next to his direct ancestors. His will was not observed by his son Charles who, with political motivations in mind, had him taken instead to Luxembourg for burial.¹⁵³ It was probably Charles who also had the first funerary monument built.¹⁵⁴ Wenceslas IV and Josse of Moravia, the *mambour* for some time, continued to keep alive John's *memoria*: both paid for yearly masses to be sung for the benefit of their ancestor's soul.¹⁵⁵ Independently of whether they felt an honest and personal veneration for the king, both cases seem to reflect primarily a political agenda, namely to stylise themselves as his rightful successors. The same attitude can even be attributed to the seventeenth-century ruler of the Southern Low Countries, Archduke Albrecht of Austria, who had a new monument constructed and celebrated the new interment in 1618 with the participation of the local nobility and the

¹⁵² See my chapter on Ermesinde.

¹⁵³ His motivation was to style himself as the true heir, against the rightful claims of his half-brother Wenceslas and the usurping attempts of his grand-uncle Baldwin. The burial ceremony in Luxembourg was opportunity for Charles to attempt to seize the title by requesting the fealty of the many local nobles who were present at the event. In the long run his plan failed. See: Michel MARGUE, *Fecit Carolus ducere patrem suum in patriam suam. Die Überlieferung zu Bestattung und Grab Johanns des Blinden*, p. 84 and 94-5; Michel PAULY, *Luxemburg auf dem Schachbrett Karls IV.*, p. 381-2; Michel PAULY, *Sépultures princières et capitales*, p. 662.

¹⁵⁴ Jean SCHOETTER, *Johann, Graf von Luxemburg und König von Böhmen*, vol. 2, p. 290.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*; Jean SCHOETTER, *Sépulture de Jean de Luxembourg, Roi de Bohême*, p. 517. See also genealogy 3 (Appendix 2).

attendance of many spectators.¹⁵⁶ Thereafter, no local ruler was to show an eager interest in John's remains until 1844 and arguably even until 1946.¹⁵⁷

Popular reverence is much more difficult to assess. Bertholet claimed that the Estates of the land gathered around the king's tomb for the anniversary of his death.¹⁵⁸ The note is brief and only followed by the laconic comment that the ceremony had been abolished. But what can be inferred from that? There seems to have been a certain degree of importance attributed to the physical remains of the king: for the ceremony to make sense, they must have represented historical continuity and the unity of the lands. Unfortunately there is no more information to be found on these occasions, so the question remains open as to when and for how long these commemorations took place, who exactly took part and under what circumstances they ceased to happen. The tomb undoubtedly continued to be a 'tourist attraction'; being the only prominent mausoleum in the town of Luxembourg was once more of crucial importance. The Franciscans, who took care of the remains during the second half of the sixteenth century, showed the bones for a small donation; the same was still possible when the tomb was relocated to the Neumünster-Abbey in the early seventeenth century. One consequence was the occasional disappearance of bones at the hands of German trophy hunters or Bohemian souvenir-gatherers.¹⁵⁹ One can conclude from this that John's tomb remained a well-known point of interest, but again it is difficult to assess how much it became a focus of collective identity.

If Bertels's *Historia Luxemburgensis* seems to express a tentatively more positive stance, it was certainly in line with his actions. After becoming the abbot of Neumünster, he made sure that the royal tomb was relocated from the Franciscans to the new abbey.¹⁶⁰ He had good reasons for this, as not only did his abbey regard itself

¹⁵⁶ Jean SCHOETTER, *Johann, Graf von Luxemburg und König von Böhmen*, vol. 2, p. 296-297. Schoetter states as own source a *Testimonium nobilium patriae qui affuerunt praesentes dum corpus Johannis Regis Bohemiae inferretur in sepulcrum novum in Münster 6 septembris 1618*, apparently to be found in the archives of the Section Historique. The absence of clearer bibliographical indications from Schoetter's part and the lack of a decent catalogue for these archives leave the document yet to be rediscovered.

¹⁵⁷ See below.

¹⁵⁸ Jean BERTHOLET, *Histoire Ecclésiastique et Civile ...*, vol. 6, p. 175.

¹⁵⁹ Pierre-Albert LENZ, *Jean l'Aveugle, ...*, p. 80; Paul SPANG, *Die Grabstätten Johannis des Blinden*, p. 220-221.

¹⁶⁰ He even claims credit for it, see: Jean BERTELS, *Historia Luxemburgensis ...*, p. 208.

as the successor institution of the Altmünster-Abbey, but as mentioned above the prominent tomb would add renown and attract visitors. Nonetheless, one can also speculate as to what degree his interest in the duchy's past and the prospect of hosting the body of a medieval hero fuelled his interest in John's remains.

The birth of a *national hero*

In 1794, French revolutionary troops marched into the Duchy of Luxembourg. While most of the principality was taken swiftly, the Habsburg garrison of the mighty Luxembourg fortress resisted for more than a year. In early June 1795, after having been blocked off from its *Hinterland* and its vital supplies for months, the city was about to surrender. Fearful of the iconoclasm that the anti-clerical, anti-monarchist wave of soldiers brought to their conquered lands, a small conspiracy formed in the *Grund*¹⁶¹ below the city walls, decided to rescue the bones of King John and hide them away from the grip of the looming invaders.¹⁶² The prelate of the abbey together with its blacksmith and the local butcher, who at the time was also in charge of its registry, carried the coffin to the local baker, Adam Bastien. A local priest leaked the information on a visit to his relative, the wealthy owner of the town's porcelain factory. He sent some of his men to the baker in order to appropriate the relic, allegedly on orders of the Grund parish priest. The industrialist had the coffin transported to the large factory of his son-in-law, Jean-François Boch-Buschmann, based within the former Benedictine monastery in Mettlach on the river Saar, across the border in Prussian lands. Next enter Crown-Prince Frederick-William of Prussia (later to be the fourth king of the name). Whilst on a visit to this part of the Prussian realm so distant from Potsdam and Berlin in 1833, Boch-Buschmann proudly presented him with his acquisition. At its sight, the royal guest is said to have exclaimed "The poor king!". Frederick-William, who was

¹⁶¹ *Grund* (locally: *Gronn*) refers to the southern-eastern part of the valley surrounding the city plateau; it was here that Neumünster Abbey with John's tomb stood at the time.

¹⁶² See the report set up by François-Xavier Würth-Paquet on 19/10/1836 in his function as principal prosecutor and based on an interview with the last surviving eye-witness, published in: Pierre-Albert LENZ, *Jean l'Aveugle* ..., p. 82-86.

already renowned as a romantic in his appetite for everything medieval,¹⁶³ did not hesitate to ask the factory-owner to surrender his distant relative. In return, he promised an adequate compensation in the form of a large fountain designed by his favourite architect Karl-Friederich Schinkel and crowned with the statue of the blind king.¹⁶⁴ It was the same Prussian architect who also received the order to design an appropriate mausoleum on a ‘romantic’ setting high above the river Saar on the location of a former hermitage.¹⁶⁵ John of Bohemia was buried in his new tomb on the 26th August 1838, the 492th anniversary of his death.

John’s tomb had been a crucial factor in keeping his memory alive for many centuries; it now developed into a focal point for the awakening search for a Luxembourgian identity. Most people in Luxembourg had come to believe that the body was lost during the French conquest. The discovery that it had been taken to Prussian lands occurred at a critical time: the last days of the Belgian Revolution in Luxembourg. The reactions were varied and ranged from emotional shock to utter indifference. The sources also reflect the political uncertainties of the moment and the lack of a mainstream discourse. The debate between Pierre-Albert Lenz and Jean-François Boch-Buschmann shall both clarify and illustrate the point.

Pierre-Albert Lenz (1804-1875), at the time ‘extraordinary professor of old history’ at the still quite young University of Ghent,¹⁶⁶ remained in touch with the developments in his native Luxembourg. He regarded the disappearance of John’s remains as a symbol for the country’s neglect of its own history, of “the son and father of the two great emperors that Belgium has given to Germany from Charlemagne to Charles V. Ungrateful Fatherland!”¹⁶⁷ The brief passage first of all mirrors an emotional impact that the events had on the author, which in turn also reflects the importance still attributed to John and his tomb. At the same time, Lenz identifies with Belgium, as did most of Luxembourg’s population at the time. Shortly

¹⁶³ Christopher Clark describes Frederick-William as having “grown up on a diet of romantic historic novels – a favourite was the Prussian writer Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué, a descendant of the Huguenot colony in Brandenburg whose historical romances featured high-minded knights, damsels in distress, windswept crags, ancient castles and gloomy forests.” Christopher CLARK, *Iron Kingdom. The rise and downfall of Prussia, 1600-1947*, p. 436.

¹⁶⁴ See figure 47 (Appendix 3).

¹⁶⁵ See figure 48 (Appendix 3).

¹⁶⁶ He became “ordinary professor” in 1848. See: Alphonse ROERSCH, Pierre-Albert Lenz, p. 71.

¹⁶⁷ Pierre-Albert LENZ, Jacques van Artevelde. Situation en Flandre à son avènement. Histoire des six premiers mois de son administration, p. 288, n. 1.

thereafter, Boch-Buschmann released a pamphlet with a retort, a justification for his deeds. He rejects Lenz's views: "In Kastel, John is still at home (*chez lui*); since he was a German prince and he will never cease to be German, which may displease the Belgians who call him one of their heroes."¹⁶⁸ He adds that unlike the prince of Prussia, no other monarch, neither Belgian nor Dutch, has shown any interest in him.¹⁶⁹ His justification also contains a flight of fancy: "as a knight errant, seeking adventures, he will be pleased with a hermitage, at the top of a rock, in a romantic setting, (...); as a soldier, he will feel in the midst of his family, in a Roman camp."¹⁷⁰ These references to two of the site's historical roles reflect the degree to which John's chivalric persona had begun to dominate his image. Lenz regards this as Prussian propaganda and replies while writing a short biography of the king. Again he accuses the population of Luxembourg of "forgetting", which in consequence required a "historic restoration of the Blind King".¹⁷¹ This also fits the changing circumstances: not having anticipated a reaction in Luxembourg, Frederick-William promised to return the body on condition that the political status of Luxembourg would be solved and that the population would erect a monument adequate to the king's memory.¹⁷² Lenz's 'reminding' the Luxembourgers of their 'duty' was thus a seriously meant incentive, especially since the political status had indeed been solved by 1839. At the same time, this brought the author into a slight conundrum of what to identify John with. He anticipated later developments by rendering him more 'Luxembourgian':

This prince loved above all his country of Luxembourg. (...)
During his life, he represented the fundamental character of
the Luxembourgian people, and since his death he has

¹⁶⁸ Jean-François BOCH-BUSCHMANN, *Jean l'Aveugle. Roi de Bohême. De 1795 à 1838*, p. 6-7.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 8-9.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹⁷¹ Pierre-Albert LENZ, *Jean l'Aveugle ...*, p. 3.

¹⁷² Frederick-William expressed his promise first in a letter to the mayor of Luxembourg in 1837, but confirmed it in person while inspecting the Prussian garrison in that fortress in 1839, see: *Journal de la Ville et du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg*, 29/05/1839, p. 4. Of course, Lenz was aware of this: Pierre-Albert LENZ, *Jean l'Aveugle ...*, p. 90.

represented its changing destinies. (...) he changed grave when his country changed domination.¹⁷³

The passage contains an underlying idea of continuity from the fourteenth century to the nineteenth. This again should motivate Luxembourg to proceed with building a new tomb as much as the intrinsic link between the fate of the medieval ruler and the modern territory of Luxembourg entailed his final phrase. Far from expressing a Luxembourgian national sentiment however, Lenz perceived local history from a Belgian perspective. He had studied in Liège, moved to Brussels during the Revolution and taken up different posts in Ghent thereafter where he remained the rest of his life.¹⁷⁴ Like the politician Nothomb,¹⁷⁵ he joined the Belgian cause and remained attached to it, publishing mainly on Flemish history.¹⁷⁶ This is also reflected by the flaring up of his Belgian theory of John's identity: since his ancestors were "born in Luxembourg, Brabant and Hainaut (...) the inhabitants of these provinces can regard him *one of their heroes*."¹⁷⁷ The use of the article in the original French (*le Luxembourg, le Brabant, le Hainaut*) reinforces the implication of "provinces", already suggested by the list as such. Lenz's constant references to John's Belgian origins as well as Boch-Buschmann's insistence of his German character illustrate that the perception of a Luxembourgian collective identity scarcely existed: there was little they could allude to. Furthermore it reflects the uneasy position of the country between the Belgian kingdom, the Dutch monarchy and the German Confederation.

Lenz's opinion was shared by some people in Luxembourg:¹⁷⁸ in 1839 the city council decided to build a fitting sepulchral monument and have the king

¹⁷³ Pierre-Albert LENZ, *Jean l'Aveugle ...*, p. 3.

¹⁷⁴ Alphonse ROERSCH, Pierre-Albert Lenz, p. 70-74; Walter PREVENIER, Pierre-Albert Lenz (1804-1875), p. 19-20.

¹⁷⁵ See my chapter on Ermesinde.

¹⁷⁶ Alphonse ROERSCH, Pierre-Albert Lenz, p. 71-72; Walter PREVENIER, Pierre-Albert Lenz (1804-1875), p. 19-20.

¹⁷⁷ Pierre-Albert LENZ, *Jean l'Aveugle ...*, p. 7.

¹⁷⁸ For most sources it is difficult to assess how wide-spread they were; in Lenz's case there was an advertisement in the main newspaper in Luxembourg City, suggesting that his booklet was rather common in Luxembourg, despite it having been printed in Ghent. See: *Journal de la Ville et du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg*, 25/05/1844, p. 2.

reburied there,¹⁷⁹ with the plan intended to be financed via public subscription.¹⁸⁰ The time however was not quite ripe for the project to meet with broad popular approval. The split of the principality had been a drastic political measure, which only the powerful but small minority of Orangists in the capital were well prepared to cope with. Only at the start of 1844 was the situation stable enough for a new incident to reignite the debate. Jacques Maas rightly noticed that the key event was the launch of a similar subscription for the finishing of the Cologne Cathedral.¹⁸¹ Considering the grand-duchy's link to the German lands as member of Customs Union (*Zollverein*) and Confederation with a Prussian garrison in the fortress, the petition was quite naturally also published in Luxembourg. While the subscription saw indeed a certain amount of success from the start, it also found almost immediately adverse reactions.

Less than a week after having published the Cologne-appeal, the 'official' newspaper printed a letter to the editor by an anonymous reader, who signed with "A.". Its author claims to be proud of the monuments of his own fatherland and that he would like to inspire his fellow countrymen to care about their own heritage before supporting a foreign project.¹⁸² Eighteen days later he sent another letter. This time his argument contained an even stronger 'nationalist' tone. "Is it the *glory of Germany* that we shall seek before our own?" he asks rhetorically, though the dichotomy of 'German' and 'our own' speaks for itself.¹⁸³ The people of Luxembourg have descended from Germanic tribes, he argued, like the French from the Franks, yet they have never been, are not and will never be Germans according to the generally agreed meaning of the word.¹⁸⁴ In consequence Luxembourg should not participate in this foreign venture, but care for its own monuments. At the same time, preparation began for another launch of a subscription for a memorial to John of Bohemia. A first announcement was published less than a month after the Cologne subscription and an official appeal followed at the end of April, signed by

¹⁷⁹ *Courrier du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg*, 6/11/1844, p. 3.

¹⁸⁰ Jean SCHOETTER, *Johann, Graf von Luxemburg und König von Böhmen*, vol. 2, p. 315.

¹⁸¹ Jacques MAAS, *Johann der Blinde, emblematische Heldengestalt des luxemburgischen Nationalbewußtseins im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, p. 602-603.

¹⁸² *Journal de la Ville et du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg*, 6/01/1844, p. 2-3.

¹⁸³ "Est-ce la gloire de l'Allemagne que nous devons rechercher avant la nôtre?" *Ibid.*, 24/01/1844, p. 3.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 24/01/1844, p. 3.

representatives of the city council.¹⁸⁵ In the following issue, A. jumps on the bandwagon and supports the idea with another long letter to the editor, featuring an account of John's posthumous peregrinations.¹⁸⁶ Thereafter he occasionally wrote to 'remind' the readers and the commission in charge of the monument.¹⁸⁷ Jacques Maas referred to the exchange as "a proper press-campaign" being led for "over one year" in favour of the creation of a new memorial for John.¹⁸⁸ This wording is slightly misleading: the newspaper published hardly any of its own articles on the topic and never took position officially. It even went as far as publishing all news on the development of the Cologne subscription, including the lists of people who had subscribed. Likewise the topic was 'hottest' in the months of January and May 1844, and therefore hardly any letters or articles were published on it during all other months. What is striking is the prominent tribune the newspaper granted to A.: all of his letters seem to have been published in their entirety, some taking over an entire page of the issue's total of four.¹⁸⁹ On one occasion he even receives the front-page, normally reserved for international politics.¹⁹⁰ The editors very diplomatically reply to one of A.'s harsher letters, which also reflects a general sympathy for his ideas.¹⁹¹ The notorious writer to the editor thus seems to have been a welcome shield behind which the newspaper could propagate its own agenda. Although one can wonder to what degree they shared his ideology, the *Journal* (and later *Courrier*) was after all the semi-official mouthpiece of the Orangist led government and city council, the initiators of the subscription for John's monument.

It is impossible to determine A.'s true identity. The speed with which he became aware of the developments hints at good connections within the local bourgeoisie, without having been one of the decision makers himself, as shown by his occasional unawareness of certain details. Likewise his writings show a high degree of education, but most likely without being a 'historian' himself. One of his letters reveals the study of secondary literature on John and his posthumous

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 31/01/1844, p. 2 and 27/04/1844, p. 4.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 01/05/1844, p. 2-4.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 15/05/1844, p. 4.

¹⁸⁸ Jacques MAAS, *Johann der Blinde ...*, p. 603.

¹⁸⁹ See for instance: *Journal de la Ville et du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg*, 01/05/1844, p. 2-4.

¹⁹⁰ *Courrier du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg*, 26/10/1844, p. 1. [N.B. The newspaper switched name from *Journal* to *Courrier* in the middle of the year 1844.]

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 26/10/1844, p. 1.

wanderings, but it limited itself to the widely read and available Bertholet.¹⁹² Since he is the only one to take position in the press, not only for a memorial, but also against the Cologne subscription, it is again hard to resolve how representative his opinion was, despite the tacid support he received from the editors. Moreover, A. certainly did not assume a position shared by everyone else and for many locals identification with Germany remained a part of their self-understanding, as not only reflected by the support for the Cologne Cathedral, but also by the readiness of the city officials to place the flag of the German Confederation as a symbol of its freedoms on top of the town hall in 1848.¹⁹³ Nonetheless the entire quarrel around John's tomb shows that the main challenge of early Luxembourgian nationalism was to portray the Germans as the 'Other'; it can in this respect also be seen as an extension of Lenz's argument against Boch-Buschmann.

The petition for John's monument was crowned with a much higher success than the German one, and again this is telling. This success was first of all quantitative: about four times the number of people promised to donate for John's monument, including almost all of those who had already contributed to the first one.¹⁹⁴ In addition, it also received royal approval. King-Grand-Duke William II emerged as the first ruler to pay interest in local history. In 1841 the monarch went to visit the grand-duchy, not only in order to receive a personal impression of his private territorial possession and the homage of local notables, but also for more private reasons. The journey provided him with the possibility to visit the ruins of his ancestral castle of Vianden.¹⁹⁵ He and his son Alexander received a tour of 45 minutes "because everything in this venerable location excited the interest of the

¹⁹² See: *Journal de la Ville et du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg*, 01/05/1844, p. 2-4. The historians who were to form the Archaeological Society had access to primary sources and could have made use of these. There is also the possibility that one of them wrote the letters, but only referred to Bertholet in order to hide his true level of expertise so as to protect his identity.

¹⁹³ For the context see: Daniel SPIZZO, *La nation luxembourgeoise. Genèse et structure d'une identité*, p. 174-176.

¹⁹⁴ See: Jacques MAAS, *Johann der Blinde ...*, p. 603-604.

¹⁹⁵ Vianden lies in the northeast of the Grand-Duchy, on the border with Germany. It is a picturesque little town and attracts swarms of tourists every year. The site is dominated by the castle, which has been largely rebuilt since the 1980s (and not by William II – see below). The castle had been in the possession of the House of Nassau since 1417 and is regarded as one of its ancestral castles. See: Ulrich SCHUPPENER, *Die Grafschaft Vianden und ihre Zugehörigkeit zu Nassau*, p. 10 and 14-15.

august visitor”, according to a devoted witness.¹⁹⁶ At several occasions the king even promised to have the castle rebuilt and restored to its ancient glories within two years.¹⁹⁷ In 1844 William toured the grand-duchy once more.¹⁹⁸ As expected, he could not escape one of the great debates of the moment while mingling with the local *grands*. During his visit to the Athenaeum of Luxembourg, at the time the main local centre of learning, its principal Muller brought the issue to the monarch’s ears in what can be regarded as a revealing speech:

(...) when the house of Luxembourg provided the emperors for Germany, our city was frequently the stopover of the crowned heads. The presence of Your Majesty brings us back the memory of that epoch. Amongst our sovereigns then, there was one who loved us like Your Majesty loves us; who enjoyed himself in the midst of the Luxembourgers, like Your Majesty has the kindness to enjoy himself. He, too, was in his times the King-knight without fear and beyond reproach; he, too, possessed a talent to win battles and to win the courts.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁶ Mathieu-Lambert SCHROBILGEN, *Relation du voyage de Sa Majesté Guillaume II, Roi des Pays-Bas, Prince d’Orange-Nassau, Grand-Duc de Luxembourg, etc., etc., etc., dans le Grand-Duché, en Juin 1841*, p. 6.

¹⁹⁷ The author even adds, it seems with a shudder, that “The King and his august son ran about through all the passageways and penetrated all the corners of the old monument in ruins. In more than one place they used ladders in order to arrive above the walls, which risked to crumble underneath their feet.” *Idem*.

¹⁹⁸ This was to be his third visit to his southern possessions after a second visit in 1842, see: Jean JORIS, *Notice Biographique sur Guillaume II, Roi des Pays-Bas, Prince d’Orange-Nassau, Grand-Duc de Luxembourg, etc., etc., etc.*, p. 102-118.

¹⁹⁹ “Mais à l’époque antérieure, quand la maison de Luxembourg donnait les empereurs à l’Allemagne notre cité a été souvent le séjours des têtes couronnées. La présence de V.M. nous rend le souvenir de cette époque. Parmi nos souverains d’alors il en est un surtout qui nous aimait comme V.M. nous aime ; qui se plaisait au milieu des Luxembourgeois comme V.M. a la bonté de s’y plaire. Lui aussi il était de son temps le Roi-chevalier sans peur et sans reproche ; lui aussi, il possédait le talent de gagner des batailles et de gagner les cours.” *Courrier du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg*, 17/07/1844, p. 3. Muller was to repeat his comparison again a couple of years after the king’s death in 1852 when pledging for a monument to be built for William II: “Les armes de Luxembourg doivent y être aussi. Le lion qui ornait la poitrine de Jean de Bohême sera fier d’orne le monument du héros qui a le plus aimé les Luxembourgeois et que les Luxembourgeois ont le plus aimé de tous leurs Souverains après le héros de Crécy.” Jean JORIS, *Notice Biographique sur Guillaume II ...*, p. 180.

In a rhetorically clever move, the speaker presents the contemporary ruler as the successor of the much-loved John of Bohemia. William II is the first ruler to visit Luxembourg again on a more regular basis since then and thus the first one again “to love” his Luxembourgian subjects. Likewise John’s alleged successes in war are set next to William’s image as the ‘hero of Waterloo’ (1815), and his own military successes in Brussels (1830) and Hasselt (1831).²⁰⁰ By ignoring the period of more than 400 years in between, Muller tacitly anticipates the idea of “foreign dominations”, about which more shall be said further on. William happily seized the opportunity to distinguish himself and considered himself glad “to have handed back to the Luxembourgers their nationality” and to help in preserving it.²⁰¹ The king had understood the message; referring to the subscription, he graciously granted “Je m’associerai à cet oeuvre”.²⁰² Two months later he promised to contribute the generous sum of 10,000 francs, under the condition that the project would attract enough support to guarantee its success.²⁰³ The promised amount was higher than all other combined.²⁰⁴ His interest in the country’s past can be regarded as a publicity stunt which was also very much to the profit of the monarch. In the same spirit he nurtured the plan to rebury John in the Romanesque chapel of the rebuilt castle of Vianden.²⁰⁵ The plan would link the dynasty of Nassau-Orange to the medieval rulers

²⁰⁰ Although these two elements appeared mainly in the Netherlands, they were naturally taken over by the Orangists in Luxembourg, see: Christiane HUBERTY, *Guillaume II, Roi des Pays-Bas et Grand-Duc de Luxembourg (1840-1849). Construction et evolution d’un lieu de mémoire*, p. 108.

²⁰¹ “Je me sens heureux d’avoir rendu aux Luxembourgeois leur nationalité. Je vois de plus en plus avec plaisir le bon usage qu’ils en font. (...) je maintiendrai votre nationalité, comptez sur moi (...)”. Jean JORIS, *Notice Biographique sur Guillaume II*, p. 180. With the term ‘nationality’, William was referring to the country’s liberties and political autonomy, see: Daniel SPIZZO, *La nation luxembourgeoise ...*, p. 152-160.

²⁰² Jean JORIS, *Notice Biographique sur Guillaume II ...*, p. 180.

²⁰³ *Courrier du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg*, 18/09/1844, p. 2, and 25/09/1844, p. 1-2; Jean SCHOETTER, *Johann, Graf von Luxemburg und König von Böhmen*, vol. 2, p. 319.

²⁰⁴ The amount promised by the general public accumulated to 6,800 francs. It seems however that only the sum of 87.50 francs was ever paid, all others were only promised, which in turn was probably also related to the ultimate failure of the project (see below). SHL 16,6 *Sitzungsprotokolle VIII, 1868-1902*, 3/08/1902.

²⁰⁵ Michel Margue made this claim in his paper ‘The discovery of the Middle Ages’ presented in Oxford on 7 April 2006. Parts of it will be published as: Michel MARGUE and Pît PÉPORTÉ, *The discovery of the Middle Ages. Medieval Myths and the Building of national identity: the example of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg*.

as outlined above, and provide it with additional legitimation by setting it as the continuation of the latter.²⁰⁶

1844 was also the year in which the Archaeological Society started to form.²⁰⁷ It is impossible to say whether there is a causal link between its foundation and the discussions about John's tomb. Interestingly, A. calls for such an organisation in two of his letters, referring to it as a "National Institute for the research of historical documents and the conservation of old monuments".²⁰⁸ Six weeks later he could declare that such body was under construction.²⁰⁹ The Society however did not position itself into the same ideological milieu that the anonymous A. stood for. While the founding members of the Archaeological Society subscribed to the petition for John, its main representatives had also been among the first to joint the Cologne list.²¹⁰ De la Fontaine, governor of the grand-duchy and one of the leading figures of the Society, even "felt honoured" to accept the honorary patronage of the Luxembourgian support for the Cologne Cathedral.²¹¹ There are however two conclusions we can draw from this. Firstly, the mysterious A. already showed a degree of patriotism (or even nationalism) that not all of his contemporaries seemed to share; the entire Orangist élite took a much more ambiguous stance. Secondly, the year 1844 can be regarded as a turning point nevertheless: the questioning of a 'German' project, the recognition of Luxembourg's 'own' historical monuments, including not least the remains of King John, the foundation of the Archaeological Society, all point towards a growing awareness of a distinct historic past. This consciousness was encouraged from above: by the local authorities, such as the municipality of Luxembourg, members of the government and the press, on the one side, and by the king-grand-duke on the other, who could use it for his own ends.

The actual 1840s project never saw the light of day. Discussions about the location failed to produce any viable result. The longest lasting suggestion was to

²⁰⁶ One remaining question is how much Frederick-William played a role in William's involvement. Despite its enthusiastic reception in Luxembourg, he must have been aware that the move could possibly be less favourably regarded by his Prussian counterpart, who was at the same time his cousin. Unfortunately, the relationship between William II of the Netherlands and Frederick-William IV of Prussia needs further study, especially with respect to their status in Luxembourg.

²⁰⁷ See my general introduction and the previous chapters.

²⁰⁸ *Journal de la Ville et du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg*, 6/01/1844, p. 2-3.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 21/02/1844, p. 4.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 10/01/1844, p. 2.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 10/02/1844, p. 3.

build a new chapel next to today's cathedral, then still only the main church in town. The only solution for incorporating a new chapel without re-organising too many buildings on the side would have involved the removal of the sacristy. This however was out of question.²¹² In the meantime the issue seemed to have lost topicality. The idea of building a new mausoleum resurfaced again briefly between 1852 and 1861 under the initiative of the state-architect Charles Arendt. He thought about burying John next to the new parish church of Clausen,²¹³ or even erecting an equestrian statute of the blind king on the Place Guillaume.²¹⁴ More important however were the plans from 1870. A new committee was set up, which included Charles Arendt, again the main initiator, and the government official Philippe Knaff, who also supported the project with two short biographies of John aimed at stirring up additional popular attention.²¹⁵ Charles Arendt's plan was to create a neo-gothic chapel on the Altmünster plateau, on the exact location of the first medieval monastery where John was first laid to rest by his son Charles.²¹⁶ It must be added that Arendt's plans were not uncontested within the *Section Historique*; its president Jean Engling in particular raised concerns that the chapel would not be sacral enough, lacking a proper altar. In addition, he imagined a more centrally located memorial of a more glorifying character, such as an equestrian statue.²¹⁷ In slight contrast to 1844, we notice that official discourse had become much more nationalist in style: supporting the project

²¹² Jean SCHOETTER, *Johann, Graf von Luxemburg und König von Böhmen*, vol. 2, p. 320; Philippe KNAFF, *Johann der Blinde. König von Böhmen und Graf von Luxemburg. Kurzfassliche kritische Beurtheilung*, p. 11. Today's setup of the site is different, since an entire new choir, crypt and sacristy was added to the cathedral in the 1930s. These transformations reshaped the setup of the area.

²¹³ Clausen is the part of city of Luxembourg lying to foot of the former castle, within the bend of the river Alzette. For the plans see: SHL 16,6 *Sitzungsprotokolle VI, 1856-1862*: report from 14/01/1861; and: SHL 16,19 *archives courantes, correspondance 1861*: letter of the Société archéologique to the city administration of Luxembourg in 1861.

²¹⁴ SHL 16,19 *archives courantes, correspondance 1856*: 12/03/1856. Alternative ideas preferred a large monument with the prince on horseback to be placed on the Place Guillaume in the centre of the City of Luxembourg. In 1884 the location indeed saw such an equestrian statute being set up, the king on horseback however was William II. See: Christiane HUBERTY, *Wëllem II – Guillaume II. Roi des Pays-Bas et Grand-Duc de Luxembourg 1840-1849*, p. 80-81. The idea of an equestrian statue for John was also incorporated into a novel in 1872, see: Angeline VON ZIEGLER, *Blüthenlese aus der Märchenwelt*, p. 124-126.

²¹⁵ Philippe KNAFF, *König Johann der Blinde. Biographische Skizze*, Luxembourg, 1872; and: Philippe KNAFF, *Johann der Blinde. König von Böhmen und Graf von Luxemburg. Kurzfassliche kritische Beurtheilung*, Luxembourg, 1872.

²¹⁶ See figure 27 (Appendix 3).

²¹⁷ SHL 16,6 *Sitzungsprotokolle VIII, 1868-1902*, report from 17/04/1872.

for this “truly national monument” was deemed as an “eminently patriotic deed”.²¹⁸ Otherwise, the reasons given repeated those from more than thirty years earlier: the existence of national independence, accusations by foreign newspapers and the “shameful neglect” towards “our royal benefactor”.²¹⁹ Again the monument never came into existence. This time the funds gathered were used up for what was regarded a more urgent matter, the erection of a “patriotic monument” for Princess Amalia.²²⁰ She had been the wife of the monarch’s brother and his lieutenant in Luxembourg Prince Henry and had died in 1872. The couple was well-loved among the population, since they resided in Luxembourg (from time to time) and the solution for the crises of 1866-1870 were attributed to them.²²¹

When analysing the deeper reasons for renewed interest in building a monument to John at this time, it is towards these crises and thus once more towards the role of Prussia that one must turn.²²² National independence, used as an argument in favour of John’s monument,²²³ had received international recognition in 1867, when Luxembourg had to accept a ‘perpetual neutrality’. In 1866, William III of the Netherlands had thought about selling his ‘personal possession’ to Napoleon III of France, but renounced in view of Bismarck’s threat to invade the grand-duchy. Although that situation had been formally resolved by 1870, the threat of a Prussian invasion was still perceived as very real during the Franco-Prussian. At the time of both crises, the population of Luxembourg reacted by expressing its national awareness, in the form of mass-demonstrations and the creation of new journals with such eloquent titles as *Das Vaterland. Wochenblatt für Luxemburgische National-Literatur*.²²⁴ The initiative for John’s new mausoleum can also be placed into this context of national defiance in reaction to the Prussian threat:

²¹⁸ *Erection d’un Mausolée Jean l’Aveugle*, p. 1.

²¹⁹ “Aujourd’hui que, peuple indépendant, nous sommes maîtres de nos destinées, le moment est venu pour nous de nous laver de l’affront que souvent nous ont jeté à la face les journaux étrangers, en nous accusant, bien qu’à tort, d’une ingratitude honteuse envers notre royal bienfaiteur et d’une indifférence coupable pour la gloire de notre pays.” *Erection d’un Mausolée Jean l’Aveugle*, p. 1-2.

²²⁰ Philippe KNAFF, *Johann der Blinde. König von Böhmen und Graf von Luxemburg* ..., p. 12.

²²¹ Christiane HUBERTY, *Hary an Amalia – le Prince Henri (1820-1879) et la Princesse Amélie (1830-1872) des Pays-Bas*, p. 93 and 96.

²²² Jacques MAAS, *Johann der Blinde* ..., p. 611-612.

²²³ See also: Charles ARENDT, *Entwurf zu einem Monumente für Koenig Johann den Blinden*, p. 245.

²²⁴ N.B. The title of the paper is in German. At the time, speakers of the local dialect still saw themselves as German-speaking. See: Benoît MAJERUS, *D’Sprooch*, p. 17-19.

Above all, [John] was a Luxembourger (...) and never would he have sacrificed the independence of his lands of origin (*Stammländchen*), which he called his dear fatherland, to a larger state, which he ruled effectively.²²⁵

This passage shows that, although the two projects of the 1840s and 1870s indicate both underlying anti-Prussian motivations, it is thus also of crucial importance to see how John's image as a 'Luxembourger' was cultivated.

The three-fold basis of the national myth

The first ever schoolbook on 'Luxembourgian history' appeared in 1819, four years after the Congress of Vienna and the creation of the grand-duchy. It is a rather thin 'chronology' of events, written by a local priest and teacher, Jean-Pierre Mäysz (1780-1866), who seemed reasonably self-aware of his motives and aims.²²⁶ The inside cover announces that a citizen recognizes a fatherland through its history,²²⁷ and the author intended to provide youth with the feelings of "love and gratitude" towards their fatherland.²²⁸ The author thus did consider patriotism a virtue worth transmitting in school. Nonetheless the phrase is potentially misleading. Firstly, as the paragraphs above showed, it was written during a time in which collective identities in Luxembourg were, at best, ambivalent.²²⁹ Secondly, the international character of Mäysz's own biography should quell any suspicions of an early-nationalist agenda. He was born to an Alsatian father and a Luxembourgian mother, studied in Metz and then began his career as a priest in French-occupied Saarland

²²⁵ "Vor Allem war er Luxemburger. (...) und nie hätte er es sich beikommen lassen, die Unabhängigkeit seines kleinen Stammländchens, welche er stets sein liebes Vaterland nannte, irgend einem grösseren Staate, der er faktisch beherrschte, zum Opfer zu bringen." Philippe KNAFF, *Johann der Blinde. König von Böhmen und Graf von Luxembourg ...*, p. 10.

²²⁶ Jean-Pierre MÄYSZ, *Chronologische Uebersicht der Geschichte der Stadt und des Groß=Herzogthums Luxemburg. Nebst einer Topographie. Zum Gebrauche der vaterländischen Elementar=Schulen des Mittel=Unterrichts*, Luxembourg, 1819.

²²⁷ "Nur in seiner Geschichte erscheint dem Bürger ein Vaterland."

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

²²⁹ See also: Daniel SPIZZO, *La nation luxembourgeoise ...*, p. 89-92 and 98.

and the *Departement de la Meurthe*.²³⁰ Only after the treaty of Vienna and the creation of the modern Luxembourg did he return to the town of his birth. Mäysz's early life therefore set him into a much wider area with a similar (bilingual) culture, but without having the later state-borders. In his thin booklet, John of Bohemia appears in a prominent position and covers an entire page, very unlike his father or his sons, who only get half a page. Mäysz's account can be summed up by his phrase that "[John] was brave in war and a father to his subjects, whose grandchildren still remember him with love".²³¹ Even though a fairly short synthesis and to a certain degree emotional in style, Mäysz further lets emerge the two other main ingredients of local esteem for the historic person. Apart from John's alleged love for his own homelands, he mentioned the foundation of the annual fair in Luxembourg, the *Schobermesse*, a 'legacy' that had been both visible and enjoyable. The third point emphasised is John's "heroic death" at the battle of Crécy, which is to stand as a distillation of his knightly life. Together these three aspects of John's life and politics were to dominate all others. For all three elements one can identify an origin, observe their manifestations and extract a message.

John's supposed love of his fatherland has some historical foundation. The chronicler Peter of Zittau claimed that John left Prague so frequently for Luxembourg "since only the fatherland of his birth is sweetest".²³² This comment was probably used as a foil to contrast the problematic relationship of John with the Bohemian nobility. In addition, as the same chronicler jealously noticed, the king levied heavy taxes on his Eastern possessions and used these revenues also to finance his politics in the West. While the medieval chronicler commented on this from a Bohemian perspective, Bertholet viewed this more positively from a Luxembourgian angle. Furthermore, whereas Zittau meant it as a strictly personal attitude towards a 'land', Bertholet widened it to the 'land and its people'.²³³ Nonetheless, for Bertholet the connotation was rather the ideal monarch caring for his subjects, an attitude he

²³⁰ Antoine NAMUR, *Notice biographique sur feu l'Abbé J.-P. Mæysz, ancien Professeur de l'école modèle, Chevalier de l'Ordre de la Couronne de chêne &c. &c. &c.*, p. 5-8.

²³¹ Jean-Pierre MÄYSZ, *Chronologische Uebersicht der Geschichte ...*, p. 12.

²³² "Quod solum natalis patrie dulcissimum sibi foret". Peter OF ZITTAU, *Chronicon Aulae Regiae*, p. 257.

²³³ Jean BERTHOLET, *Histoire Ecclésiastique et Civile ...*, vol. 6, p. 180.

also expected from his own Habsburg rulers.²³⁴ With the creation of the modern state, John's 'homelands' were being transformed into an independent territory. Even though national awareness was developing only slowly, it was paralleled by the growing association of John's love for the fatherland with the idea of a Luxembourgian nation.²³⁵ Together with an essentialist definition of the nation surviving the ages as an unchangeable body, the assumed expression of John's love was welcomed as a factor linking this fourteenth-century ruler to the contemporary inhabitants. In addition, the contemporary nation was supposed to share this feeling and further reciprocate it. The constant reference to John's 'patriotism' can thus also be interpreted as a call to rally the nation around this *lieu de mémoire*.

The proof for the king's love of the fatherland is generally given by referring to the *Schobermesse* (*Schueberfouer* in the local tongue). In 1340, John issued a charter ordering the establishment of a yearly fair to be held in Luxembourg after the day of St Bartholomew (24 August).²³⁶ For centuries the growing popularity of the event was used to pay homage to its 'creator' and the foundation was praised as one of John's most acclaimed deeds in the earlier Luxembourgian sources. Pierret already presents it as one of John's great domestic achievements and even adds an explanation for the origin of the name. Since John himself died on the day of St Bartholomew in 1346, the fair was supposedly cancelled that year and the tradesmen forced to leave without having sold anything. This would have resulted in the naming of "damaging fair", or *schadbare Messe* in German ("Shadbassre meß" as he writes) and the name would have endured the centuries as *Schobermesse* (or *Chabremesse* in Pierret's spelling).²³⁷ *Faute de mieux*, the legend survived the ages.²³⁸ The *Schobermesse* maintained its popularity also among historians and its foundation

²³⁴ Jean BERTHOLET, *Histoire Ecclésiastique et Civile ...*, vol. 1, p. iv.

²³⁵ "In many ways he sought to increase the reputation of his country of birth and to favour the Luxembourgers." *Luxemburger Lesebuch für das 5. und 6. Schuljahr*, p. 226.

²³⁶ UQB 10/1, L75, p. 106-108; for a detailed analysis, see also: Jean SCHROEDER, *L'acte de fondation de la Schueberfouer*, p. 41-46.

²³⁷ François PIERRET, *Essay de l'Histoire de Luxembourg*, p. 321-322. Needless to say, this is pure myth. To start with, John actually died on the 26th August, and not the 24th. It did probably take many days for the news of his death to arrive in Luxembourg, at which point the fair was over anyway. See also: François-Xavier WÜRTH-PAQUET, *La Foire de Luxembourg dite Schoberfuhr ou Schobermess. Etymologie de ce mot*, p. 70.

²³⁸ See for instance: Jean-Pierre MÄYSZ, *Chronologische Uebersicht der Geschichte ...*, p. 12; or: Jean ULVELING, *Tableau analytique et chronologique des principaux faits de l'histoire du Grand-Duché et de la ville de Luxembourg*, p. 9-10.

remained an unavoidable subject in the many schoolbooks of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.²³⁹ Its result was widespread awareness of the link between the founder and fair – the reason for stressing it was manifold. First of all, they aimed at imparting some background knowledge to one of the city’s annual cultural highlights. However, there is probably more to it. The trade fair had been developing predominantly into a fun fair, a favourite especially among the children and the youth exposed to it in the classroom. The first function for mentioning it is thus also a mnemonic one, or as one historian put it: “With the *Schobermesse*, John created his most beautiful monument by himself”.²⁴⁰ The popularity of the event is supposed to interweave with that of its founder. Proving John’s fondness for Luxembourg with such an emotionally convincing example was a means to integrate him further and stylise him as a good ruler, or as Paquet put it, it was a “good deed” and an example of how “his Luxembourgers” were “privileged at every occasion”.²⁴¹

John’s death at Crécy is the most fundamental of these three points. It is regarded as the most significant moment of his life, as can be illustrated by its centrality in all nineteenth-century texts, both historiographical and literary, or even in paintings depicting the battlefield. In 1863, the nineteen-year-old Mathias Mongenast²⁴² wrote a poem on “The blind hero” for the end-of-year school performance at the Athenaeum.²⁴³ Despite the king’s age (“ein Held in Silberlocken”), he is eager for combat (“voll Kampfesgluth”) and the English cries of victory let his heroic blood boil in his veins (“das alte Heldenblut [in seinen] Adern wallen”). John allows himself to be led into battle where “he fights like a lion” and dies the glorious death of a hero. The writer finished with the hope that John will return home to the lands that once were so dear to him. The action is clothed in a very romantic style, yet it also follows many details set out by Froissart already. At

²³⁹ Jean-Pierre MÄYSZ, *Chronologische Uebersicht der Geschichte ...*, p. 12; Joseph PAQUET, *Die Geschichte des Luxemburger Landes*, p. 32. Jean SCHOETTER, *Geschichte des Luxemburger Landes nach den besten Quellen*, §23, p. 94; Arthur HERCHEN, *Manuel d’Histoire nationale*, 1918: p. 52, 1972: p. 87-9; Joseph MEYERS, *Geschichte Luxemburgs*, p. 72-3; Paul MARGUE, *Luxemburg in Mittelalter und Neuzeit (10. bis 18. Jahrhundert)*, p. 79-80.

²⁴⁰ Paul SPANG, *Die Grabstätten Johannis des Blinden*, p. 232-233. John of Bohemia’s motives for founding the fair were probably only of a financial nature, yet the *lieu de mémoire* often consumes the view of past impulses.

²⁴¹ Joseph PAQUET, *Die Geschichte des Luxemburger Landes*, p. 32.

²⁴² He would become prime minister of Luxembourg for a couple of months in 1915.

²⁴³ Mathias MONGENAST, *Der blinde Held. Vorgetragen auf der musikalischen Abendunterhaltung der Schüler des Athenäums am 11. März 1863*.

the same time it reflects a specific reading of the *Chroniques*, namely that of a heroic suicide. Froissart seems to indicate that John was pressing to fight, even though the battle already seemed lost before his charge. This reading was combined with the underlying thought that by this point in his life John had achieved all he could ask for, after a lively and successful career crowned by the recent election of his son as king of the Romans. In addition, the king's blindness was considered an important hindrance to his chosen knightly way of life and thus he decided to end it with the most romantic of possible deaths.

The image of the dead king was particularly strong. Around 1845, Michel Sinner (1826-1882) crafted his first large painting, choosing as its subject the discovery of John's body.²⁴⁴ We see how in the night after the battle the king's body is found by the English, who are beset by shock and awe. A warrior in dark armour standing behind the body seems to represent the Black Prince. Sinner donated the painting to the Luxembourgian government in 1851 and asked specifically for its public display.²⁴⁵ The painter Nicolas Liez (1809-1892) fixed the scene on canvas around the same time (or maybe slightly later).²⁴⁶ Interestingly, Liez painted under the patronage of Boch-Buschmann at a time when John's remains had become an issue. The painting even seems to have been inspired by a similar one painted by a relative of the patron, Gustave (or Gustaaf) Buschmann, who lived in Antwerp.²⁴⁷ Liez had entered Boch-Buschmann's service as a decorator of porcelain objects and ended his career as the designer-in-chief of the factory in Dresden.²⁴⁸ A couple of years later Liez also created a lithography of the scenery around John's tomb in Kastel, again in Boch's service.²⁴⁹ His view of the kings' death shares many of Sinner's aspects. On the canvas, night is approaching, while the evening sky lights up in red and yellow. The whole English host gathers behind the body of the dead king; in front of him possibly Edward III standing, this time the prince in black is much younger, but once more standing close to John. Both paintings have as a common element John of Bohemia representing the focal point within the

²⁴⁴ See figure 29 (Appendix 3).

²⁴⁵ Letter by Michel Sinner to the Luxembourg government in 1851. ANL G 317.

²⁴⁶ See figure 28 (Appendix 3).

²⁴⁷ Ministère des Arts et des Sciences (ed), *Nicolas Liez. Artiste et Artisan Luxembourgeois 1809-1892. Exposition de son œuvre au Musée de l'Etat du 22 au 31 Décembre 1960*, p. 8.

²⁴⁸ Marcel NOPPENY, *L'œuvre multiple de Nicolas Liez*, 18 and 25.

²⁴⁹ Karl CONRATH, *Nicolas Liez, ein Romantiker der Saarlandschaft*, p. 17.

composition. The impression is further enhanced by his lightly coloured dress in the case of Sinnr, and shining armour with Liez, which contrast with the darkly clothed figures who blend into the background. In addition, the king still reflects a strong serenity even in death. English paintings of the scene are entirely different. Benjamin West's from the late eighteenth century presents Edward III greeting his son in shimmering armour, their army surrounding them, while John lies darkly clad at their feet with a gravely agonised expression on his face.²⁵⁰ Julian Russel Story's 1888 painting of *The Black Prince at Crécy* shows Edward the Black Prince standing alone in the centre, while John lies somewhere underneath his horse on the far right.²⁵¹

There were few grand nineteenth-century paintings on Luxembourgian history. The fact that two of them present the same scene at Crécy, denotes the importance given to the moment. Its eminence is closely connected to an ever growing promotion of John's knightly image in historiography. Two historians need to be named here, partly also because they added to the heightened sensitivity the topic had received by 1870. The first one was Joseph Paquet (1804-1858), who wrote two histories of the "country of Luxembourg" (*Luxemburger Land*) for use in primary schools.²⁵² History was not part of the compulsory school curriculum in Luxembourg for most of the nineteenth century, but Paquet – himself a teacher at the Athenaeum – intended to boost it with his two publications in 1842 and 1858.²⁵³ Again John received particular attention, since he is "rightfully [...] the object of pride of each and every Luxembourger".²⁵⁴ As well as hinting at an existing esteem the author seeks to perpetuate it. His exclamation is subsequently justified primarily on the basis of John's chivalric virtues; because of them he is known throughout Europe and still remembered.²⁵⁵ Furthermore, Paquet tends to provide a slightly

²⁵⁰ See figure 30 (Appendix 3).

²⁵¹ See figure 31 (Appendix 3). For a deeper discussion of the memory of Edward the Black Prince, see: Barbara GRIBLING, *Nationalizing the Hero: The Image of Edward the Black Prince 1780-1903* York, forthcoming (PhD Thesis). I am very grateful to Barbara Gribling for some rich discussion on the subject and the exchange of picture material.

²⁵² Joseph PAQUET, *Die Geschichte des Luxemburger Landes*, Luxembourg, 1842. A second edition was published in 1856; the third followed in 1872.

²⁵³ Jacques MAAS, *Ziele und Inhalte des Geschichtsunterrichts in Luxemburg (1815-1941)*, p. 27-8.

²⁵⁴ "Mit Recht ist Johann der Blinde der Stolz eines jeden Luxemburgers". Joseph PAQUET, *Die Geschichte des Luxemburger Landes*, p. 26.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

apologetic account. John's first concern was the peace and security of his subjects;²⁵⁶ he was a restless traveller from being constantly called upon as a referee; he might have been involved in many wars, but only because it was his destiny.²⁵⁷ When he rides to war it is to either restore peace or to come to someone's "help", such as his aid to the Teutonic knights in Lithuania, or to the city of Brescia in Northern Italy.²⁵⁸ Paquet spends one out of seven pages to describe the events around Crécy alone; his description is heavily based upon Froissart and Weitmil.²⁵⁹

The second and even more influential author was Jean Schoetter (1823-1881), who after having acquired a doctorate in Leuven returned to his native Luxembourg to become a teacher at the Athenaeum.²⁶⁰ In 1865, he published the first scholarly methodic monograph written by a Luxembourgian historian; the choice of topic again revealing: a biography of John of Bohemia. The publication's popularity inspired Charles Arendt to resuscitate the plan for a mausoleum.²⁶¹ Unlike his immediate predecessors, who mainly reproduced the information found in Bertholet, Schoetter went back to the primary sources and emerged, after more than six years of research, with two densely written volumes. Although his choice of topic was indeed a 'national' one, the author himself stemmed more from a positivist background, than a romantic-nationalist one. In fact, his works read like a succession of facts extracted from a set of primary sources, spiced only with the occasional evaluating comment. In consequence, Schoetter's interpretation of John is ambiguous. On the one hand he introduces John in the most positive possible light,²⁶² and likewise finishes with the approbatory conclusion that John had been "the greatest regent of the country of Luxembourg".²⁶³ On the other hand, his frequent citation of the *Chronicon Aulae Regiae* also implies an introduction of some very negative views. In an attempt to

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

²⁵⁷ "Aber Johann schien zu ewigen Kriegen verdammt zu sein ..." *Ibid.*, p. 29.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 30-1.

²⁶⁰ Tony KELLEN, *Die luxemburgische Geschichtsschreibung: ein Rückblick und ein Ausblick*, p. 152-153.

²⁶¹ SHL 16,6 *Sitzungsprotokolle VII, 1862-1868 und 1905-1915*, report from 27/11/1865.

²⁶² "Der größte Held und der einflussreichste Monarch des vierzehnten Jahrhunderts war unstreitig Johann, Graf von Luxemburg und König von Böhmen. Sein Ruhm erscholl durch ganz Europa, von dem atlantischen Ozean bis jenseits der Memel in's Land der Lithauer und von den Gestaden der Nord- und Ostsee bis zu den Ufern der Tiber." Jean SCHOETTER, *Johann, Graf von Luxemburg und König von Böhmen*, vol. 1, p. v.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 301.

reconcile both, Schoetter incorporates the occasional apologetic judgement, such as the stereotypical claim that John followed bad advice from his entourage.²⁶⁴ At other moments he cannot escape a clearer verdict, when for instance condemning John's habit of squandering resources, or his constant restlessness.²⁶⁵ Overall though, his general judgements tend to be very approving.²⁶⁶ In the end, for Schoetter John remains essentially a man of the knightly world, with an "innate urge for wars, adventures and tournaments".²⁶⁷ His 'reassessment' generated a vast amount of new knowledge on the man's life and certainly revived the more negative facets, and yet it could not escape the spell of a 'chivalric perspective'.

This emerges even more clearly from his school textbook. After the School Act of 1881 had made the teaching of history compulsory,²⁶⁸ Schoetter had written a history manual that was published the following year.²⁶⁹ Armed with his extensive knowledge on the subject, Schoetter's description of John's politics attempts not to omit a single detail, all structured within twenty-three paragraphs. As in the case of his earlier monograph, his textbook is very balanced compared to its immediate predecessors. John's political problems in Bohemia are not omitted, nor any atrocities committed (even in the County of Luxembourg) during the campaign against Metz. Similarly his unhappy marriage to Elizabeth of Bohemia and his unsuccessful policies in Tyrol are mentioned. His occasional financial problems even lead the author to apply the witticism "blind spendthrift".²⁷⁰ However, yet again the overall picture remains rather positive, with some of the descriptions idealistically tinted. John is introduced as "one of the greatest heroes and most influential monarchs of the fourteenth century".²⁷¹ The point is proven by his role in the struggle for the imperial crown between Louis of Bavaria and Frederic of Habsburg, when John was allied to the former. He was involved in some armed clashes, where he

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 204-225

²⁶⁵ "Dieses Jahr [1334] ist in dem Leben des Königs besonders durch unsinnige Geldpenden und unstetes Herumirren bezeichnet." *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 80.

²⁶⁶ "Im allgemeinen zeigte König Johann in diesen verwickelten Verhältnissen viel Klugheit, Mäßigung und Entschlossenheit" *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 103.

²⁶⁷ "seinen angeborenen Drang nach Kriegen, Abenteuern und Turnieren" *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 281.

²⁶⁸ Jacques MAAS, *Ziele und Inhalte des Geschichtsunterrichts in Luxemburg (1815-1941)*, p. 29.

²⁶⁹ Jean SCHOETTER, *Geschichte des Luxemburger Landes nach den besten Quellen, fortgesetzt von A. Herchen und N. van Werveke*, Luxembourg, 1882.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

excelled in “courage and braveness” and took many prisoners. The battle of Mühlendorf, where Schoetter claims that John had the leadership of the Bavarian forces, is presented as a duel between John and Frederic: “no one fought as chivalrously” as the two, but John “saved” the day and Frederic was captured.²⁷² Another important point is the extension of the *Hausmacht*: John’s territorial enlargement of the county of Luxembourg and his attraction of new vassals.²⁷³ The passage on Crécy, subtitled “heroic death of the king”, is particularly meticulous. Most of the descriptions are based upon Froissart, but some details are adorned with additional embellishments. While in Froissart and Weitmil, Edward III and his eldest son merely lament the death of the Bohemian king,²⁷⁴ Schoetter however explains how after the battle the Black Prince rode over the field, found John the Blind and started crying.²⁷⁵ Again it confirms the importance given to the scene in the paintings – the recognition John received by his enemies validate his universal heroism.

It will therefore come as little surprise that the most widely known poem on John, written by Nicolas Welter in 1900, does not differ much from Mongenast’s 1863 composition.²⁷⁶ Again John is old, but this stands in contrast to his broad shoulders and his majestic face (*hehres Antlitz*). Using the same reading of Froissart, John rides into the lost battle: “No Luxembourger ever died in bed / when flatteringly wooed by the battle’s chant”.²⁷⁷ Even the motif of the lion reappears,²⁷⁸ thus linking John to his ferocious heraldic symbols, and at the same time to the modern State which still uses the red lion of the medieval counts.²⁷⁹ The same story line and set of ideas again reappear in Willy Goergen’s poem *De Blanne Jang* (1913). Their longevity proves a need.²⁸⁰

In the last decades of the nineteenth century, the three elements (love for the fatherland, founding of the fair, death at Crécy) helped shape John into an essential

²⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 66.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 71, 78, 80, 84, 92.

²⁷⁴ Jean FROISSART, *Chroniques*. Edited by: Peter F. AINSWORTH and George T. DILLER, §286, p. 589; Benes OF WETMIL, *Chronica*, p. 514.

²⁷⁵ Jean SCHOETTER, *Geschichte des Luxemburger Landes ...*, p. 99.

²⁷⁶ Nicolas WELTER, *Aus alten Tagen*, p. 132-133. This particular poem had to be learnt by heart by generations of pupils during the twentieth century. See for instance: Jacques DOLLAR, *Jean l’Aveugle à Crécy*, p. 105.

²⁷⁷ “Kein Luxemburger noch im Bette starb / Wenn schmeichelnd ihm das Lied der Schlacht umwarb”

²⁷⁸ “Laßt fliegen hoch die Löwen, stark gepaart / Siegen oder Tod! das ist so Löwenart.”

²⁷⁹ For more on the heraldic lion of Luxembourg, see my chapters on Melusine and Ermesinde.

²⁸⁰ Willy GOERGEN, *De Blanne Jang*, p. 41-42.

ingredient of a slowly emerging national narrative: he constituted the first apogee of the nation's development. He had become a thoroughly 'Luxembourgian' prince, who was deeply attached to the lands of his birth. Therefore his glorious reign gave 'small' Luxembourg greatness, renown and strength throughout Europe. As seen, the idea is already present in Paquet's textbook, yet it managed to arouse the spirits of the most rational of historians, such as Nicolas van Werveke (1851-1926). The latter wondered who would have thought:

that [John] would be (...) the arbitrator of the whole of Europe, that he would make shine the noble colours of his coat of arms and that he would carry the lion of Luxembourg, victor so-to-speak, into all of Central Europe: to Germany and France, to Italy, Lithuania and Prussia.²⁸¹

The author sums up: "This was the very epoch when the House of Luxembourg became once more the first in Europe."²⁸² Van Werveke's account of John's life stands in contrast to many of his other writings, which are renowned for their dry precision. This one is drenched in national pride and emotional rhetoric, but there are more reasons why this is astonishing. Van Werveke had briefly studied with Karl Lamprech in Bonn and had become an adherent of *Kulturgeschichte*, ready to defend the history of the 'common man' against the traditional elitists, such as Arthur Herchen (1850-1931). He further never subscribed to the nationalist narrative, whose major proponent was once more Herchen, and the two historians fostered an animosity based on differences in personality and political ideology. Van Werveke saw himself as the successor of the liberal tradition and fought for the creation of a girl's school, for instance; Herchen was an arch-conservative Catholic, who taught at

²⁸¹ "qu'il serait (...) l'arbitre de toute l'Europe, qu'il ferait briller, d'un éclat inouï, les nobles couleurs de son blason et qu'il porterai le lion de Luxembourg, vainqueur, pour ainsi dire, dans toute l'Europe centrale: en Allemagne et en France, en Italie, en Lituanie et en Prusse." Nicolas VAN WERVEKE, *Jean l'Aveugle, roi de Bohême et comte de Luxembourg*, p. 4.

²⁸² Ce fut l'époque même où la maison de Luxembourg devint de nouveau la première de l'Europe." *Ibid.*, p 11.

the grand-ducal court.²⁸³ Nonetheless, the idea of John's reign as the nation's apogee was shared by both.

Arthur Herchen's textbook (1918) hails the rise of Henry VII to imperial glories as "one of the great turning points of our national history" and John's marriage to Elizabeth of Bohemia as "the beginning of the great power the House of Luxembourg was meant to receive in the fourteenth century".²⁸⁴ John is praised as one man of "only few who ever fulfilled the chivalrous ideal",²⁸⁵ and yet again the battle of Crécy plays a prominent role in supporting that image. The account of the battle is centred more on John's chivalrous qualities than the actual event itself.²⁸⁶ The last pages on John the Blind account for his attachment to Luxembourg, the territorial expansion and the founding of the *Schobermesse*.²⁸⁷ The chapter concludes with the acknowledgement that John is indeed the most popular figure in Luxembourg's history and, in line with Paquet and van Werveke, the author asks rhetorically whether his heroic death does not reflect positively unto his native lands.²⁸⁸ This image of national grandeur is further perpetuated by Joseph Meyers (1900-1964), who published his textbook on the very eve of the Second World War, a moment of heightened patriotic fervour. He repeats all possible clichés: John was an active traveller, rushing through the whole of Europe, present on all battlefields,²⁸⁹ and a ruler who loved Luxembourg.²⁹⁰ His focus rests essentially on how the county profited from his rule: the territory is expanded, he releases privileges for the towns, undertakes the construction of a third wall for the city of Luxembourg and founds the *Schobermesse*.²⁹¹ His time is viewed as a period of expansion and general well-being, to be destroyed in the fifteenth-century.

This does not mean that John was entirely beyond criticism. As mentioned, Schoetter already saw John as a wastrel. Meyers also takes up the idea, but with a slightly different focus. It is not John's sometimes overly lavish lifestyle itself which

²⁸³ See: Tony KELLEN, *Die luxemburgische Geschichtsschreibung ...*, p. 153-154 and 159.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 1918: p. 45, 1972: p. 76-7.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 1918: p. 47, 1972: p. 82.

²⁸⁶ See: *Ibid.*, 1918: 50-51, 1972: p. 85-7.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 1918: p. 52, 1972: p. 87-9.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 1918: 54, 1972: p. 89.

²⁸⁹ Joseph MEYERS, *Geschichte Luxemburgs*, p. 70-1.

²⁹⁰ "Johann weilte gerne in Luxemburg, das er sehr liebte". *Ibid.*, p. 72.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 72-3.

was of concern, but the way he had to finance it. Since he decided to fund his politics through selling rights over some of his Luxembourg territories,²⁹² Meyers finds him indirectly responsible for the Burgundian conquest and the subsequent 400 years of ‘foreign dominance’.²⁹³ While Meyers’s overall evaluation was still extremely positive, Camille Wampach (1884-1958) saw John slightly more negatively. Wampach was one of the first local historians with a serious academic background, having gained a doctorate and a lectureship at the University of Bonn. He returned to Luxembourg at the outbreak of the war and became the head of the National Archives thereafter, allowing him to release a multi-volume edition of Luxembourgian medieval charters. In addition, Wampach was an ordained Catholic priest and had studied theology before becoming a lecturer in history. He acknowledged that John loved his fatherland and expanded it, although one needs to question to what degree these affirmative comments were made for a German audience, against whom he felt obliged to defend age-old Luxembourgian self-determination.²⁹⁴ He then repeats Meyers’s argument in regards to John’s opening of the policy of pawning.²⁹⁵ Furthermore he portrays him as a rather debauched character, based on Zittau’s claims that “many a time [he] trod all over the dignity of a husband, knight and king for the sake of base desire”.²⁹⁶ Wampach’s John is a ruler without religious feeling: John might have taken the cross, but his friendship with the pope was the result of political circumstances. It must be noted however that Camille Wampach was practically the only historian with a slightly negative stance, writing almost exclusively for an academic audience and still he did not dare to destroy the myth of the great and heroic king (*Heldenkönig*) completely.

²⁹² See: *Ibid.*, p. 73-4.

²⁹³ Philip the Good prepared his takeover of Luxembourg by purchasing the rights over the pawned duchy in 1434, creating a legitimate basis for his rule even after the conquest of 1443.

²⁹⁴ Although the arguments that followed were published in 1933, they were reiterated during a conference in Germany which he had joined together with Joseph Meyers and Nicolas Margue in order to oppose German claims of a cultural (and in consequence also a possibly justified political) belonging of Luxembourg to the German world. The three papers were published in: *Ons Hémecht* 43, 1937.

²⁹⁵ Camille WAMPACH, Die Herrscher aus luxemburgischem Hause. Ihr Werden, ihre Machtstellung und ihre besonderen Beziehungen zu Papst und Kirche, p. 37; the article is almost identical to: Camille WAMPACH, Die Luxemburger im Rahmen des mittelalterlichen Kaiserreiches.

²⁹⁶ “[er hat] so manches Mal Gatten-, Ritter- und Königswürde um schnöde Lust mit Füße getreten”, Camille WAMPACH, Die Herrscher aus luxemburgischem Hause. Ihr Werden, ihre Machtstellung und ihre besonderen Beziehungen zu Papst und Kirche, p. 36.

Mort pour la France

As seen, the arguments over John's mortal remains and the subsequent discussions about a possible monument illustrate not only the discursive construction of a Luxembourgian identity and a growing patriotic awareness, but also how they defined themselves in opposition to the expansion of Prussia. For most of the second half of the nineteenth century, the aim of many nationalists was twofold. Firstly, they rejected the feeling of Belgian-ness that was so contrary to the dominant Orangist political ideology. Secondly, they intended to create a distance to pan-German tendencies, which the nation could have identified with under different political circumstances. However, their stance was less problematic with regards to France; in fact one notices an increasing amount of sympathy towards that neighbouring country, especially shortly after 1900. Again, this is reflected in the depictions of John, which increasingly attributed French affinities to him.

Although John had died on the French side in the battle of Crécy, his motives did not merit a lengthy explanation for many centuries; they were interpreted as the vassalic aid he owed to his personal ally, the king of France.²⁹⁷ Bertholet appears to endow John's engagement with additional meaning. What had led him to join the ranks of Philip's army was his "attachment to the interests of France".²⁹⁸ The phrase however represents a rather tame comment, not to be over-interpreted. Writing decades before the French Revolution, Bertholet's "interests of France" are identical to those of the crown. The idea is thus not appropriated or developed, neither by his Orangist successors, nor even by later historians, such as Schoetter and van Werveke. Schoetter sends John to Crécy for rather personal reasons, to defend his friends and the children of his daughter.²⁹⁹ This does not mean that John's frequent stays in France and the matrimonial alliances with different branches of the French royal dynasty had gone unnoticed, not least by Jean Schoetter. But he sees the king's motives as predominantly chivalrous: he is attracted to Paris, not because of the aura

²⁹⁷ See for instance: Jean BERTELS, *Historia Luxemburgensis* ..., p. 95.

²⁹⁸ Jean BERTHOLET, *Histoire Ecclésiastique et Civile* ..., vol. 6, p 173.

²⁹⁹ Jean SCHOETTER, *Geschichte des Luxemburger Landes* ..., p. 97.

of French civilisation, but simply as a centre of knightly lifestyle.³⁰⁰ More emotional in style, the public funding appeal for the 1870 monument included a brief line that John had died “for the chivalric and magnanimous France”.³⁰¹ This anachronistic phrase suggests a parallel to the Franco-Prussian war in progress, which thus represents the underlying framework of the thought. It is therefore to be regarded as stemming from an anti-Prussian stance, as already described above, rather than an overtly pro-French one.

However, around 1900 we perceive a change in approach and an increasing element of Francophilia entering John’s memory. The possibly unintended initiative came from the historian Théodore de Puymaigre (1816-1901), a Frenchman of noble descent with an affinity for everything chivalric and a sincere conviction of the cultural superiority of French civilisation. Both aspects re-occur consistently in his writings. He published a first, rather brief, article on one of John’s expeditions to Lithuania and Poland.³⁰² Its great innovation was a re-reading of Machaut, who is introduced for the first time into a scientific paper as a source on John’s time.³⁰³ Machaut, who is quoted extensively,³⁰⁴ also helped to shape the author’s very chivalric focus on John’s life and deeds. While Schoetter, whom Puymaigre quotes in his bibliography, had attempted at producing a balanced picture, the French perspective puts John (once more) in an entirely positive light. This also holds true for Puymaigre’s second, much longer and far more influential article published in 1892,³⁰⁵ whose self-declared aim it was to present the relation between John of Bohemia and France. Although politically part of “Germany”, Puymaigre regards his dynasty as a part of France by “civilisation” and “family”:³⁰⁶ Paris was the

³⁰⁰ „Johann verweilte gerne an dem glänzenden Hof des Königs von Frankreich. Hier waren stets die angesehensten Ritter versammelt und in den vielen Turnieren, die hier veranstaltet wurden, fand der Geist des Ritterthums eine reichliche Pflege.“ Jean SCHOETTER, *Geschichte des Luxemburger Landes* ..., p. 72-73.

³⁰¹ “tombé à la bataille de Crécy en combattant pour la chevaleresque et magnanime France”; *Erection d’un Mausolée Jean l’Aveugle*, p. 5.

³⁰² Théodore DE PUYMAIGRE, *Une campagne de Jean de Luxembourg, roi de Bohême*.

³⁰³ Guillaume de Machaut had been quoted by earlier writers, see for instance: Pierre-Albert LENZ, *Jean l’Aveugle*, ..., p. 72. The same passage is taken up by Schoetter and referenced to Lenz, see: Jean SCHOETTER, *Johann, Graf von Luxemburg und König von Böhmen*, vol. 2, p. 282-283, n. 5. In both cases the source is quoted for a decorative purpose rather than analysed in order to provide possible insights into John’s travels or reputation.

³⁰⁴ Théodore DE PUYMAIGRE, *Une campagne de Jean de Luxembourg, roi de Bohême*, p. 173-175.

³⁰⁵ Théodore DE PUYMAIGRE, *Jean l’Aveugle en France*.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 396.

indisputable centre of both chivalric life (*vie chevaleresque*) and education and therefore constituted a place of interest for the counts of Luxembourg, who in consequence also intermarried with the Capetians and Valois. They became satellites at the fringe of the French cultural orbit. Although clearly aware of the Bohemian sources, Puymaigre again uses predominantly the French ones, such as Guillaume de Machaut's *Jugement du roy de Behaigne*, or Froissart's *Prison amoureuse*.³⁰⁷ The effect is a very positive slant on all of John's activities; he features as an active, intelligent and heroic ruler.

Puymaigre's Franco-centric perspective on John's politics was first introduced into Luxembourg by the newly founded history journal *Ons Hémecht* in 1895. Its first issue featured an article on "John the Blind and France", a compilation of John's relations with France, adopting the relevant passages from Schoetter and translating other bits from Puymaigre.³⁰⁸ The article however is extremely narrative and does not convey an obvious message. This was to change with Alfred Lefort's publications. The author was an amateur historian of French origins, who had been living in Luxembourg. Lefort not only read Puymaigre,³⁰⁹ he also adopted most of his argument, used the same sources and only stopped just short of plagiarism.³¹⁰ Although his article intended to focus on the whole Limburg-Luxembourg dynasty, his paragraph on John is by far the lengthiest, to the degree that the author apologises, albeit immediately following it with a claim to have never strayed off topic. The reader is thus left with the unquestionable impression of John's abundant and passionate relations with France. The French character of John and his dynasty discovered and proven, they subsequently function as a precedent for sympathetically minded historians and writers within the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg. Another figure in spreading the French connection was the literary author Marcel Noppeney (1866-1977). Born in Luxembourg, he went on to study in Paris, where he developed a deeply Francophile perspective. In 1907 he published his *Prince Avril*, a collection

³⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 408-411.

³⁰⁸ Jean-Charles KOHN, Johann der Blinde. Graf von Luxemburg und König von Böhmen.

³⁰⁹ See: Alfred LEFORT, La Maison Française de Luxembourg, p. 42.

³¹⁰ He often 'quotes' the very same sources as his French predecessor. See for instance the Michelet quotation both take from Schoetter (p. 44, n. 3), or the excerpt from Froissart's *Prison Amoureuse* (p. 105); he was to rectify his references in the book version of his articles, published in Reims in 1902.

of poems written between 1894 and 1900 when the author was in his twenties.³¹¹ None of the poems directly refers to John himself, yet the aspects of stereotypical knightly life constitute the reoccurring theme of the book. The chivalric ideals developed by Noppeneý seem to refer directly to those that John of Bohemia commonly stood for: fighting for one's beliefs and, if necessary, dying for them. Frank Wilhelm argues that the 'French' chivalric virtues, as embodied by John, served Noppeneý as an antidote against the German economic and possibly cultural dominance in Luxembourg.³¹² Noppeneý was maybe the only French literary writer to use John as a Francophile *topos*, but his ideas were part of a larger intellectual movement co-initiated around the same time by the writers Batty Weber and Frantz Clément. Their central concept was that of Luxembourgian culture as a *Mischkultur*, a mixture of both German and French.³¹³ The idea acknowledges the undoubted Germanic origins of the local language, but further suggests that centuries of French influence have refined local culture and elevated it to a superior degree.

This new point of view could co-exist with the older Luxembourg-centric one. As early as 1902, the Frenchman Louis Léger had the idea to restore the *Croix de Bohême* in Crécy, a decayed monument on the site of the (probable) battlefield. Léger worked as a specialist of Slavic Studies at the Institut de France,³¹⁴ and his main interest was the connection with Bohemia. However, he also approached the *Section Historique* in Luxembourg, where his plans received support, especially from Alfred Lefort.³¹⁵ The latter seems to have been in personal contact with Léger and managed to convince the society to launch a public funding appeal, similar to those for the mausoleums. In 1905 the new monument was inaugurated and both the government and the city of Luxembourg sent an official delegation to attend the occasion. The event marked a cordial coexistence of several complementary views on John's role at Crécy. For the French he is now officially "mort pour la France", as the reconstructed *Croix de Bohême* testifies. He joins the fallen soldiers in the more recent wars remembered in the many, very similar, monuments of the Third French

³¹¹ Marcel NOPPENÉY, *Le Prince Avril*, Paris, 1907.

³¹² I am indebted to Frank Wilhelm for discussing Noppeneý's motives with me.

³¹³ Claude D. CONTER, *Mischkultur*, p. 23-24.

³¹⁴ Jacques MAAS, *Johann der Blinde ...*, p. 613.

³¹⁵ SHL 16,6 *Sitzungsprotokolle VIII, 1868-1902*, report from 18/03/1902; SHL 16,6 *Sitzungsprotokolle VIII, 1868-1902*, report from 12/06/1902.

Republic.³¹⁶ In France, John had become part of a discourse whose context was set by the war of 1870. Furthermore, he stands for an international alliance connecting France, Luxembourg and Bohemia.³¹⁷ For the mayor of Luxembourg, Alphonse Munchen, the “mort pour la France” was seen as a symbol for the centuries of Franco-Luxembourgian friendship and “a shared historic destiny”, which also included a long tradition of Luxembourgian soldiers fighting on French sides.³¹⁸ The mayor had seemingly ‘forgotten’ about the sieges laid to the city he represented by the troops of François I, Louis XIV and the Directoire, all of which ironically resulted in the destruction of John’s tomb and the moving of his remains. Interestingly, the inauguration speeches reflect divergences in the Luxembourgian perspectives. The ambassador to Paris, Henri Vannérus, took a more traditional stance. He did not mention Franco-Luxembourgian friendship, instead focusing essentially on John’s heroic death and conveying the gratitude of the Luxembourgian sovereign and population to the French for honouring their nation’s hero.³¹⁹ Since Vannérus was already over seventy at the time, and about twenty years Munchen’s senior, one can wonder to what degree the striking difference in opinion may be explained by them belonging to different generations. It seems that the ageing diplomat was still relying on the interpretation that had been en vogue for so long. Munchen was still able to develop his political career and therefore readily promoted the new trend. Furthermore, Vannérus was the country’s official ambassador and one can speculate as to what degree he was careful not to encourage a view that could arouse suspicion among German observers; as a member of the Customs Union, the grand-duchy was economically still entirely dependant on its eastern neighbour.

So far John’s alleged ‘Francophilia’ had mainly been of importance to a minority – certain members of an intellectual and political elite aiming at closer ties with France, many of them part of liberal pro-Republican circles.³²⁰ The ensuing triumph of their vision was above all due to the Great War and the subsequent re-shaping of Luxembourg politics and identity discourse. The demise of German

³¹⁶ David G. TROYANSKY, *Monumental Politics: National History and Local Memory in French Monuments aux Morts in the Department of the Aisne since 1870*, p. 124.

³¹⁷ See the speech of the mayor of Crécy given at the occasion: *Inauguration du monument de Jean de Luxembourg, roi de Bohême, à Crécy-en-Pontieu. Comte Rendu et discours*, p. 9.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 11-13.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

³²⁰ For more examples see: Jacques MAAS, *Johann der Blinde ...*, p. 613, n. 42.

cultural and political influence after 1918 was combined with a severe political crisis, challenging monarchical rule, the country's independence and economic ties. While the ruling dynasty was reconfirmed in its position,³²¹ economic ties with Germany were severed and the population opted for closer links with the victor of the war: France.³²² In the same spirit, the first large national monument was erected in 1923, the so-called *Monument du Souvenir*,³²³ in memory of those who had fallen on the Allies' side during the First World War. The monument illustrates the will to forget of any existing German collaboration during the war-time occupation, in favour of a pro-French memory.³²⁴ At the same time it glorifies those soldiers who died for France, paving the way for a re-assessment of John's death at Crécy, from then onwards considered a precedent. This appears clearly in the 1927 play *Pro Patria* by Lucien Koenig. He lets the French Field-Marshal Pétain enter the stage and compare those Luxembourgers who fell during the Great War on the French side with "their great national hero, John the Blind, who died for France".³²⁵ The idea of a fourteenth-century rapprochement with France now quickly entered the wider mainstream. The newly released schoolbook by Herchen also included for the first time quotations by Guillaume de Machaut within the chapter on John.³²⁶ Their knightly-heroic message fitted the prevalent image of John generally favoured over Zittau's unpredictable and rash version.

Up to the end of the 1930s, schoolbooks either remained unchanged or were replaced by Belgian or German ones.³²⁷ While Herchen remained rather uncontested as a schoolbook, it was only destined for the two central years of secondary

³²¹ See my chapter on Ermesinde.

³²² The French rejected the Luxembourgian offer, and in consequence the Grand-Duchy turned to its third neighbour to form the Belgium-Luxembourg Economic Union (UEBL) in 1921.

³²³ The monument is popularly known as the *Gëlle Fra* (Golden Lady), for what is its most recognisable feature. For more information, see: Benoît MAJERUS, *Gëlle Fra*, p. 291-296.

³²⁴ The position of the Luxembourg government to the German occupation was ambiguous. Since the country was economically dependant on Germany it did not want to condemn the occupation publicly, which earned the government the reputation abroad of endorsing it. Behind the scenes, the large metallic industrial complex did indeed accept orders for war material from German companies. On the other hand, the majority of the population seemed to assert a Prussophobia and developed more of a Francophile stance. See: Gilbert TRAUSSCH, *La stratégie du faible. Le Luxembourg pendant la Première Guerre mondiale (1914-1919)*, p. 56-58, 62-64, 95-96 and 100.

³²⁵ "leur grand héros national, Jean l'Aveugle, mort pour la France" Lucien KOENIG, *Pro Patria! Drama an 3 Akten vum Sigg yu Letzebuerg*, p. 32.

³²⁶ Arthur HERCHEN, *Manuel d'Histoire nationale*, 1918: 54, 1972: p. 89.

³²⁷ Paul DOSTERT, *Der Geschichtsunterricht in Luxemburg 1918-1944*, p. 104, 108, and 114.

schools.³²⁸ Different textbooks were needed for the three younger classes and the two most senior years, partly because their curriculum set different requirements. While the more senior years of secondary school read ‘national history’, the teaching in the initial three was supposed to rest on European history and was done in German, thus demanding books in that language. The textbook in place was generally shunned by teachers, as it was considered utterly useless from an educational point of view: unstructured, superficial and too narrative.³²⁹ In 1927 pressure was rising on the minister of education (*ministre de l’instruction publique*) to introduce a new book.³³⁰ He asked several commissions for their advice on a selection of contemporary German schoolbooks; one commission was based in every secondary school of the country, consisting of local history teachers.³³¹ Their reactions varied, but overall none of the suggested books seemed to make for a satisfactory choice. The compromise was the textbook by zur Bensen. It was chosen because of its clear structure and accessible language, which some judged “excellent”.³³² Nonetheless it was far from ideal: the evaluators regretted its complete focus on German history, its Francophobe stance, right-wing political tendencies and the occasional passage on racial theory.³³³ *Faute de mieux*, its three volumes were gradually introduced between 1927 and 1930. From 1930 additional Belgian textbooks were ordered for the senior classes.³³⁴

With the changing political situation in Germany and the perception of the Nazi regime as a threat in the late 1930s, the German textbook was increasingly considered untenable by the wider public. The discussion intensified in 1939, for several reasons.³³⁵ Firstly, by now the political atmosphere in Europe was tense and the danger of a German invasion intimidatingly real. Secondly, the Centenary of the Independence celebrated in that year coincided with a heightened sensitivity for all

³²⁸ For a general account on the teaching of history between the two world wars, see: Paul DOSTERT, *Der Geschichtsunterricht in Luxemburg 1918-1944*, p. 103-117.

³²⁹ Nicolas MARGUE, *Um ein Geschichtsbuch*, p. 31.

³³⁰ Between 1921 and 1936 this was Joseph Bech who should become prime minister in 1926. See also my chapter on Ermesinde.

³³¹ See: *Instruction Publique. Réformes du cours d’histoire 1926-27*, ANL IP614.

³³² *Ibid.*

³³³ See: *ibid.* The commission from the *Lycée Classique* in Echternach was particularly opposed to this textbook, leading one of its members, Jean-Pierre Kauder, to protest in a letter to the government.

³³⁴ Paul DOSTERT, *Der Geschichtsunterricht in Luxemburg 1918-1944*, p. 108.

³³⁵ See: *Ibid.*, p. 112-114.

matters historical. Thirdly, the 1927 search for a schoolbook had resulted in a foreign choice, mainly because no local historian was willing to write a new text. This changed when Pierre Biermann composed a general history book on his own initiative, with the intent of it being used in schools. The minister of education – this had been the historian Nicolas Margue since 1937 – was initially opposed to Biermann’s manual, but succumbed to general pressure in 1939 and let it replace zur Bonsen’s. It is difficult to guess why Margue seemed so reticent in the affair, especially since (again) a commission of history teachers had approved Biermann’s book. Although Margue did not endorse the German nationalist tone of zur Bonsen, neither did he consider it a serious obstacle. When questioned about the textbook in parliament, he considered the problematic passages to be few, but extreme to the point that “our pupils laugh about them and our teachers do justice to them with a brief word” – in other words, the propaganda proved counterproductive.³³⁶ The fact that he did not immediately regard Biermann’s book as a superior choice brought the conservative government member Margue harsh criticisms from the leftwing press and the parliamentary opposition. They interpreted his decisions as a sabotage of Biermann motivated by his support for Meyers’s textbook project, which was closer to his own conservative views.³³⁷ Margue and Meyers had previously completed and re-edited Herchen’s 1918 manual together and seemed to share many of its ideals. The left-wing newspaper *Die Neue Zeit* clothed its criticism in bright colours. The affair was considered “a scandal”, Biermann had to fight against “the clericals”, while “the party-fanatic” Margue’s additions to Herchen were seen as “reactionary and party-political”.³³⁸ This last point was mainly based on the textbook’s pro-monarchic interpretation of events during and after the Great War: the assenting view given of Grand-Duchess Marie-Adelheid and the almost complete neglect of the democratic forces and Prime Minister Eyschen. Interestingly, throughout the entire debate on the schoolbooks, the presentation of the medieval past was never directly questioned. Nonetheless it proves once more that the history taught at school – a very powerful medium after all – tends to be a result of political debates and decisions.

³³⁶ “(...) nos élèves en rient et nos professeurs par un petit mot en font justice.” *Compte rendu des séances de la Chambre des députés du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg. Session ordinaire de 1939-1940*, col. 880-882.

³³⁷ See: *ibid.*, col. 878-879.

³³⁸ *Die Neue Zeit* 34, 1/4/39, p. 1-4.

Thus the years 1938 to 1940 saw two new publications. Pierre Biermann's book ended up being in use for only one year.³³⁹ As with most other parts of the book, his description of the fourteenth century is marked by the general fear of a pending German invasion, and again John is used to express a preference for French over German culture. Luxembourg is presented as a state in between France and Germany, the latter being identified with the Empire. The paragraph on John of Bohemia starts with his relationship to France and Biermann comments that his Francophile attitude was characteristic of the weakness of the Empire.³⁴⁰ He is further depicted as a restless warrior and strong figure.³⁴¹ Compared to Paquet who had seen in John a friend of Emperor Louis,³⁴² and to Schoetter who remained rather ambivalent about the ties to Louis, Pierre Biermann describes the relations to the Emperor as *schwankend*, i.e. fluctuating, but with the connotation of unsteady, uncertain or hesitating. Joseph Meyers's *Geschichte Luxemburgs*, which came into use in schools in 1939, also uses Crécy both to illustrate the close links to France and further to enhance the heroic image.³⁴³ After the war, Meyers stressed that the French influence brought civilisation and democratic culture and rendered Luxembourg profoundly non-German since the later Middle Ages. In a 1946 interview with a highly popular magazine, Meyers added that "Germany was culturally influenced by the Luxembourg rulers from west to east, one could even say colonised. It is significant that Germany received its first and only Constitution by Charles IV in his Golden Bull."³⁴⁴

Meanwhile, French historiography took again a more balanced stance with the publishing of Raymond Cazelles's biography in 1947, which despite its occasional colourful prose remains the most recent scholarly written narrative account of John's life outside the Czech world. On the one hand, Cazelles (1917-1985) does write from a French perspective, never ignoring the importance of Paris's standing in European culture and the French crown's impact on John's politics. His opening chapters on his education in Paris seem to emerge straight from the spirit of

³³⁹ Pierre BIERMANN, *Geschichte des Mittelalters von Luxemburg aus gesehen. Zweiter Teil*, Luxembourg, 1935.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

³⁴² Joseph PAQUET, *Die Geschichte des Luxemburger Landes*, p. 27 and 29.

³⁴³ Joseph MEYERS, *Geschichte Luxemburgs*, p. 74.

³⁴⁴ *Revue* 2/18, 1946, p. 355.

Puymaigre.³⁴⁵ John is therefore never a ‘German’; on the contrary Cazelles believes that he spoke better French and attributes to him a feeling of alienation from the Germans.³⁴⁶ On the other hand, Cazelles does not see John’s relationship with the French crown as an easy and straightforward affair. He concedes that dealings between the two kings were occasionally tainted by conflicting interests, especially with regards to the Imperial crown eyed by both monarchies. Cazelles also moves away from seeing the Bohemian king as merely attracted by the superiority of the French culture: the Valois need him as an important vassal and in consequence they flatter and even bribe him.³⁴⁷ In consequence, John’s French relations may well have been mutually cordial, but they were also part of a political scheme from which both parties could profit.³⁴⁸ This is in line with the opportunist character the author ascribes to John, who is primarily driven by concrete concerns rather than higher ideals.³⁴⁹

In Luxembourg however, the myth is still kept alive nowadays, with one of its more contemporary supporters being the writer Jacques Dollar (*1926). Again, the author maintains strong French affinities, incorporating them into a book on “John the Blind at Crécy”. The preface is written by a French brigadier (*général de division*) who puts John into the “long line of so many valiant soldiers” from Luxembourg who “fought in the service of France and died on the fields of honour”.³⁵⁰ Although the remains of the monograph are less dramatic in style, they fit the ideology. Dollar starts off by confirming John’s love for his fatherland, but continues by repeating the arguments already set out by Puymaigre.³⁵¹

³⁴⁵ See for instance: Raymond CAZELLES, *Jean l’Aveugle ...*, p. 6-7 and 14.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 57 and 184.

³⁴⁷ “Nous avons un peu, avec le recul des siècles, l’impression que Jean s’est laissé griser par l’alliance capétienne, par les fêtes données en son honneur, par les louages qu’on lui adresse de toutes parts, pendant son séjour à Paris, sur son courage, sur sa valeur et sur sa belle victoire de Mühlendorf.” *Ibid.*, p. 121; see also p. 200.

³⁴⁸ See also for instance his description of John’s marriage to Béatrice of Bourbon, after which John received important seignorial rights and thus became a vassal of the crown. It resembles a business deal between two parties to the profit of both. *Ibid.*, p. 228.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 154 and 163.

³⁵⁰ “C’est ainsi que Jean l’Aveugle est devenu le premier Luxembourgeois d’une longue lignée de tant et tant de vaillants soldats venus des rives de l’Alzette, de la Sûre et de la Moselle, à travers les siècles et sur tous les champs de bataille d’Europe et d’ailleurs, pour se battre au service de la France et tomber au champ d’honneur.” Jean AUBIER, Préface, in: Jacques DOLLAR, *Jean l’Aveugle à Crécy*, p. 7-8. [N.B. The Alzette, Sûre and Moselle are the three main rivers of the grand-duchy.]

³⁵¹ Jacques DOLLAR, *Jean l’Aveugle à Crécy*, p. 9-10 and 18.

The dynasty's favourite

It is also in this context that the utilising of John by the ruling dynasty needs to be further analysed. As seen before, William II was already identified as a 'new John'; the idea of seeing the House of Orange-Nassau as the successors of the medieval princes fitted well into the later grand narrative. Afterwards, Prince Henry of the Netherlands was being flattered by similar comparisons,³⁵² and so did even the comparatively less-loved William III.³⁵³ After the 'German' House of Nassau-Weilburg took over the grand-ducal throne in 1890 the analogy lost none of its attraction. While the palace in the city of Luxembourg was renovated and extended – unlike their Orange predecessors, the new dynasts decided to reside in the country – a number of references to the medieval rulers in general and to John in particular were built in. When the *Salle d'Armes* received a new fireplace decoration in 1895, the chosen motif for the smoke vent was a bronze relief of John on horseback, as shown on one of his seals.³⁵⁴ The wall behind it boasted a large fresco showing the coats of arms of the sixteen Luxembourg knights (wrongly) believed to have died with the king at Crécy.³⁵⁵ While the grand-ducal family probably gratefully accepted the decorations, the masterminds behind the choice of topic were locals: the historian Nicolas van Werveke, the architect Charles Arendt and the painter Michel Engels.³⁵⁶ The wall-paintings were removed in 1943 by the German occupants and the portrait of the *Führer* placed below the figure of John.³⁵⁷ During the renovations of the palace in the late 1990s, the coats of arms were 'revived'; in fact a new fresco was created containing another set of heraldic emblems, all unrecognisable though due to the

³⁵² Charles ARENDT, *Heinrich, Prinz der Niederlande. Eine biographische Skizze*, Luxembourg, 1879, p. 27.

³⁵³ See for instance Batty Weber's poem *Auf ein Königsgrab* in which he compares the death of King William III (November 1890) with that of John.

³⁵⁴ Nicholas VAN WERVEKE, *Das Großherzogliche Palais zu Luxemburg. Festschrift zur Feier des achtzigjährigen Geburtstages S.K.H. des Großherzogs Adolph von Luxemburg*, p. 6-7; see also: Daniel GAYMARD, *Histoire architecturale ou l'aboutissement d'une identité*, p. 73.

³⁵⁵ Nicolas RIES, *L'Art de la Renaissance*, p. 6-7; Robert L. PHILIPPART, *A la découverte d'un intérieur somptueux*, p. 198-199 and 222. See figure 32 (Appendix 3).

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 190. Van Werveke however left all responsibility for the choice of motifs with the monarch: "Er wollte nicht nur Herrscher unseres Landes sein, Er wollte, daß alles was Ihn umgibt, und namentlich sein Palast die innige Verbindung zeige, die Ihn mit Land und Volk, und deren früheren Herrschern und Einrichtungen verknüpft." Nicholas VAN WERVEKE, *Das Großherzogliche Palais zu Luxemburg*, p. 4.

³⁵⁷ Robert L. PHILIPPART, *A la découverte d'un intérieur somptueux*, p. 199.

mixing in of whitewash so to leave the impression of a restored ancient fresco.³⁵⁸ There is however no relationship between both mural paintings – the latter is merely a post-modern reference to the former.³⁵⁹ Nevertheless, it seems to show a certain attachment of the then monarch Grand-Duke John, who oversaw all the renovation work on the palace. His connection to John of Bohemia found its origin in the latter's alleged Francophilia.

When, in 1919, the monarchy saw its position seriously challenged, it also reacted by re-inventing itself.³⁶⁰ The collaboration with the German occupants that the abdicated Grand-Duchess Marie-Adelaide was accused of was counter-balanced by the openly Francophile stance taken by her sister after the war. Eleven months after ascending the throne, she married Felix of Bourbon-Parma, an Italian prince, but of Bourbon blood nonetheless. Only the year before her sister Antonia had been engaged to the crown-prince of Bavaria, who at the same time was a *Generalfeldmarschall* of the German Imperial army;³⁶¹ the move was internationally regarded as a further expression of the dynasty's Germanophile attitude.³⁶² Charlotte's marriage offered different possibilities, and the dynasty's repositioning went much further.³⁶³ In 1921 the grand-ducal couple's first-born son and heir was named John, a name that had never occurred in their own lineages.³⁶⁴ According to a confidential letter sent by the father to the Holy-See, asking Pope Benedict XV to be the child's godfather, Prince Felix confirmed that his choice was indeed intended as a

³⁵⁸ See figure 33 (Appendix 3).

³⁵⁹ I am indebted to Guy May from the *Maréchalat de la Cour* for this information.

³⁶⁰ See also my chapter on Ermesinde.

³⁶¹ Gilbert TRAUSSCH, *La stratégie du faible. Le Luxembourg pendant la Première Guerre mondiale (1914-1919)*, p. 107.

³⁶² After the German defeat in the War and the politically precarious situation in both Luxembourg and Bavaria, the engagement of Princess Antonia to Crown-Prince Rupprecht was called off, only to be reconfirmed in 1921 when the political circumstances were more stable again. See: Jean-Louis SCHLIM, *Antonia von Luxemburg. Bayerns letzte Kronprinzessin*, Munich, 2006, 60-66.

³⁶³ It must be said though that the couple had already met during the war and agreed to marry, while at the time Prince Felix, as the brother of the Empress of Austria, was considered an ally of Habsburg and therefore an enemy. Nonetheless, his Bourbon origins helped to integrate him in the years and decades after their wedding.

³⁶⁴ The name John (Johann / Jean) cannot be found as a first name in the House of Bourbon-Parma, nor Nassau-Weilburg, nor even Orange-Nassau. As seen above, John of Bohemia himself most likely inherited the name from his maternal grandfather John of Brabant, since the name had never been used among the wider Limburg dynasty, nor even in the families of Ardenne or Namur.

reference to the medieval monarch.³⁶⁵ The public understood the message. The press welcomed the choice of name for the new prince, also because he was the first male heir to the throne born in Luxembourg since John of Bohemia himself.³⁶⁶ Likewise the official form of the name being the French *Jean*, all newspapers also printed it in an Antiqua typeset, i.e. a French one in style, even though the rest of the article was often in German and therefore printed in a blackletter typeset.³⁶⁷ Although a mere detail, this shows an acknowledgement of the French character sought and thus also support for the new French image of the dynasty. The reference to John of Bohemia was especially hailed in articles by French writers in Luxembourg, such as Marcel Noppeney,³⁶⁸ or by French and Belgian newspapers. Thus the Parisian newspaper *L'Œuvre* took up the occasion to remind its readers that John “is the name of the Luxembourgian national hero John the Blind, who at the battle of Crécy sealed with his blood the inalterable friendship of Luxembourg for France”.³⁶⁹ A Berlin paper on the other hand bewailed that an originally profoundly German (*kern-deutsche*) dynasty had transformed into a French one, “and German-ness has yet lost another province”.³⁷⁰ For nationalist circles in Luxembourg the pro-French allusion was tacitly accepted, while for them the reference to the medieval dynasty seemed to prevail.³⁷¹

Even later in his life, John of Nassau-Weilburg³⁷² could not escape the association with his medieval counterpart. The alleged motto of the king of Bohemia

³⁶⁵ “Le peuple désire beaucoup le nom de Jean, en souvenir de Jean de Luxembourg mort à la bataille de Crécy 1346.” As found in: Georges HELLINGHAUSEN, *Naissance et baptême du Prince Jean* (1921), p. 187.

³⁶⁶ *Luxemburger Wort*, 6/01/1921.

³⁶⁷ See for instance: *Escher Tageblatt*, 8/01/1921.

³⁶⁸ *L'Indépendance Luxembourgeoise*, 6/01/1921. In a letter to the editor Noppeney was criticised by more nationalist writers for referring to the new dynasty as Bourbon-Nassau (which it was and still is technically) and emphasising its French character, instead of calling it Nassau-Bourbon (after the example of Habsburg-Lorraine) in order to stress the continuity; see: *L'Indépendance Luxembourgeoise*, 13/01/1921.

³⁶⁹ “C’est le nom du héros national luxembourgeois, de Jean l’Aveugle, qui, à la bataille de Crécy, a scellé de son sang l’amitié inaltérable du Luxembourg pour la France.” *L'Œuvre*, 9/01/1921.

³⁷⁰ “(...) und das Deutschtum hat abermals eine Provinz verloren.” *Der Sport im Bild*, 9/02/1921.

³⁷¹ “E letzebuenger Haus soll ons jong Dynastie sech bauen” *D’Natio’n. Organ vun der Letzebuenger Nationalunio’n* 6, 1921, p. 2.

³⁷² John had kept the dynasty’s name rather than adopting the logical Bourbon-Nassau. His motivations could well have been the wish to create a continuity stretching back to his great-grandfather and even the House of Orange. Furthermore, it was probably out of respect for his mother, who especially after the hardship of the Second World War was greatly venerated among the population. See my chapter on Ermesinde.

“Ich Dien” provided the means. Even though Schoetter had already refuted the story of the Black Prince adopting his motto from John of Bohemia,³⁷³ its veracity persisted nonetheless in the minds of many. Knaff takes it up only seven years after Schoetter’s publication, to demonstrate how the king’s main intention was to serve his people.³⁷⁴ All editions of Herchen’s textbook further helped perpetuating the story and anchor it in the minds of the population.³⁷⁵ The façade of the wing added to the grand-ducal palace after 1890 contains an insert of John’s crest with the motto underneath, right next to Nassau’s own “Je maintiendrai”.³⁷⁶ A couple of years later, Grand-Duke William IV in his inaugural speech thus promises to stick to the motto “of our former count” himself.³⁷⁷ In 1939, a newspaper presents it as the motto of the ruling dynasty and attempts to rally the entire nation to ‘serve’ the fatherland.³⁷⁸ Linking the alleged motto personally with the crown prince was achieved in 1948, when the Luxembourg heraldicist Pierre-Adam Even and the French heraldicist Robert Louis presented the then crown prince with their creation of a new coat of arms. It combined the traditional colours of Nassau, Luxembourg and overall Bourbon.³⁷⁹ They also added the motto “Ich dien”.³⁸⁰ In 1946 the first Luxembourgian coins to be minted after the war showed Prince John on one side and John of Bohemia on the reverse, together with the motto “serviam” – as if the designer felt he had to outdo everyone else.³⁸¹

To complete the picture, one must acknowledge that Grand-Duke John himself has shown personal interest in his medieval ‘predecessor’. In 1996, on the 650th anniversary of the battle of Crécy, the monarch attended in person an academic symposium on John of Bohemia, while at the same time instigating the building of a

³⁷³ Jean SCHOETTER, *Johann, Graf von Luxemburg und König von Böhmen*, vol. 2, p. 282, n.4.

³⁷⁴ Philippe KNAFF, *Johann der Blinde. König von Böhmen und Graf von Luxemburg*, p. 8-9.

³⁷⁵ Arthur HERCHEN, *Manuel d’Histoire nationale*, 1918: p. 50, 1972: p. 87.

³⁷⁶ Nicholas VAN WERVEKE, *Das Großherzogliche Palais zu Luxemburg*, p. 4; Daniel GAYMARD, *Histoire architecturale ou l’aboutissement d’une identité*, p. 68-69.

³⁷⁷ Jean SCHOOS, *Wilhelm. Grossherzog von Luxemburg. Herzog zu Nassau. 1852-1912 (Zum 100. Geburtstag und 40. Todestag)*, p. 36.

³⁷⁸ *Luxemburger Wort*, 22-23/04/1939; as found in: Claude WEY, *Le Centenaire de l’Indépendance et sa commémoration en 1939*, p. 47.

³⁷⁹ Jean-Claude LOUTSCH, *Les armoiries de Son Altesse Royale le Grand-Duc de Luxembourg*, p. 9.

³⁸⁰ Grand-Duke John never officially accepted any coat of arms or motto different from the traditional emblems of the House of Nassau-Weilburg.

³⁸¹ Robert PROBST, *Le centenaire de notre dynastie raconté par les monnaies*, p. 33. See figure 39 (Appendix 3).

new mausoleum.³⁸² The nature of the grand narrative had already linked medieval and modern-day dynasties; the discovery of the former's 'French' character motivated not only monarchist historians, but the grand-ducal family itself to reinforce this link. The most important moment for the dynasty to profit from John's aura took place in August 1946, the 600th anniversary of the king's death and the 'repatriation' of his remains.

Although never raising enough popular and political support to bear fruit, calls for a return of John's remains had never ceased to be made. For some, his resting place on 'foreign' soil was increasingly regarded as a point of national shame. The latter finds its origins in Lenz and Knaff, but is perpetuated mainly by literary authors. Even though their poems focus on his death, none fail to end without a call for the return of his bones. The nationalist poet Lucien Koenig (1888-1961), who in his writings adopted the pseudonym of *Siggy vu Lëtzebuerg*, repeatedly made such an appeal. In 1913 he published a collection of poems, one of which was entitled "John the Blind's lament" (*Jang dem Blannen séng Klo*), in which the king addresses the Luxembourg nation and asks to be brought back.³⁸³ While all nineteenth-century attempts to fulfil the requirements set by Frederick-William of Prussia to build an adequate mausoleum failed, the aftermath of the First World War and the breakdown of the German Reich also eliminated any successor who may have felt personally responsible for the earlier promise made. At the same time, the defeat of Germany seemed to offer the possibility of regaining John's bones by other means. The call came from the main nationalist grouping *Nationalunio'n*, which also emerged with calls for territorial expansion. One post-war issue in their journal *D'Natio'n* showed a map with the territorial extension of the former duchy on its cover page with the appeal: "Great-Luxembourg. Thus it was. Thus it should be again".³⁸⁴ Towards the end of 1919 their magazine regularly featured John of Bohemia on its cover, asking the readers to volunteer their services in bringing him 'back'.³⁸⁵ A furtive mission was organised jointly with a group of American soldiers, who had managed to gather

³⁸² Michel PAULY, *Ein Grab für Johann den Europäer*, p. 35.

³⁸³ Siggy VU LETZEBUERG (alias Lucien KOENIG), *Jang dem Blannen séng Klo*, p. 21-22. The author promised to donate the profit made from the book to a monument for John.

³⁸⁴ "Gro'ssletzeburg. Eso' wor et. Eso' muss et nês gin." *D'Natio'n. Organ vun der Letzebuenger Nationalunio'n*, 18/10/1919.

³⁸⁵ On 13 December, they claimed to have found twenty volunteers, see: *Ibid.*, 13/12/1919.

the necessary equipment. Apparently the endeavour was aborted only shortly before it was supposed to happen, when the military commanders involved started doubting the legality of their actions and foresaw possible reprimand.³⁸⁶ The public in Luxembourg seemed undaunted about the issue and gave priority to other concerns, such as recovering from the constitutional crisis and the national referendum.

The next chance was offered after the successfully ‘won’ World War II. The hardships endured during the German occupation, including the latter’s efforts to germanise the country culturally, begged for compensation. On a military level a base was set up under French auspices on the former enemy’s territory. In November 1945 a Luxembourgian contingent was stationed at Kastel – Captain Will Albrecht, the commanding officer, later justified this move: when the army marched over the bridge of the Moselle into Germany “in order to occupy an old part of the former country of Luxembourg” it seemed obvious to celebrate the occasion in Kastel “in the company of John the Blind”.³⁸⁷ At the same time the main Luxembourgian newspaper, after having launched a series of articles on John’s successive tombs, asked the rhetorical question of whether the occupation of the Saar would not offer the possibility to return John’s remains.³⁸⁸ By the end of the month, but behind the scenes, politicians began working in the same direction. Since Kastel lay in the French military zone, Prime Minister Pierre Dupont wrote to the Quai d’Orsay for French consent in the affair.³⁸⁹ The French agreed in principle on the proposal to move King John, accepting that the body belonged to “a great friend of France”.³⁹⁰ From an early point in the preparations, the 600th anniversary of John’s death on 26 August was considered the best moment for the occasion and again the French were willing to respect that.³⁹¹

On 10 August, the tomb in Kastel was opened in front of a number of witnesses, including the Prime Minister of Luxembourg, the commander of the French forces in Germany, General Pierre Koenig, the historian Joseph Meyers and

³⁸⁶ *Luxemburger Zeitung*, 12/05/1929 (morning edition).

³⁸⁷ Transcript of an interview on the radio, 22/08/1946, 1.15pm. ANL DH 1374.

³⁸⁸ *Luxemburger Wort*, 8/11/1945, p. 1. See also: *Ibid.*, 13/11/1945, p. 2.

³⁸⁹ 21/11/1945, Dossier ‘Repartiement des cendres de Jean l’Aveugle’ ANL.

³⁹⁰ 29/05/1946 and 19/06/1946, Dossier ‘Repartiement des cendres de Jean l’Aveugle’ ANL.

³⁹¹ 6/03/1946 and 3/07/1946, Dossier ‘Repartiement des cendres de Jean l’Aveugle’ ANL.

not least Lucien Koenig,³⁹² who, awestruck at the sight of the king's bones, famously declared: "It's him!" (*T ass en!*).³⁹³ For Lucien Koenig, the whole affair was most dear to his heart as noted before; apart from his earlier calls for a return of the bones, he had been one of the foremost members of the *Nationalunio'n* and certainly also involved in the earlier 'repatriation' attempt. Only that very same year, he had released another play in which he lets John the Blind appear and plead for his return.³⁹⁴ Considering his personal involvement in the 1946 events, one can wonder to what degree his publication was not part of a plan to build up popular enthusiasm for the actual return. The public was left unaware of the attempts to regain John's body for a very long time. The opening of the tomb on 10 August went completely unnoticed in the press, and even on 20 August yet another newspaper article on John's different tombs appeared still wondering "maybe the burning wish of the blind hero to have 'a grave among his people' will reach fulfilment".³⁹⁵ Only on the 21st was the news broken, together with the publication of the ceremonial programme.³⁹⁶ During the following days the topic became omnipresent in all forms of media, in newspaper articles as well as regular radio shows.³⁹⁷ The event was in practice always referred to as the "repatriation" (*Heimholung, repatriement*) of John's remains. The principal newspaper headlined the story with "Home, home, home, to my country",³⁹⁸ or "The father of emperors and king-hero at home again".³⁹⁹ The act thus presupposes and strongly confirms that John was a Luxembourger according to the modern definition of the word, with modern-day inhabitants his descendants.⁴⁰⁰ This historical connection was additionally enhanced by the attendance of the ceremony.⁴⁰¹

³⁹² Procès-verbal dressé le 10 août 1946 lors de l'ouverture du tombeau et du cercueil de Jean l'Aveugle à Castel/Sarre. ANL DH 1373.

³⁹³ Michel MARGUE and Jean SCHROEDER (ed), *Un itinéraire européen*, p. 193.

³⁹⁴ Lucien KOENIG, Gêschter iwer der Hémecht! Nationalletzebuergesch Trauerspill an 3 Akten vum Siggy vu Letzebuerg, p. 14-15.

³⁹⁵ Der blinde König, *Luxemburger Wort*, 20/09/1946, p. 6.

³⁹⁶ Am Sonntag 25. August 1946. Heimholung der Gebeine Johans des Blinden, *Ibid.*, 21/09/1946, p. 2.

³⁹⁷ See: *Ibid.*, 24/09/1946; and: ANL DH 1374.

³⁹⁸ *Luxemburger Wort*, 24/09/1946, p. 8.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 26/09/1946, p. 3-4.

⁴⁰⁰ See also my general conclusions.

⁴⁰¹ Katherine VERDERY, *The political lives of dead bodies. Reburial and Postsocialist Change*, p. 41-42 and 108.

The ceremony itself presented a strange mix of nationalist symbolism, military ritual and medieval-style display. Covered in the national colours of modern Luxembourg, the coffin was placed onto a caisson as soon as it crossed into the grand-duchy and then driven with a large military escort to the capital. Military bands played at the border and during the main ceremony in the capital's Place Guillaume. In every village, local notables paid tribute to the passing carriage, the church bells sounded and children stood by the roadside waving the national flag. After the procession had entered the capital it stopped for a minute in front of the *Monument du Souvenir*, as a mark of respect to soldiers fallen on the allied side in the First World War,⁴⁰² then meandered through the city's streets until it reached the Place Guillaume. Here the grand-ducal family, a large number of dignitaries and large crowds were awaiting the king's coffin, which was laid on an elevated base. A military ceremony started. Thereafter a religious ceremony was performed at the cathedral in whose crypt John was laid once more to rest in his pre-1793 sarcophagus. It stands close to the burial place of the grand-ducal family, over whose entrance one can recognise John's crest of vulture feathers over the Luxembourgian coat of arms.⁴⁰³

The 'repatriation' of John's remains in 1946 employed all of the existing myths – and thus reinforced them. John's own fondness of Luxembourg and its inhabitants were re-iterated in order to stress his 'national importance'. His assumed Francophile attitude was used in the negotiation with the French military representatives and emerged during the speeches. The prime minister stressed that "we brought home the ashes of John the Blind, as a couple of months ago we brought back those of our heroes of the last war."⁴⁰⁴ The anti-German symbolism attached to him was also strengthened by presenting the 'repatriation' as a result of 'victory' over the eastern neighbour. As Nicolas Margue put it: "It would have been

⁴⁰² In fact the symbolism of the monument at this point was more complex. The Germans had torn down the golden lady at its top. The socle was regarded as a scar from the German occupation until the rediscovery of the lost statue in the 1980s. See: Benoît MAJERUS, *Gëlle Fra*, p. 291-296.

⁴⁰³ See figures 34 to 37 (Appendix 3).

⁴⁰⁴ "Aujourd'hui, nous avons ramené dans la patrie les cendres de Jean l'Aveugle comme, il y a quelques mois, nous avons ramené ceux de nos héros de la Dernière Guerre." Pierre Dupont quoted in: Jacques DOLLAR, *Jean l'Aveugle à Crécy*, p. 93.

unacceptable to us had he remained in foreign, especially enemy, soil”.⁴⁰⁵ By ‘reclaiming’ John’s remains, the nation also symbolically reclaimed a part of its ‘identity’ after all its suppression during the occupation. The ceremony above all constituted a moment where the nation could celebrate itself again after the war. As usual for these occasions, it was almost entirely centred on the monarchy, which had presided over the whole ceremonial. This once more emphasised John’s role as a precursor to the modern-day dynasty, adding to its legitimacy both as a ruling family and a form of government.

As mentioned before, John was a constant topic in all media: newspaper articles, Koenig’s play and regular radio shows. Considering the ailing state of its budget after the war, the government tried to finance the ‘repatriation’ by minting a special coin for the occasion, the piece uniting crown-prince and medieval ruler.⁴⁰⁶ Furthermore, the National Museum set up an exhibition on John’s life.⁴⁰⁷ Also trying to profit from the excitement, the national charity fund sold a postcard with John’s coat of arms as its main motif,⁴⁰⁸ and the Caritas charity released a series of postage stamps figuring the king’s bust. The examples show how the hype went far beyond the mere ceremony and the general public could not possibly escape exposure.

The last days of the nationalist icon?

The year 1946 certainly constituted the unbeatable climax of John’s nationalist instrumentalisation. The following decades could not surpass it and one can even perceive a slow decrease in his presence. This was additionally nourished by the stable political relations with the neighbouring countries, especially Germany, and the fact that the return of his body eliminated a lot of John’s potential to stir up dispute.

The main form of media keeping John’s presence alive became the schoolbooks. Until a reform of the school system in 1968, these did not change very much; for all classes on the history of Luxembourg, Herchen’s and Meyers’s

⁴⁰⁵ “Il eût été inadmissible pour nous qu’il continuât à rester en terre étrangère, voire même ennemie.” Nicolas MARGUE, Jean de Luxembourg, in: *Luxemburger Wort*, 27/09/1946, p. 1.

⁴⁰⁶ See above and figure 39 (Appendix 3).

⁴⁰⁷ See: *Revue 2/18*, 1946.

⁴⁰⁸ Konschkârt Jang de Blannen, *Luxemburger Wort*, 28/09/1946. See figure 38 (Appendix 3).

remained in place.⁴⁰⁹ A new book for the teaching of the medieval history authored by Paul Margue (*1923) came out in 1974; its later editions are still officially in use in classic secondary school education nowadays.⁴¹⁰ The author remains rather traditional in his approach. John is introduced as a “tireless chivalrous quarreller and imaginative politician”⁴¹¹ and is followed by the usual description of his ‘political’ activities, such as the war against Metz, the relations to the French court, his campaign in Northern Italy, his crusades in Lithuania etc.⁴¹² The author acknowledges that John’s politics were not without problems, especially in Bohemia, and carries on with his achievements in the county of Luxembourg, such as the territorial expansion of county and city, and the founding of the *Schobermesse*.⁴¹³ The chapter concludes with a brief note on Crécy, which is then followed with a selection of maps and contemporary sources, including excerpts from Froissart and Machaut, coins and illustrations.⁴¹⁴ Paul Margue uses a less nationalist tone than Herchen or Meyers, which goes hand-in-hand with limiting himself to describing John’s political ambitions and deeds. Nonetheless there is still a noticeably strong emphasis on the military aspects, while all the elements of his administrative, diplomatic and financial policies are only marginally present. John continues to possess a pre-eminent position within the structure of the textbook: Paul Margue does not use many more paragraphs on John than for instance on Henry VII or Charles VI, but he adds eight pages of documents, enlarging thus the section enormously with comparatively exciting material.

The 1989 anniversary of the country’s ‘independence’ saw a large rise in publications on Luxembourgian history of all sorts. Among those we find a more ‘serious’ comic strip, which saw its mission to provide its readers an easier access to

⁴⁰⁹ Armand THILL, *L’enseignement de l’histoire au Luxembourg depuis 1945*, p. 120-122. For manuals on the larger historical perspective, as taught in secondary schools, German publications became disregarded, and were subsequently replaced by French and Belgian publications. The exception is a Luxembourgian one written by the three history teachers Probst, Koch and Meyers; see: Henri KOCH and Joseph MEYERS, *Handbuch der Geschichte für die Unterstufe der Höheren Schulen. Band II. Mittelalter 2. Teil und Neuzeit*. Since it was intended to introduce pupils to European history, John the Blind only plays an extremely minor role (p. 60).

⁴¹⁰ Paul MARGUE, *Luxemburg in Mittelalter und Neuzeit (10. bis 18. Jahrhundert)*.

⁴¹¹ “ein nimmermüder Streithahn und einfallsreicher Politiker”, *Ibid.*, p. 77.

⁴¹² *Ibid.*, p. 77-8.

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 79-80.

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 80-8.

Luxembourgian history.⁴¹⁵ Since Paul Margue worked as its advisory, his opinion shines through: John is an active, but high-tempered prince, who “was involved with everything in politics, except for leading a church service”;⁴¹⁶ the title of the chapter sets the tone “Knight until death” (*Ritter bis an den Doud*). The story tries to do justice to the medieval sources, including Peter of Zittau. The first scene depicts him in a heated debate with his wife, symbolizing thus also his political problems in Bohemia. Compared to earlier depictions, the authors provide him with a rash and unrestrained personality. Playing again on Zittau’s example, John throws away his money into the masses, while participating in jousts, where he is often wounded.⁴¹⁷ The depiction of Crécy on the other hand remains firmly in the tradition of Froissart and the suicide theory. John, who is wearing a crowned helmet, feels that the battle is lost, but asks his men to bring him forward for one last hit. Likewise John’s son Charles IV is shown as unwilling to support his father and risk his life in a lost cause, which can be interpreted as either a sign of cowardice or wisdom.⁴¹⁸

Very different in style is the second volume (of many) of the super-hero-*malgré-soi* Superjhempe, also published in 1989 and given the circumstances also focusing on ‘national history’.⁴¹⁹ These comic-books aim for easy entertainment with ironic comments on everyday politics and society, and this volume is no exception. Although it focuses essentially on the ‘great phases’ of Luxembourgian history, the latter is used rather as a pretext than an end in itself. John appears in his armour, unrecognisable because of the closed helmet, but with a big head of a rather cuddly looking red lion painted on his chest.⁴²⁰ The depiction of John is a caricature that reverses many of the dominating views: he is very short, very unmajestic in manner, unable to use bow and arrow. Interestingly the whole five-page episode set in the fourteenth century takes place at the *Schobermesse*.⁴²¹ Although the latter is depicted

⁴¹⁵ Marc ANGEL and Paul MARGUE, *D’Geschicht vu Lëtzebuerg a Bandes Dessinéés*, Luxembourg, 1989. See figure 43 (Appendix 3).

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 47-9.

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 52-3.

⁴¹⁹ Roger LEINER and Lucien CZUGA, *De Superjhempe. Dynamit fir d’Dynastie*, Luxembourg, 1989. See figure 44 (Appendix 3).

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁴²¹ In this particular volume, Superjhempe is able to time-travel with the help of a time machine.

as a funfair with medieval rollercoasters, it illustrates nonetheless that to many people this seems to be one of the main relics of John's reign in Luxembourg.

Since the 1970s, the real *Schobermesse* has seen a fundamental reorientation in the perception of the relationship with its founding father. Whereas in earlier years it was used to promote a positive display of John, now the king is being increasingly used to provide the fair with historical tradition. The earliest example for this is the erection of a monument to John's memory in 1975; the only freestanding one for him in Luxembourg until today. The initiator of the project was the association of the showmen, the *Union des Industriels Forains Luxembourg*. Although the inaugural speeches focused more on the previous lack of monuments for John rather than stressing his role as founder of the fair, the fact that the performers chose to set up this monument is telling, as is its location.⁴²²

The next push started in 1990 and was possibly more self-aware. The 600th anniversary of the fair's foundation led to the production of memorabilia: a plaque with the print of one of John's chivalric seals and a replica cast of that very same seal.⁴²³ While the two previous examples have been rather top-down, the showmen also started making use of John about ten years later. One food-stand started to sell a sausage baptised "Blind John" (*Blanne Jang*) and in 2005 one beer-tent named itself after the king: "At Blind John's" (*Beim Blanne Jang*).⁴²⁴

One recent example of a comic book using a John the Blind theme illustrates that in popular culture the king is still very much identified with a *national* context. In 2005 the artist Andy Genen (signing himself with *ND!*) and the comic book writer Lucien Czuga, who also writes the texts for the *Superjhempe* series, together produced the first volume of a planned manga-style series entitled "The last knight" (*De leschte Ritter*).⁴²⁵ Being miraculously transported in time from the field of Crécy to modern day Luxembourg, John the Blind is in search of a treasure hidden in the fantasy castle of "Drachestein", which itself is based on the castle of Vianden. In this endeavour he is helped by some loyal friends, among them Prof. Siggy Kinnek (a

⁴²² The monument stands between the city parks and the glacis square, where the *Schobermesse* takes place. It is principally made of a rock of about 120cm high, on which is a bronze plaque with John's chivalric seal. See figure 40 (Appendix 3).

⁴²³ See figure 41 (Appendix 3).

⁴²⁴ See figure 42 (Appendix 3).

⁴²⁵ Lucien CZUGA and ND! GENEN, *De leschte Ritter. De Schatz vun Draachestein*, Luxembourg, 2005. See figure 45 (Appendix 3).

pun on Lucien ‘Siggy’ Koenig), and challenged by the evil-doer Edward P. Black (the reincarnation of the Black Prince). Although the book uses some of the stereotypes rather playfully, it nonetheless confirms the old clichés rather than making any attempt to surpass or challenge them. It uses the same imagery that had been in place in the middle of the twentieth century, citing the cathedral window, or traditional representations of the chained horses on the plain of Crécy. John is presented as a rash quixotic knight, who despite his age and blindness is always up for a proper fight (preferably with beer-drinking British motorbikers⁴²⁶). Constantly wearing tracksuits or t-shirts in the national colours with prints, such as “Luxembourg”, or “I love LU”, the blind king helps to fight the locals against the large foreign capitalist company lead by the Black Prince. The foundations of the storyline reach all the way back to the nineteenth century: while the small nation of Luxembourg is threatened by powerful external forces, John of Bohemia stands up as its champion and defends it successfully in his high-tempered style. Peter of Zittau’s critique of John tried to achieve its goal by presenting the king as rash and restless. One must wonder to what degree the nationalist interpretation has not slowly turned this critique into a virtue, as a means by which small Luxembourg could assert itself among the other larger European nations.

Alternative memories?

Whereas so far we have explored the evolutions within the mainstream national model in Luxembourg, we should nonetheless also wonder about possible alternative memories of John of Bohemia. Here we need to distinguish first between those that have been developed inside a Luxembourgian context and thus positioned themselves principally against the dominant discourse, and those that coexist alongside and can mainly be found outside the borders of the grand-duchy.

As seen above, mild forms of criticism aimed at John were generally accepted, as long as they were part of an overall positive viewpoint, not challenging the standing of the national hero within Luxembourg. Any entirely antagonistic views were marginal, short-lived and ultimately futile. When at the very end of 1937,

⁴²⁶ See: *Ibid.*, p. 4.

Caritas Luxembourg released a series of charity post stamps with the portraits of the great fourteenth-century Luxembourg rulers, Henry VII, John, Charles IV and Wenceslas IV, the newspaper *Die Neue Zeit* answered with a polemic article.⁴²⁷ This particular monthly paper positioned itself within the leftwing, antifascist movement,⁴²⁸ but occasionally reflected strong anti-clerical and anti-monarchist tendencies. In this particular case, such a philosophy was conveyed through the means of a very deliberate and complete critique of John of Bohemia. In consequence, John is portrayed as “a great murderer!” (*Ein Mörder im Großen!*), the claim based on his many wars. The high taxation under his reign, his large-scale forging of coins, his persecution of Jews and desecration of graves, all reflect “a sick craving for recognition and outrageous prodigality”. Likewise his personal life was marked by a business marriage (*Geschäftssehe*), many concubines, the banning of his children from Bohemia and the loathing of both his wives. Finally, the author, who hid behind a pseudonym, questions John’s sacrosanct love for his fatherland by considering the nationalist argument that the pawning of his lands ultimately led to the ‘foreign dominance’ of the Burgundians. The article was generally ignored. Only the liberal-centrist *Luxemburger Zeitung* answered with a brief but complete rehabilitation of John, rejecting all of the arguments.⁴²⁹ There was no other perceptible aftermath.

A similar initiative from an alternative milieu can be found at Luxembourg City’s train station. Since the Luxembourgian railway network was initially operated by a German company, they were also responsible for the maintenance of the railway stations. Thus, in 1903, the new city station was designed by a Berlin architect, who used a Rhenish neo-Baroque style to illustrate the relationship of Luxembourg with its eastern neighbour. The façade contains the busts of illustrious ‘Luxembourgers’ who the designer thought to incarnate the close ties between both countries.⁴³⁰ One of these chosen few is John, who was given one of the most prominent locations; his bust is larger and better placed than any other. The initiative met with no long-lasting

⁴²⁷ Peter FORSCH, Aus Anlass einer Charitasmärke, in: *Die Neue Zeit. Monatsschrift für Demokratie, Geistesfreiheit und Kultur* 16, January 1938, p. 4.

⁴²⁸ Romain HILGERT, *Zeitungen in Luxemburg 1704-2004*, p. 194.

⁴²⁹ Jean PÉTIN, Verwurelt Gedanken. Über „Der Hochstapler und Räuber Johann der Blinde“, in: *Die Neue Zeit*, Januar 1938, in: *Luxemburger Zeitung*, 17/01/1938.

⁴³⁰ Robert L. PHILIPPART, Le monument est-il innocent, p. 63.

acclaim, especially not since at that very moment John was increasingly attributed with strong French affinities.

The question, as to what degree John had to be regarded as a symbol of Luxembourg's link to 'Germany', was of greatest relevance during the occupation of World War Two. There was however no clear trend to be identified among German writers on the topic. Some did indeed see the fourteenth century as the period in which Luxembourg was most closely integrated into Germany. In this context John's acquisition of Bohemia was interpreted as a bridge uniting the western parts of the Empire with the eastern.⁴³¹ The most extreme pro-German reinterpretation was to be found in the official guidebook to John's tomb in Kastel. It explains how the mausoleum was built in John's favourite area, close to his castle of Freudenburg,⁴³² without any mention of Luxembourg or acknowledgment that the area actually had belonged to that county. After his death, the tomb had to be moved regularly, because of the frequent French attacks on Luxembourg, until Frederick-William finally provided his ancestor (*Ahnherr*) with a resting place of dignity.⁴³³ Other authors seem to prefer ignoring John in favour of the emperors Henry VII and Charles IV.⁴³⁴ One reason may have been that John's role was indeed less prestigious from an imperial point of view than that of his father and son. On the other hand, one can also suspect the grip of the Luxembourgian nationalists on John's memory as being a factor – the German writers of the time may not have been confident enough of overriding these connotations.

The National-Socialist civic administration preferred to integrate John rather than ignoring him, even though such efforts only occurred sporadically. One such symbolic gesture was retaining the street name of that named after John, only changing the name from French into German.⁴³⁵ Meanwhile, many other streets were renamed, so as to receive a firmly pro-German connotation. After the destruction of the *Monument du Souvenir*, there were even plans to replace it with a monument for

⁴³¹ Emil GLASS, *Luxemburg und das Reich. Briefe über eine erste Begegnung*, 21-22; see also the plate in between p. 16 and 17.

⁴³² Verwaltung der Staatlichen Schlösser und Gärten (ed), *Die Klause bei Kastel. Kurze Beschreibung der letzten Ruhestätte Johanns von Böhmen*, p. 6.

⁴³³ *Ibid.*, p. 6 and 10-11.

⁴³⁴ Frid MUTH, *Altes deutsches Kernland Luxemburg*, p. 601; Paul Hermann RUTH, *Luxemburg*, p. 1.

⁴³⁵ Guy MAY, *Die Straßenbezeichnungen der Stadt Luxemburg unter deutscher Besatzung (1940-1944)*, p. 30-31.

John.⁴³⁶ As so often, the latter never saw reality and in the end none of these German interpretations or plans survived the war.

The memory of John outside the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg can only be sketched out briefly within this context. In some cases it only exists in small pockets with merely locally confined importance. One can name here especially Durbuy, a small town in the Ardennes that had been under the control of the counts of Luxembourg since the thirteenth century. John is of local importance, since he put his seal to the town's first letter of enfranchisement in 1331. However, more importance seems to be given to the fact that Guillaume de Machaut imagined it as the setting of his *Judement du roy de Behaigne*, celebrated for example on a plaque in front of the eighteenth-century castle. The town further adorns itself with a street named *rue Jean de Bohême* and since 1997 a grand hotel in its centre of the same name.⁴³⁷ The name also illustrates that John is not linked into a Luxembourgian context and used for the creation of a local identity, as is the case for Ermesinde in Clairefontaine. The situation in Mettlach, across the German border, is comparable. The fountain that Frederick-William donated to Boch-Buschmann in return for John's earthly remains still stands (recently renovated) behind the local Villeroy & Boch porcelain factory.⁴³⁸ However, the fountain in Mettlach never attracted any tourists and is today largely ignored. Furthermore, it is known (and advertised) under the name of its designer as *Schinkelbrunnen*, whereas the identity of the depicted knight is only revealed to those who approach the fountain and take the trouble to read the explanatory plaque.

John's former grave in the romantically set hermitage in Kastel above the river Saar still exists and has only deteriorated a little.⁴³⁹ Unlike the fountain of Mettlach, the chapel in Kastel still attracts the occasional tourists or locals on their Sunday afternoon walk. One can argue that the location of the building and its interior confer a political message. The mausoleum is visible from afar by any traveller along the borders of the river Saar, giving it some prominence despite not being placed in a densely populated area. The interior shows a large fresco with the

⁴³⁶ Benoît MAJERUS, *Gëlle Fra*, p. 292.

⁴³⁷ See figure 46 (Appendix 3).

⁴³⁸ See figures 47 and 47a (Appendix 3).

⁴³⁹ See figures 48 and 49 (Appendix 3).

genealogy of both Frederick-William and his wife Elisabeth of Bavaria, linking with John as their common ancestor – the prince of Prussia intended to present himself as King John’s heir, which he had already attempted by assuring him a resting place full of dignity.⁴⁴⁰ Considering that the lands along the Saar were to some degree also ruled by the Bohemian king, Frederick-William thus also presented himself as the rightful ruler of these lands so far from Berlin and then only recently (1815) added to the Prussian crown. Even though Kastel may have been built chiefly to satisfy the prince’s personal romantic needs, it was nonetheless a symbol of Prussia’s power in the area. Thus it stood also for the Prussian expansion, so well understood in Luxembourg and reminded the latter how it ‘forfeited shamefully’ the remains of its beloved King John. The population of Luxembourg answered by peregrinating to the tomb; the journey was particularly popular among schools and several generations of students passed by.⁴⁴¹ The idyllic setting of the place and its proximity to the grand-duchy further recommended it as a destination for daytrips. The site was slowly integrated into Luxembourgian popular memory and helped to perpetuate the calls for a return of the king’s body.

One last such example from Germany is Bitburg, which was the main base of the Luxembourgian armed forces in Germany after the Second World War. It was named after ‘John the Blind’, which for the occupants was chosen for the well-known connotations of his military heroism and the territorial greatness of Luxembourg, both working particularly well in this German context. Some locals in Bitburg re-interpreted the name to suit their own ends; a local historian wrote that the name illustrated that the Luxembourgers had come as friends rather than enemies since John himself had always been kind to the inhabitants of Bitburg.⁴⁴² With the minor exception of Kastel, these examples share the fact that they are only of significant local importance when not linked or opposed to any other existing tradition. Furthermore, in the cases of Kastel and Bitburg, a local memory developed which was not acknowledged in Luxembourg, but coexisted alongside within their own contexts.

⁴⁴⁰ See figure 50 (Appendix 3).

⁴⁴¹ I am grateful to Paul Margue and to my maternal grandparents, Alice and Michel Feltes-Braun, for sharing these memories.

⁴⁴² Joseph HAINZ, *Johann der Blinde (1310-1346), Herzog von Luxemburg und König von Böhmen*, p. 188.

In Bohemia, on the other hand, the situation is far too complex to be properly analysed within the framework of this thesis.⁴⁴³ In addition, the language has always been a problem for an investigation of Czech research in Luxembourg. The lack of a translation of Jiří Spěváček's biography,⁴⁴⁴ for instance, means that it has never been read by a Luxembourgian scholar.

The more interesting moments for our analysis are therefore those rare occasions where there was actual interaction between Czechs and Luxembourgers. John constituted mainly an opportunity to stress former links between the two countries whenever appropriate. Only in 1929 was there a reason for some short-lived discontent, when the Czechoslovak government petitioned Berlin to move the king's remains to Prague.⁴⁴⁵ The Luxembourgian press became slightly agitated⁴⁴⁶ and the government decided to intervene.⁴⁴⁷ It remains doubtful that this had any impact on the final decision to leave the bones where they were. In the run-up to the Second World War and facing a common threat, this earlier incident had long been forgotten. On 13 November 1938, as part of the twentieth anniversary of the end of World War One, a new memorial was set up in Neuville-saint-Vaast for the soldiers of the Czech voluntary company *Na Zdar*, which also included soldiers from Morocco and Luxembourg.⁴⁴⁸ The ceremony attempted to recreate the very similar event of 1905. The inaugurated monument was a replica of the Bohemian Cross in Crécy, with the same medallion representing John of Bohemia. Again the ceremony saw delegations from France, Czechoslovakia and Luxembourg, and again it was used to celebrate their century-old alliance. Even more so than with the 1905 ceremony, the timing is crucial in order to understand this declaration of friendship fully: it took place less than two months after the Munich Agreement and only a month after the occupation of the Sudetenland. The year also coincided with the centenary of John's burial in Kastel, thus raising an additional awareness on the side of the Luxembourg delegation. It was a moment of solidarity in the face of another

⁴⁴³ An overview is provided in: Ferdinnt SEIBT, *Johann von Luxemburg in der Historiographie*.

⁴⁴⁴ Jiří SPEVÁČEK, *Král diplomat*, Prague, 1982.

⁴⁴⁵ Tony KELLEN, *Die Irrfahrten des toten Königs ...*, p. 57; Evy FRIEDRICH, *Als die Tschechen den Blanne Jhang haben wollten*, p. 4.

⁴⁴⁶ Um die Gebeine Johans des Blinden, in: *Jonghémecht* 8, 1929, p. 183

⁴⁴⁷ *Luxemburger Zeitung*, 12/05/1929 (morning edition).

⁴⁴⁸ *Luxemburger Wort*, 16/11/1938.

glooming war against the common neighbour. The gesture implied a bond between the western and central parts of the continent, and the ceremony thus also anticipated some developments that have arisen since the last decade of the twentieth century, but this time the context was a European one.

The European champion

New trends in the writing of history seldom emerge abruptly, but sometimes a specific occasion operates as a catalyst for the launch of fresh interpretations which had been simmering for a while. In a small country such as Luxembourg, where the number of professional academics is limited, anniversaries in particular offer the possibility for a concerted approach. In this case the group of medievalists was the recently formed CLUDEM.⁴⁴⁹ The occasion came in the form of two anniversaries: the 650th anniversary of the foundation of the *Schobermesse* in 1990 and the 650th anniversary of John's death (and the 700th of his birth) in 1996.

These dates mark a re-invention of the blind king, which took place on two levels. The first can be regarded as part of a scientific process attempting to combine new approaches, knowledge and international comparisons into a nuanced picture of the king's political deeds. One must name here the studies undertaken in the context of the *Schobermesse* anniversary.⁴⁵⁰ It was the first time that the foundation of the fair was analysed on its own terms and set within the context of economic and urban politics, while at the same time taking into consideration the wide-ranging research on similar topics elsewhere. The book was incidentally also the first publication edited by CLUDEM. The trend was continued by the German scholar Winfried Reichert, who submitted a PhD thesis on the administration in the late medieval

⁴⁴⁹ The acronym stands for *Centre Luxembourgeois de Documentation et d'Etudes Médiévales*. It was founded in 1987 by the six medievalists Aloyse Estgen, Michel Margue, Michel Pauly, Michel Polfer, Jean Schroeder, and Henri Trauffer. Except for Estgen, all of them have since held positions (some of them only temporarily) at the Centre Universitaire de Luxembourg or its successor institution, the University of Luxembourg. While in 1987 all six were in their early careers, twenty years later Margue and Pauly are tenured professors at the University of Luxembourg, Polfer director of the National Museum of History and Art, and Trauffer director of the *Lycée classique* in Echternach. In July 2007 they opened the society to six new members.

⁴⁵⁰ Michel PAULY (ed), *Schueberfouer 1340-1990. Untersuchung zu Markt, Gerwerbe und Stadt im Mittelalter und Neuzeit*, Luxembourg, 1990 (Publications du CLUDEM 1).

County of Luxembourg at the University of Trier.⁴⁵¹ Amongst academics, the image of the hero has thus been gradually making way for that of the skilled diplomat and a sharp and accomplished financial politician. This change in perception was helped by the fact that Luxembourgian scholarly research had ignored John for many decades, despite his presence in popular culture and school textbooks. These new studies insert themselves in international scholarship: they take up trends set elsewhere, while their conclusions are often shared abroad, or even find precedents. It is striking that Czech historiography has also seen a move from Josef Šusta's negative perception of the "king foreigner" (*král cizinec*) in 1932, to Jiří Spěváček's approving "king diplomat" (*král diplomat*) in 1982.⁴⁵² While earlier studies, such as Schoetter's, or even Cazelles's, often expressed implied comments on the king's character and persona, recent historiography is comparatively bare of these. This development is also linked to an extremely critical standpoint *vis-à-vis* the narrative medieval sources. Most of the hitherto influential authors, such as Froissart, are no longer accepted as direct witnesses thus rendering them unreliable and all are now considered as obscuring some facets of the historic John behind their own political agenda. The same applies for Peter of Zittau and Guillaume de Machaut. While these sources had a decisive impact on the nature of John's image for more than 600 years, they are now being read on a meta-level. This new reading is a feature of Michel Margue's research, which has been reassessing the courtly contexts that gave rise to John's knightly image for many years.⁴⁵³ In the same spirit, CLUDEM organised a large international conference in 1996, which resulted in 800 pages of proceedings and crowns the new historiographical process.⁴⁵⁴ The event brought together scholars from Luxembourg, Germany, the Czech Republic, France and Britain, and was a unique opportunity for a large exchange on the topic.

⁴⁵¹ Winfried REICHERT, *Landesherrschaft zwischen Reich und Frankreich. Verfassung, Wirtschaft und Territorialpolitik in der Grafschaft Luxemburg von der Mitte des 13. bis zur Mitte des 14. Jahrhundert*, Trier, 1993 (Trierer Historische Forschungen 24).

⁴⁵² Ferdinand SEIBT, Johann von Luxemburg in der Historiographie, p. 17-19.

⁴⁵³ See for instance: Michel MARGUE, Jean de Luxembourg, prince idéal et chevalier parfait: Aux origines d'un mythe, p. 11-26.

⁴⁵⁴ Michel PAULY (ed), *Johann der Blinde. Graf von Luxemburg, König von Böhmen. 1296-1346. Tagungsband der 9es Journées lotharingiennes. 22.-26. Oktober 1996. Centre Universitaire de Luxembourg*, Luxembourg, 1997 (PSH 115; CLUDEM 14).

The new interpretations entered school textbooks very quickly: in 1997, a new one for use in polytechnic secondary schools was published.⁴⁵⁵ The book has a much wider scope, aiming further than at the mere transfer of knowledge, introducing for the first time elements of social and cultural history and reducing the traditional political element to a lesser role. As a result the presence of John of Bohemia diminishes and he appears principally as just one of the many members of the House of Luxembourg.⁴⁵⁶ Nonetheless, the book also provides a brief excerpt from a contemporary source, in which John is attributed with a cunning belligerence. His administrative qualities appear a couple of pages further on. The authors present his monetary and economic policies and relate to this the founding of the *Schobermesse*.⁴⁵⁷ It is striking how financial motivations have replaced the alleged patriotism of the previous generations. The final mention of John is in relation to the monastery of Altmünster, the place he was buried after battle of Crécy, but the name now devoid of all heroic connotations.⁴⁵⁸ The latest textbook for primary schools follows a very similar line. John the Blind only appears once and rather briefly. He is named as the founder of the *Schobermesse* and the book's main point is that what we now perceive as a fun fair was once upon the time a trade fair to attract foreign merchants to Luxembourg.⁴⁵⁹ No mention of a 'chivalrous character' or a 'heroic death'.

Despite its strictly academic nature, this first reassessment of John's politics already hints at an underlying shift away from a national perspective. The second one reflects this more radically so, partly due to its more ideological nature. Setting John into a European context allows for a new analysis of his diverse and far-reaching politics, also by taking in the many international studies. In consequence, this process has not only enlarged the analogical evidence, but also placed its results on more robust foundations than earlier examples set in a traditional and largely national perspective. However, this approach also fitted well the new ideological trend that recognised the country's role as a leader of the contemporary European integration

⁴⁵⁵ Michel MARGUE, Michel POLFER and Denis SCUTO (ed.), *Entdecken und Verstehen. Geschichtsbuch für den technischen Sekundarunterricht in Luxemburg*, vol. 2, Berlin, 1997. [N.B. The classical secondary school still uses Paul Margue's from 1974.]

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, *Entdecken und Verstehen*, vol. 2, p. 84.

⁴⁵⁹ Education nationale (ed), *Die Zeitmaschine. Lëtzebuurger Geschichtsbuch*, p. 105.

process. The main publication of 1996 opens with mapping John's itinerary and covers a European map with coloured dots from today's Kaliningrad to Toulouse, and from Malines to Bologna.⁴⁶⁰ John appears to have transcended borders which have become permeable again; at least the book's main title "A European itinerary" (*Un itinéraire européen*) seems to encapsulate this. Conveniently, at the time the president of the European commission was the former Luxembourgian prime minister Jacques Santer, who was willing to provide the publication with a high-profile preface. Considering his position, he saw a particular aspect of the present reflected in the past:

(...) I would like to stress John's politics of openness (*politique d'ouverture*) towards Central Europe, Bohemia, Poland and Hungary (...). At the time, the position of these countries within the concert of European states was without doubt.⁴⁶¹

The second sentence seems to imply that this had not been the case for a long time, but has now changed once again. By letting this statement follow the first sentence, he leaves the impression that John was indeed a precursor in respect of modern day European integration and enlargement. Again, a ludicrous statement, which has as little a bearing on the medieval setting as the earlier nationalist narratives.

Michel Margue (*1958), one of the editors and main authors, also seems to justify the choice when claiming in a newspaper article:

Since one needs to situate this travelling king, let us place him in the world that he belonged to, namely the European stage of his times. 'European' he was by his impressive and diverse itinerary. 'European' he was by his independent politics (...).

⁴⁶⁰ Michel MARGUE and Jean SCHROEDER (ed), *Un itinéraire européen*, p. 12-13.

⁴⁶¹ "(...) je tiens à souligner la politique d'ouverture de Jean vers l'Europe centrale, la Bohême, la Pologne et la Hongrie (...). A l'époque, la place de ces pays dans le concert des Etats européens ne faisait pas de doute." Jacques SANTER, Préface, in: *Ibid.*, p. 5.

‘European’ he was also by his belonging to the way-of-life of the social elite, chivalry (...).⁴⁶²

The constant repetition of the word “European” necessarily evokes certain contemporary connotations in the reader’s mind, despite the author’s own brief and seemingly only half-hearted disclaimer at the very end of his article:

One must certainly be cautious to provide the qualifier ‘European’ too much of a modern, anachronistic meaning. Nevertheless, John of Luxembourg was more than a ‘national’ sovereign, i.e. a king confined to the limits of his own kingdom.⁴⁶³

If one has to “be cautious” about the word ‘European’, the question remains why it suddenly appears repeatedly in the context of John’s politics. If one really applies the term to a ruler not “confined to the limits of his own kingdom”, just about any medieval monarch could qualify and the word would represent an empty although politically trendy slogan. Leaving behind the national viewpoint is of course justified: nonetheless the over-use of the word tends to reflect a momentary opportune way to sell medieval history to a wider public, which has so often become critical to its value and *raison d’être*.

The king’s new role was spread via different media. The aforementioned *Itinéraire* proved a highly successful publication, despite the relatively scholarly style of its content. The large format, its many colourful pictures and photos, and not least John’s constant popularity made it a runaway success. A year later (1997) the rotating presidency of the European Council of Ministers came to Luxembourg, opening funding possibilities for a cultural programme which was partly used on an

⁴⁶² “Alors, puisqu’il faut bien situer, ce roi dit voyageur, plaçons-le dans le monde auquel il appartient, à savoir sur la scène européenne de son temps. ‘Européen’, il l’est par son itinéraire impressionnant de diversité. ‘Européen’, il l’est par sa politique indépendante (...). ‘Européen’, il l’est aussi par son appartenance à un mode de vie qui était celui d’une élite sociale, la chevalerie (...).” Michel MARGUE, Jean de Luxembourg, prince ‘européen’.

⁴⁶³ “Il faut certes se garder de donner à ce qualificatif ‘européen’ un sens trop moderne, anachronique. Il n’en demeure pas moins que Jean de Luxembourg (...) était plus qu’un souverain ‘national’, c’est-à-dire un roi cantonné dans les limites de son propre royaume.” Ibid.

exhibition about John.⁴⁶⁴ It was again conceived by CLUDEM, already responsible for the *Itinéraire*, and who again applied the same perspective yet more rigorously. The popular character of the event also ensured a certain presence within the print media, which distilled elements of the research for wider public consumption. The paper with the largest readership, the *Luxemburger Wort*, published not only an article on the exhibition's opening entitled "A prince with a European dimension", but added a whole supplement on John's life.⁴⁶⁵ Likewise the illustrated magazine *Télécran* (of the same publishing house) presented a colourful article on "John the Blind, the European prince"; the title was clearly a reference to the author's interpretation of the exhibition, which he claims attempts "to prove that John the Blind was also a ruler with a European dimension".⁴⁶⁶

The message was understood. In 1999 the Luxembourgian architect Jim Clemens won the competition for the creation of a new mausoleum for John. It was to be based on a round chamber symbolising the "conclusion of an epoch".⁴⁶⁷ While in the traditional nationalist mindset this would have referred to a national conclusion, starting in the Middle Ages and finishing with the modern-day nation state, here the architect meant it from a European perspective, alluding precisely to John's role as a pioneering champion of the European enlargement.⁴⁶⁸

Recent decades have thus seen a re-orienting of John away from the dominantly chivalric view with a particular stress on warfare, to an emphasis on administration and financial politics. This does not mean that the implied *grandeur* of the nationalist view has disappeared entirely, but that it has above all been reshaped. Some of the main foundations for these views have been John's vast territorial possessions and his widespread field of activity: both cases a reason for pride.

⁴⁶⁴ Ein Fürst von europäischer Dimension, in: *Luxemburger Wort*, 20/11/1997, p. 5.

⁴⁶⁵ *Luxemburger Wort*, 20/11/1997, supplement [no page numbers]. It contained among other Michel Margue's aforementioned contribution.

⁴⁶⁶ Jean-Louis SCHEFFEN, Johann der Blinde, ein europäischer Fürst, in: *Télécran* 48, 1997, p. 36.

⁴⁶⁷ Michel PAULY, Ein Grab für Johann den Europäer, p. 36.

⁴⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

The forgotten: Sigismund⁴⁶⁹

Traditionally, when John has been praised for his achievements, the claim rests on his knightly image, but is to some degree also justified by his dynastic position: he is both the son and the father of an emperor.⁴⁷⁰ It is nonetheless striking that John should receive all this admiration, rather than his father Henry VII or his successors Charles IV and Sigismund, who held precisely the imperial title that John unsuccessfully strived for. Among the emperors of the Limburg-Luxembourg dynasty, Henry VII and Charles IV still receive occasional attention;⁴⁷¹ but Emperor Sigismund used to be thoroughly neglected. In one of the extremely rare articles in the Luxembourgian press that mention Sigismund, his ancestors Henry VII and Charles IV were regarded as “two great rulers”, whereas he himself is described as an incapable Emperor, more interested in “splendour and women than politics” and directly responsible for the ‘disastrous’ takeover of the duchy by the Burgundians.⁴⁷² This view is all the more astonishing when considering the potential Sigismund had to become a prominent figure within collective memory. He could have been seen as the pinnacle of the House of Luxembourg, respected for his achievements in ‘reunifying’ the Church and been used to symbolise the grandeur of Luxembourg; he was, after all, probably the largest ‘global player’ the dynasty had ever produced. None of this happened.

In early local historiography Sigismund still enjoyed a very positive reputation; the seventeenth-century historian Jean Bertels did not spill much ink on the Emperor’s life and deeds, but the little he wrote was nonetheless full of praise.⁴⁷³ More than a century later, Jean Bertholet still came to a similar conclusion.⁴⁷⁴ As a

⁴⁶⁹ Most of this paragraph has already been published as part of an article: Pit PÉPORTÉ, Emperor Sigismund and the Land of his Forefathers, p. 61-70, especially p. 67-70.

⁴⁷⁰ See for instance: Joseph PAQUET, *Die Geschichte des Luxemburger Landes*, p. 26.

⁴⁷¹ See for instance: Joseph MEYERS, *Geschichte Luxemburgs*, p. 66-78. Meyers spends 4 pages on Henry VII, 4 pages on John the Blind, and 4 pages on Charles IV and Wenceslas I.

⁴⁷² Fernand SALENTINY, Vier Luxemburger auf dem deutschen Kaiserthron, in: *Revue* 52, 1982, p. 98-106.

⁴⁷³ “Princeps fuit virtute, sapientia et animi fortitudine plurimum excellens (...)”. See: Jean BERTELS, *Historia Luxemburgensis ...*, p. 110.

⁴⁷⁴ “Prince véritablement grand, liberal, humain, pieux, ennemi de toutes les nouveautés en matière de Religion, & à qui on aura les obligations éternelles, soit pour avoir éteint le schisme funeste qui désoloit l’Église, soit pour avoir purge la Bohème de l’hérésie abominable qui y dominoit.” See: Jean BERTHOLET, *Histoire Ecclésiastique et Civile ...*, vol. 7, p. 363.

result, most historians of the nineteenth century still treated him mildly. In early history textbooks his reign was presented in a very narrative style, but again one does find occasional esteem for his role as Roman King and Emperor.⁴⁷⁵ Towards the end of the century and with a wider knowledge of the many archives, the period was seen more as being marked by feuds and widespread conflict.⁴⁷⁶ Blame for the apparent chaos fell on Sigismund, who was held liable above all for showing too little interest in Luxembourg. Indeed, his reign did not leave many visible traces or glorious stories comparable to those of the death of his grandfather on the fields of Crécy, nor a splendid court life as often associated with the Renaissance governor Peter of Mansfeld. Furthermore, Sigismund is blamed for leaving his niece alone in power; Elizabeth of Görlitz's image is even worse than that of her uncle. At the very least, she is assessed as politically "incapable", but she has also been linked to a constant thirst for money and the consequent inability to manage her revenues, as well as a vivacious love life.

Sigismund's posthumous image became even worse in the first half of the twentieth century. First of all he was held responsible for the fall of the dynasty. In his history schoolbook, Meyers titles his chapter on Wenceslas IV and Sigismund accordingly with "The Decline" (*Der Niedergang*).⁴⁷⁷ The term is to be understood with all its connotations. Not only was it the end of Luxembourg's 'own proper home-grown' dynasty, it was also almost the end of Luxembourg as such, since the politics of Wenceslas IV and Sigismund were regarded as having led to the so-called 'foreign dominations', i.e. the subsequent Burgundian and Habsburg regimes.⁴⁷⁸ As a result, the whole period now had to be painted in the darkest possible colours: it was

⁴⁷⁵ Joseph PAQUET, *Die Hauptthaten der Luxemburger Geschichte*, p. 38; Joseph PAQUET, *Die Geschichte des Luxemburger Landes*, p. 37-38; Jean SCHOETTER, *Geschichte des Luxemburger Landes*, p. 118-121.

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 122-3; see also: François-Xavier WÜRTH-PAQUET, Table Chronologique des Chartes et Diplômes relatifs à l'Histoire de l'Ancien Pays de Luxembourg. Règne de Sigismond, Empereur des Romains, Roi d'Allemagne, de Hongrie et de Bohême, Duc de Luxembourg et Comte de Chiny, p. 2: "Ce ne furent que guerres extérieures et divisions intérieures. Le pauvre peuple était pillé par les nobles, qui guerroyaient encore l'un contre l'autre. Elisabeth, trop faible pour maintenir l'ordre et la tranquillité, fut souvent butte à des persécutions et à des inimitiés."

⁴⁷⁷ Joseph MEYERS, *Geschichte Luxemburgs*, p. 98.

⁴⁷⁸ "Die Luxemburger auf dem Kaiserthron vermochten ihr Stammland nicht zu erhalten. Erst stürzten sie es schimpflicher Weise in die Pfandherrschaft, dann verloren sie es an den Burgunder, der Schrittmacher der Franzosen war." Joseph MEYERS, *Die Entwicklung des luxemburgischen Sonderbewußtseins unter den Burgundern und Habsburgern*, p. 167. For an analysis on the concept of "foreign dominations", see: Guy THEWES, *Dominations étrangères et fidélité dynastique. Deux mythes de l'historiographie luxembourgeoise*, p. 39-43; Michel MARGUE, *Dominations étrangères*, p. 29-34.

marked by “disorder and anarchy”.⁴⁷⁹ Some historians still admitted that Sigismund’s imperial politics were successful, but saw him as incapable of freeing Luxembourg from its unfortunate fate.⁴⁸⁰ These views are intrinsically bound to the traditional nationalist approach to history. Since these historians saw the independent nation-state as a political ideal, the pawning of territory was considered a threat to its integrity and its ruler behaving carelessly when giving their consent to the practice. Moreover, the interpretation that this policy resulted in “foreign” rule was justification enough for any criticism. A further result of this attitude was that the conflict against Anthony of Brabant also received a particularly nationalist flavour, becoming a conflict between a “Burgundian” camp and a “national” one.⁴⁸¹ For many authors the last straw was that Sigismund did not seem to have been concerned enough to redeem the pawning of Luxembourg. This was certainly another clear sign of his neglect and another element to undermine the historian’s national self-esteem. The lack of affection many expressed was thus merely considered to be reciprocal; Sigismund had little to do with his western possessions. After his ancestors had acquired imperial glories and important territories in Central Europe, their extended *Hausmacht* provided them with an entirely different perspective on their lands in the West. The duchy became part of a bigger picture, an element within larger strategic thinking: a small territory on the western fringe, threatened by the expansion of the Burgundian dukes.⁴⁸² Despite how natural this perspective may have been for Sigismund and how convenient the situation probably proved to be for most of his subjects, local history developed a different attitude. It was his lack of presence and involvement that constituted the major reasons why Luxembourgian historians blamed or ignored him for many years.

Sigismund contrasts in this respect heavily with his grandfather John of Bohemia. John possessed neither the true vastness of Sigismund’s territories, nor was he wearing the imperial crown. Nonetheless he later became the national hero and stands for the apogee of dynasty and nation. Both monarchs travelled over enormous distances; in John’s case it is seen as an expression of an active and adventurous

⁴⁷⁹ Arthur HERCHEN, *Manuel d’Histoire Nationale*, 1918: p. 63-5, 1972: p. 101-103.

⁴⁸⁰ Joseph MEYERS, *Geschichte Luxemburgs*, p. 100-101.

⁴⁸¹ Arthur HERCHEN, *Manuel d’Histoire Nationale*, 1918: p. 64, 1972: p. 103.

⁴⁸² See: Pit PÉPORTÉ, *Emperor Sigismund and the Land of his Forefathers*, p. 63-67.

spirit, of far-reaching politics and good personal connections across the continent. Sigismund's itinerary went almost unnoticed. Both men also had a taste for pomp and circumstance. Whereas in John's case it was occasionally seen as part of a chivalrous lifestyle, in Sigismund's case it has almost exclusively been regarded as frivolously squandering his wealth.⁴⁸³

There are of course some features that Sigismund was missing compared to his forefather. He certainly lacked John's chivalric aura and glorious death that further helped spreading this image. As was already the case for Charles IV's reign, Sigismund seems much more rational in his aims and methods compared to the nineteenth-century views of John's. In consequence he represented less of inspiration for the more romantically minded. In addition the emperor did indeed leave fewer traces in Luxembourg, while John's memory was largely kept alive with the fair and the presence of his earthly remains. The final missing element was Sigismund's inability for a convenient political misuse; he was not close enough to the French court to be interpreted as a Francophile, and too much involved in imperial and thus 'German' affairs.

Since the 1970s Sigismund has lost almost all his remaining presence. Paul Margue in his school manual from 1974 dedicated only half a page to the Emperor.⁴⁸⁴ Gilbert Trausch (*1931) in his *Nations D'Europe* edition on Luxembourgian history (1992) mentions him at two points, but merely as a member of the dynasty and with no reference to his reign, nor to the simple fact that he actually was the titular ruler of Luxembourg.⁴⁸⁵ Michel Margue in an overview of local history mentions him in two brief sentences, after having spent seven pages on John of Bohemia alone and referring only to the economic decline during Sigismund's reign.⁴⁸⁶ This indifference was reinforced by the absence of any monuments or other visual memorials to his name.⁴⁸⁷ Nonetheless this 'forgetting' of Sigismund did on two recent occasions lead to a surprising re-evaluation. Both instances were exhibitions. The first, on the Italian

⁴⁸³ E.g.: Jean SCHOETTER, *Geschichte des Luxemburger Landes...*, p. 122.

⁴⁸⁴ Paul MARGUE, *Luxemburg in Mittelalter und Neuzeit*, p. 93.

⁴⁸⁵ Gilbert TRAUSCH, *Histoire du Luxembourg*, p. 42-3.

⁴⁸⁶ Michel MARGUE, *Du comté à l'Empire: origines et épanouissement du Luxembourg*, p. 145 and 146-147.

⁴⁸⁷ The exception may be a street named after him, the 'rue Sigismond' in Luxembourg-Bonnevoie. Nonetheless this street is neither large nor central, and thus rather unimportant and probably unknown to many not living in its immediate neighbourhood.

politics of the House of Luxembourg, did actually recognise Sigismund's influence and hold him in high regard. He is called a polyglot, a courtier like his grandfather John and a gifted diplomat like his father Charles.⁴⁸⁸ The second context was the 2006 exhibition in Budapest and Luxembourg, and its preliminary conference in Luxembourg in whose context this present section must also be seen.⁴⁸⁹ At the time, the Luxembourg government had the presidency of the European Council of Ministers and the opulent funding of the event was a result of these political circumstances. In the inaugural speeches of the symposium, Sigismund was presented as an important link between Western and Central Europe. The resonance of the recent enlargement of the European Union that also included Hungary can be clearly perceived.⁴⁹⁰

It is therefore in the post-national context that John and Sigismund find themselves gaining comparable appreciation – however, at this point it is still far too early to predict how it will develop in coming decades. John's very firm standing, based on a tradition of several centuries, tends to imply that even if Sigismund returns to the public consciousness, he will still most likely only play second fiddle to his more esteemed relative.

Conclusion

In the 1950s, the fencing club of the Luxembourg's armed forces was looking for a new emblem and considered John of Bohemia's chivalric seal a fitting symbol. The club addressed the National Archives for a model, but the archivist recommended that they adopt the seal of Count Henry V Blondel instead.⁴⁹¹ He asserted that the dominating presence of John made Blondel a refreshingly original alternative⁴⁹² – a case in which the exception proves the rule. In Luxembourg John still has a pre-eminent position among all historic figures and he has maintained this

⁴⁸⁸ Vanna COLLING-KERG, Paul MARGUE and Jean-Claude MULLER (ed), *Le Rêve Italien de la Maison de Luxembourg aux 14^e et 15^e siècles. Catalogue de l'exposition*, p. 36.

⁴⁸⁹ I presented this as part of a wider paper on Sigismund and the Duchy of Luxembourg, see again: Pit PÉPORTÉ, *Emperor Sigismund and the Land of his Forefathers*, p. 61-70.

⁴⁹⁰ For instance in the speech of François Biltgen, Luxembourgian Minister of Culture, Higher Education and Research, given on 8 June 2005 at the Centre Neumünster in Luxembourg.

⁴⁹¹ See figure 51 (Appendix 3).

⁴⁹² I am indebted to Hérold Pettiau for this information.

status for centuries. The continuity of his presence in collective memory is striking, as is the continuity of the knightly image that he is associated with. His death at Crécy already inspired his own generation and is still brought forward as a heroic feat nowadays. Would he ever have received as much importance, had he not died at that precise moment? A recent study justly comments that “his exit from life at the battle of Crécy (...) marked his entrance into history”.⁴⁹³

His reign represented a time of *grandeur* for all historians of a ‘national history’, even for those who did not subscribe to the grand narrative, such as Nicolas van Werveke. John of Bohemia is thus a major historic character for the nation to take pride in. This process was facilitated by firmly integrating John as a Luxembourger himself, for instance by asserting his own love for the fatherland. In the same spirit, he is in Luxembourg (up to today) generally presented as “count of Luxembourg and king of Bohemia” – not the other way round, as in his own charters. As the foremost representative of the nation he was subsequently made to mirror its self-perceptions over the past two centuries, as well as being co-opted by different political ideologies. He was recruited to help the nation alienate itself from Germanness, and then in the wake of the great European wars between 1870 and 1945 he developed into a Francophile. From there the move to being a ‘proto-European’ at the end of the twentieth century was not so great a change. This progress is all the more ironic, as John probably also considered himself a prince within the German world.

⁴⁹³ Michel MARGUE, *Jean de Luxembourg, prince idéal et chevalier parfait: Aux origines d'un mythe*, p. 15.

Conclusions

The creation of medieval history in Luxembourg is an ongoing process. It can be structured into three major phases, of which the last one can be further divided.

The first phase is the (so-called) Middle Ages themselves. Naturally, the sources for its understanding were created during the period itself. In the case of Luxembourg, one striking feature of this period is a considerable absence of local historiography. Remaining sources from the period are administrative documents, archaeological evidence and the occasional historiographical source from outside the territory. From the fourteenth century on, literature constituted an additional carrier type through which ideas could be transmitted. The latter is especially the case for John of Bohemia, whose renown was created and spread via poems and invented stories. Melusine finds her origins in the same period and in the same literary medium.

The second phase stretches from the sixteenth century until 1815. This phase can be characterised as a rediscovery of the past, an attempt was to draw together medieval sources so as to form a chronological account of the past. In the case of Jean d'Anly this attempt was an absolute first for the duchy as a whole – a fact that has gone largely unnoticed so far. The earliest of these examples still reflect much of the approach of a medieval chronicle: Wassebourg for instance makes little attempt to weigh different sources against each other, while Estienne de Lusignan includes a lot of hearsay and even belief in the existence of the fictional Melusine.¹ In addition, until the seventeenth century, most historical writing was concerned above all with noble genealogies and the territorial possessions of these dynasties. Nonetheless, their method sets most these authors apart from their medieval predecessors. Starting

¹ These authors were no exceptions, see: E.O.G. HAITSMAN MULIER, *De humanistische vorm. Over de stiling van de politiek*, p. 30-31.

with Wassebourg, these authors increasingly included primary source material – although often copied from their predecessors, instead from the original – and likewise they increasingly tended to discuss these sources and reach more balanced results.

The continuity within some of the medieval *topoi* is striking, and many of the ideas still prevalent in the nineteenth and even twentieth centuries originate from this second phase, notably from the writings of Jean Bertholet. This eighteenth-century Jesuit historian has often been frowned upon for his moralising account, which glorifies the political ideal of a benevolent despot, and for copying blatantly and extensively from his precursors, Wiltheim and Pierret in particular.² This attitude, however, tends to neglect some of Bertholet’s innovative contributions on the one hand, and his profound impact on shaping the views of his successors on the other. His eight-volume history was not simply a synthesis of previous authors, but in good Bollandist tradition, Bertholet not only read many primary sources, he even reproduced them as “*preuves*” at the end of every volume. Like his predecessors, he did not bestow his history with an overarching narrative structure or an intrinsic purposeful progression; he depicts historical scenes, which he judged to serve as instructive models. But for this aim he needed to shape his historic figures. Bertholet did not always create these moulds anew, instead borrowing heavily from different traditions; nonetheless those that he bound into his monumental *oeuvre* were to dominate historiography for most of the subsequent two centuries. Among these we find the fortress-building Sigefroid, the emancipated Ermesinde and the positively heroic John with his epithet “the Blind”. When a more detailed national narrative started to emerge more than a century after Bertholet’s death, it was largely based on a deliberate selection derived from his account.

A last feature of historiographical writing in this second phase is that none of it was influenced by national ideas or sentiment. As seen, most significant authors on Luxembourg’s history did not even originate from the Duchy of Luxembourg, and

² Jean-Claude MULLER, Jean Bertholet SJ (1688-1755) umstrittener Historiker des Herzogtums Luxemburg, p. 94 and 97 in particular. Muller bases his argument partly on: Nicolas VAN WERVEKE, *Etude sur les chartes luxembourgeoises du Moyen Age*, p. 52-3; the latter however only refers to the charters that Bertholet inserted into his text.

rarely wrote from there.³ This all was to change with the rise of nationalism across Europe, which tended to ‘nationalise’ many histories; in Luxembourg local writers were thenceforth largely responsible for the shape local history received.

The process of ‘nationalising’ historiography constitutes the third phase, which started after the independence of the territory in 1815 – although the process was a slow one. The years between 1815 and 1850 resulted in very little historiographical production. Although the idea of a *vaterländisch* history gained currency, the term itself was an ambiguous one, reflecting the uncertain political status of the country. The period 1850-1895, however, produced a first surge in the writing of local history, initiated mainly by those who had helped to shape the country politically and define its international status. Despite their ‘amateur’ background and the lack of a local institution of higher education, the quality of their work was high by international comparison. With the rise of a national consciousness in this period, the study of history also started to be infused with political meaning and educational purpose. The result was the establishment of a selected core of historical themes; for example: the first written accounts of Melusine stories appear,⁴ Ermesinde was recognised as a ‘liberal’ princess, and Schoetter wrote his two volume biography of John of Bohemia. In the nineteenth century, politicians and historians alike tended to use the past in an ad hoc fashion when a domestic or international crisis forced a re-examination of the grand-duchy’s history. John of Bohemia in particular emerged between 1839 and the early 1840s, when a new, and for many, unexpected political situation (i.e. the formation of Belgium and the partition of Luxembourg) demanded a re-assessment of the political past. Another important context affecting views of the past was the threat of the small state being assimilated by its larger neighbours, especially Prussia. During the crisis of 1866-67 especially, John of Bohemia was held up as an example of local power and persistence. Between 1895 and 1918 the main themes were woven into a national narrative whose construction was to culminate in the publication of Arthur Herchen’s textbook. Even so, the creation of a ‘national history’ at this point must also be set within a wider European context – though elsewhere the result was of a much larger

³ See my general introduction.

⁴ Strictly speaking, the Prussian officer Cederstolpe published his version in 1844 already; most versions by authors of local origin came later.

scale – with Karl Lamprecht in Germany, Pieter Jan Blok in the Netherlands, Henri Pirenne in Belgium and Ernest Lavisse in France.⁵

It is an apparent paradox that the importance attributed to the medieval epoch was not translated into the construction of visual monuments in Luxembourg. In many other European countries physical reminders of medieval greatness were more common, even in places where the medieval past plays less of a national role, or in countries even smaller than Luxembourg.⁶ However, this difference may be more apparent than real. Luxembourg had – and still has – very few large bronze monuments and most of them appear to suggest that current affairs weight stronger than the distant past. For example, in Luxembourg City the statue for Princess Amalia was erected in the years immediately after her death, and the *Monument du Souvenir* commemorating war heroes was built as soon as the country had achieved stability after the First World War. Later the memories of the Second World War were to produce another important surge of monuments, the largest being probably the Patton-Memorial in Ettelbruck. At the same time one should not forget that there were many plans for medieval monuments; the numerous projects for a mausoleum for John of Bohemia spring to mind. Furthermore, medieval dates, sites and figures are present, just not very obviously so, since they seem to limit themselves to metal inscriptions – the site of the former castle of Luxembourg displays many – or minor free-standing monuments, such as the monument for John's foundation of the *Schobermesse*.

The memory of the medieval past can also be found in another form of public works: the naming of streets. Many were created (or renamed) in the phase between 1866 and 1918 with its massive urban growth, due to industrialisation on the one hand and the demolishing of the fortress of Luxembourg on the other. The names of medieval rulers were not given to the large avenues and boulevards of the capital, but to smaller streets, some of them (John the Blind, Henry VII and Ermesinde) regrouped together in the residential area of Limpertsberg. The *rue Sigefroid* was even moved after the Second World War from close to the station to the old town,

⁵ Jo TOLLEBEEK, *Historical Representation and the Nation-State in Romantic Belgium (1830-1850)*, p. 329.

⁶ An equestrian statue of Godefroid de Bouillon, for instance, decorates the Place Royale in Brussels, and a large Leifr Eirikson in bronze reigns over the port of Reykjavik, while Robert the Bruce watches over the plain of Bannockburn.

not simply because the location seemed more fitting (which in fact it is), but because its prior location was considered a more appropriate place for a recently deceased politician.⁷ On the other hand, one notices that John of Bohemia has three streets that can be linked to him within the city of Luxembourg alone; apart from that named directly for him, there is also a street celebrating his victory at Pont Rémy and his death at Crécy – no other historical figure has this presence. Furthermore, his street can be found in other towns as well: Diekirch in the north, or Esch-sur-Alzette and Belvaux in the south.⁸ Finally, the larger roads in the capital tend to have rather generic names (e.g. Avenue de la Liberté, Boulevard Royal) or they are named after recent monarchs (e.g. Boulevard Grande-Duchesse Charlotte). In this respect the medieval figures are no more neglected than any other.

The period between 1918-1963 saw the long survival of a *verklärtes Mittelalter* in its nationalist guise. Interestingly, the Second World War did not cause a rupture in the presentation of history, but a mere parenthesis with a catalysing effect. During the Nazi occupation, the grand-duchy was temporarily steeped in a discourse orchestrated mainly from outside its borders and operating under entirely different paradigms than the local mainstream. In the years preceding the looming German invasion and in the immediate aftermath of the war, the country saw its strongest expression of national sentiment to date. The mass character of this phenomenon also led to an increased presence of historical themes in mass media. Most nineteenth-century and earlier media were aimed at a highly-educated audience, but this started to broaden in the second half of the century with the inclusion of romantic literature, publicly exhibited visual art and wider access to education and exposure to schoolbooks. From the 1930s, medieval history became an element of large-scale celebrations. Anniversaries offered themselves as moments when the conglomerate of historians, politicians and artists, who shaped collective memories, could focus on a particular figure or event. The output of scholarly literature as well as popular media and memorabilia increased significantly on these

⁷ The person in question is Jean Origer, the last cleric to lead the governing *Partie de la droite* in parliament and director of the newspaper *Luxemburger Wort*. He died in the concentration camp of Dachau in 1942. There are four more “rue Sigefroid” in the grand-duchy, in Belvaux, Bettembourg, Echternach and Mamer.

⁸ I am grateful to Benoît Majerus for sending me his comprehensive list of street names in Luxembourg.

occasions. One could argue that one cannot change the date of an anniversary, but this would fail to recognise the deliberate character of their selection. The anniversary of 1939 for instance was arguably invented – the motivation being the German threat – since it rests on an interpretation that recognised the painful partition of 1839 as the glorious birth of national independence in favour of the creation of the grand-duchy in 1815. Although most other celebrations were seemingly less engineered, the selection of anniversaries considered worth commemorating nonetheless betrays a purpose. The 900th anniversary of the foundation of Altmünster Abbey by Conrad I in 1983 was not celebrated, but instead the 650th anniversary of John of Bohemia's death in 1996. Their regularity not only provided a possibility to celebrate the nation's past and thus its very existence, but anniversaries also show the specific needs of the moment. The two great commemorations of the 1930s, i.e. the 700th anniversary of Ermesinde's enfranchisement of Echternach in 1936, and the centenary of the independence in 1939, reflect the need to affirm the independent existence of a nation fearful of being consumed by Germany. The strategy was twofold: firstly to create a national tradition going back to medieval times (a feature especially prominent at the 1939 event); secondly, to stress the 'liberal' aspects of the medieval epoch (which Ermesinde's policies were made to incarnate). The exaltation of national independence went along with the creation of a model of freedom pitted against foreign oppression, which was transplanted back into the thirteenth century. After the trauma of the Second World War, the nation celebrated its own survival with the 'repatriation' of John of Bohemia in 1946, and reclaimed at the same time its 'identity' from the Germans. Luxembourg's 'millennium' celebrations in 1963 were again of a different nature: the celebration of the country's medieval origins came to represent a new beginning within the European Community.

Since 1970 this type of national historiography has undergone severe questioning. In retrospect the anniversary of 1989 seem to have been based on an odd combination. It appears as a last grand moment, when an older generation of historians and politicians helped the nation to celebrate itself, while on a more scholarly level many younger historians had already moved beyond the traditional approach. This new generation was ever more firmly rooted in an international

context and some of the new models they started to create in the 1980s reached mainstream status from the mid-1990s. While national politics had become enshrined within a European context, historiography started to destroy many of the myths that had dominated the previous centuries. The year 1996 therefore stands already for a new approach, the triumph of the supra-national. Maybe one could let a fourth phase spring from this moment, but the tendency to regard oneself as innovative and ‘modern’ has misled previous generations. The verdict shall belong to future historians.

* * *

One aspect of the third phase deserves further comment: it was this period that saw the slow rise and fall of the national narrative. Although pre-1800 histories of Luxembourg provide accounts of the territory’s political happenings, none of them intended to convey an underlying purpose of history or a sense of continuous progress. In the sixteenth century, for instance, Wassebourg presents a continuous sequence of the country’s different rulers, unbroken despite changes of dynasty. Even his successors present a gallery of successive reigns rather than a coherent story. The nationalist ideology that dominated from the second half of the nineteenth century interpreted history through a teleologically oriented narrative. The previous chapters have already hinted at its internal construction: Luxembourg was founded by Sigefroid and saw its first national apogee under John of Bohemia, while under the neglect of John’s successors the country fell prey to many foreign invaders who were to rule the place for four centuries until its national resurrection after the Congress of Vienna, the Belgian Revolution and at the latest the ascension of the House of Nassau-Weilburg.⁹ The concept developed partly out of the comparison of John of Bohemia and William II of the Netherlands. It was inscribed in an essentialist understanding of national identities: throughout the centuries of

⁹ A couple of relatively recent studies on the topic have (justly) focused on its middle part, the ‘foreign dominations’, which provides the glue between both ends, see: Guy THEWES, *Dominations étrangères et fidélité dynastique. Deux mythes de l’historiographie luxembourgeoise*, p. 39-43; Michel MARGUE, *Dominations étrangères*, p. 29-34.

oppression the particular character and identity of the nation is supposed to have remained unbroken.

It would have been entirely possible for an alternative narrative to have emerged, starting for instance with Conrad I as the creator of the 'Luxembourgian State', the count who gave the territory a unity, a name and a capital. This characterisation would be a bold, anachronistic exaggeration, yet Sigefroid was endowed with even stronger attributes before the nineteenth century. The figure of Henry Blondel could stand for a renewal after a period of turmoil, as the resurrection of territorial integrity and an innovative way of ruling it, taking into account the monastic and urban policies so often attributed to his mother, Countess Ermesinde. Instead of King John, his grand-son Emperor Sigismund could easily have embodied the pinnacle of the dynasty's power and might. This alternative vision would not even have affected the traditional position allocated to the early modern period as the period of 'foreign dominations'. Then again, the date that Charles IV elevated the comital conglomerate to the status of a duchy (1353) could have been regarded as an important historic break. Before that date the count of Luxembourg ruled many lands with diverse legal statuses and under different titles, sometimes as the vassal of a different lord. The transformation to the duchy did not simply increase the status of the Luxembourg ruler, but above all erased the diversity and created a territorial unity. None of these alternative structures is inherently superior to another, but they all reflect specific interpretations of the past. At the same time there are many different reasons as to why one of them emerged and established itself. Some of them are more dependant on chance: we should refute the idea of an imaginary nationalist conspiracy that consciously orchestrated the creation of the past. As much as creating a historical tradition, the nationalist narrative is based on historiographical traditions. Sigefroid for instance prevailed because from the sixteenth century onwards he was the first count that could be linked to the name 'Luxembourg'. John of Bohemia had managed to set up a propaganda machine, which after his death gained a momentum of its own, and succeeded in inspiring the romantically-minded, centuries after his death. The way Ermesinde was deployed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries seems to indicate a more deliberate attempt at shaping the narrative and providing the period with some unity.

The latter seems indeed one of the epoch's defining aspects. The time before 963 represents merely the chaotic backdrop to the 'national history', which starts *ab urbe condita* with Count Sigefroid. Likewise the period is defined by a clear ending in the form of the Burgundian conquest in 1443, preceded by the decline inaugurated by the last direct male descendants of John of Bohemia. Ermesinde stands for the cohesion of this medieval period, by establishing a link between the different medieval dynasties and erasing thus any possible divisions. In this respect the national narrative is a very 'Romantic' one: the Middle Ages are denied their own internal development, but tend to constitute a closed age defined by a 'medieval' way of life, characterised by castles, knights and battles – a view that also survived in twentieth-century fantasy literature as initiated (inadvertently) by J.R.R. Tolkien. This is even more a feature of literary pieces, artistic representations and popular culture. A telling example is Charles Arendt's views of Sigefroid's splendid castle, which the architect established as a very serious contribution to historical research in 1895, but which lived on among the memorabilia of the millennium celebrations of 1963, and adorned the first page of the Luxembourg passport in the 1990s.¹⁰ A further example is the striking presence of John of Bohemia during the 1963 celebrations. Although Sigefroid offered the pretext for it, the city of Luxembourg honoured many of its worthy staff by presenting them with large replicas of John's seal. Naturally, this initiative also illustrates once again the importance the king was accorded in national history. Scholarly literature remained slightly more immune to the idea, presenting instead a time of continuous territorial expansion that reached its pinnacle shortly after King John's death. The period is thus one of 'national' growth, and the Luxembourgian Middle Ages are bright.¹¹ The "feudal" age that Herchen announces in his table of contents is not a time of oppression – as the connotation of the word suggests in many other contexts – but of freedom and independence, or *Selbstständigkeit* as Meyers wrote.¹² Even though the dukes of Burgundy brought a halt to much of the local feuding and created a stability that resulted in economic

¹⁰ See figure 8 (Appendix 3).

¹¹ For a discussion of 'bright' and 'dark' Middle Ages, see: Hans-Werner GOETZ, *Moderne Mediävistik. Stand und Perspektiven der Mittelalterforschung*, p. 47-54.

¹² Joseph MEYERS, *Geschichte Luxemburgs*, p. 47.

improvement for the duchy,¹³ their times tend to be depicted in much darker colours than the fourteenth century, simply because they were associated with a loss of political independence. Interestingly, John of Bohemia and his successors even overshadow the Black Death, which finds virtually no representation in much of traditional historiography.

Another part of this perspective was to identify the nation by its monarchy; as long as medieval rulers reigned from Luxembourg, their dynastic policies were translated into national politics.¹⁴ The medieval counts of Luxembourg ruled effectively as ‘clan-chiefs’ but were later identified as ‘heads of state’. It is at this point that the pro-monarchical and nationalist ideologies meet. Together they forcefully underline the idea of early modern ‘foreign dominations’, a concept that found its origins in the validation of the modern-day dynasties by presenting them as successors of the medieval ones.

This links into what at first sight may appear surprising: there have seldom been any strictly opposing or rivalling depictions of the Middle Ages in Luxembourg at a given time. Although dissensions of a scientific nature occurred regularly, collective memories of medieval times seem to complement rather than to contradict each other. Take for instance John of Bohemia, who in 1905 was attributed a pro-French stance by the mayor of Luxembourg, while the Luxembourgian ambassador to Paris still saw him in an entirely national light. John’s purported Francophilia did not question the nationalist perspective, but rather extended and re-shaped it in a specific direction. Likewise, the author Jacques Dollar still presented King John primarily from a French perspective in 1996, while a much broader ‘European’ one had already established itself among academics and politicians.¹⁵ All these views co-existed without harming each other. There are several reasons for this lack of

¹³ See: Jean-Marie YANTE, *Economie urbaine et politique princière dans le Luxembourg (1443-1506)*, p. 121-127.

¹⁴ This appears at its clearest in a comment on Wenceslas of Luxembourg and Brabant found in the posthumous editions of Herchen’s textbook: “Wenceslas Ier, qui n’était ni empereur ni roi de Bohême, est à considérer comme le dernier souverain vraiment national du Luxembourg au moyen âge. Il est vrai qu’il était aussi duc de Brabant, mais le Brabant n’avait pas vis-à-vis du Luxembourg une importance telle qu’il pu empêcher Wenceslas de se consacrer à son pays d’origine.” The last sentence is supposed to set him in a stark contrast to his successors in the duchy of Luxembourg. Arthur HERCHEN, *Manuel d’Histoire nationale*, 1972: p. 98.

¹⁵ See: Jacques DOLLAR, 26 août 1346. La fin héroïque de Jean l’Aveugle. Il y a 650 ans a eu lieu la bataille de Crécy, p. 23-26.

embattlement between different views of the medieval past. In relatively general terms, the Middle Ages may still be part of collective memory, but not of 'collected' memory anymore, unlike for instance the Second World War. Given the distance between the present and the medieval past, the emotion it arouses has diminished. This is not an inevitable or necessary process, as demonstrated by the feelings still evoked by the battle of Kosovo in Serbian memory. In Luxembourg, however, the period has thoroughly positive connotations. Its grandeur remained unquestioned by those who sought to position themselves in its tradition. In addition, nineteenth-century historiography for the most part still had a very political outlook on the past: dealing predominantly with the succession of noble rulers, their reigns and administrations. However, not only did the medieval past offer little interest for the anti-monarchical historian, but most historians were located within the politically influential section of society, which in the nineteenth century exercised power to a large extent only with the approval of the monarch. In consequence, forces that were firmly pro-monarchy exercised a monopoly over the interpretation of the entire past before the creation of the nation-state. Following Bertholet's pro-Habsburg ideology that had dominated the historiographic production of the eighteenth century, so Orangist liberals dominated that of the nineteenth century. Their pro-monarchy position was shared by the conservative Catholic writers who took over the mainstream shortly before 1900. These two groups may have attributed different connotations to certain concepts such as 'nationality',¹⁶ or given different weight to certain issues, religious aspects in particular, but they did share a belief in the venerable age of the territory, the continuity of local law and liberties, and the legitimacy of monarchic rule since historical times. Until the second half of the twentieth century and the end of this grand narrative, no historian from a liberal-left, or even a socialist orientation had approached the issue. One possible exception was Nicolas van Werveke, the principal inheritor of the Orangists. The occasional anti-clerical tones in his later career, however, were more a relic of the *Kulturkampf* than the result of an anti-establishment intent and did not lead to a different interpretation of history. Likewise, Jean Kill's Marxist history follows entirely the structure of the nationalist narrative with its medieval independence and subsequent foreign

¹⁶Daniel SPIZZO, *La nation luxembourgeoise. Genèse et structure d'une identité*, p 161-200.

dominations. His short passage on the Middle Ages does not present a re-interpretation of the individual figures, but the period as a whole is qualified as “feudal” – this time with a negative connotation.¹⁷ The slow and late development of a working class movement occurred at a time when medieval history had long been dominated by more centrist or conservative forces. The result is a continuous tradition of seeing medieval history from a pro-monarchical position, overlapping – slowly but increasingly – with a nationalist point of view. Meanwhile, the far-left, any anti-clerical or anti-monarchist thinkers did not even venture to appropriate this part of history for their own purposes.

As this thesis has explained, the aim of nationalist historiography was not only to create a continuity within the medieval past, but also to link this past with the modern day. For this purpose it made use of additional strategies, most obviously the use of the possessive pronoun in the first person plural (‘our’), even in reference to elements of a rather distant past. Its use is meant to allow the author to identify with the past and to express a sense of collective consciousness reaching back to it. In schoolbooks, press-articles or speeches, the use of the pronoun becomes a way of binding the audience into the same collective, and asking them to identify with the nation and its past. The procedure becomes thus part of a historical self-hypnosis, an attempt to convey this sentiment of commonality to the fellow citizen and future generations. Two days after John’s ‘repatriation’, Nicolas Margue published a long celebratory article on the front page of the main newspaper, in which he re-iterated the historical importance of the blind king. His wording is revealing: by reclaiming John “we reclaimed as ours our past and our history; that we feel still today linked by a close parentage to those who were the Luxembourgers of the fourteenth century, and represented the glorious epoch of the House of Luxembourg.”¹⁸

Representations of the late medieval Limburg dynasty make use of similar strategies. Firstly the dynasty was renamed as Luxembourg-Limburg in order to be more fully integrated in its Luxembourg context, as seen in the chapter on

¹⁷ Jean KILL, 1000 jähriges Luxemburg: Woher? – Wohin? Ein Beitrag zum besseren Verständnis der Geschichte des Luxemburger Landes, p. 27.

¹⁸ “(...) nous revendiquons comme nôtre notre passé et notre histoire ; que nous nous sentons aujourd’hui encore, liés par une étroite parenté à ceux qui étaient les Luxembourgeois au XIV^e siècle, et représentaient l’époque glorieuse de la Maison de Luxembourg, (...)” Nicolas MARGUE, Jean de Luxembourg, p. 1.

Ermesinde. Secondly, mid-twentieth-century German historiography also started to re-label the dynasty as “the Luxembourgers” (*die Luxemburger*). As a clearly defined historiographic construct the expression is useful within a scholarly context, which in German places the dynastic house alongside “the Habsburgers” (*Habsburger*) or “the Wittelsbachers” (*Wittelsbacher*). Because the medieval principality kept its name as an independent modern nation-state, this strictly dynastic name was from the start the same one that generally refers to the country’s inhabitants, i.e. any Luxembourger in the English sense of the word. The French language makes a difference between *les Luxembourgs* for members of the dynastic house and *les Luxembourgeois* for the modern day inhabitants, and similarly English distinguishes between *the Luxembourgs* and *the Luxembourgers*. German, however, uses the same word for both. Being a truly multilingual country, German is generally used whenever French is not; this applies especially to primary school books, most of the press and half of historiography. With their penchant for regarding the dynasty’s time as one of glory, these media played on the terminological ambiguity. For instance, a schoolbook in use from the late 1970s to the early 1990s has a chapter on “Luxembourg(er)s on the German imperial throne” (*Luxemburger auf dem deutschen Kaiserthron*).¹⁹ Although the authors were not necessarily conscious of the impression they created, this title nonetheless seems to contain an almost imperialist tone, as if Luxembourg had conquered its German neighbour.

The continuity of the name ‘Luxembourg’ was of further value in this respect. The fact that the name already referred to a medieval political entity encouraged the idea of a long continuity and therefore also the glorification of this epoch. In addition, the word has different meanings and can refer to the city of Luxembourg, the political territory around it, both in its historical and contemporary dimensions, and further the inhabitants of either part. As seen in the case of the millennium celebrations, the blurring of these different meanings was at some stages an opportune and forceful way to suggest a historical unity of a country and a nation when there was none. Those ‘mechanisms’ clearly do not constitute any deliberate

¹⁹ See: Fédération générale des instituteurs luxembourgeois (ed), *Geschichtsblätter für das 6. Schuljahr*, Luxembourg, 1977.

inventions, but they offered an opportunity to strengthen the discourse of the nation state.

The continuity of the single name sets Luxembourg firmly apart from Belgium or the Netherlands, whose national historiographies struggled to incorporate a medieval past.²⁰ It is especially striking that even though the Belgian provinces (with the possible exception of Liège) and Luxembourg share much the same political history until 1839, the historical narratives that both nations produced are quite dissimilar. Belgian historians took up the concept of ‘foreign dominations’ much earlier than their Luxembourgian counterparts, the term having been in the air even before the Belgian Revolution.²¹ In complete contrast to the concept’s usage in the grand-duchy, it had never constituted an element within a Belgian narrative, but merely a formula taken up by early national historians and later schoolbooks in order to come to terms with the diverse and alternating ruling dynasties of the past.²² In consequence the concept’s content remained relatively vague: whether the Burgundian dukes were seen as foreign rulers depended entirely on the particular author, while the House of Orange on the other hand was certainly regarded as such. In Luxembourg, by contrast, the oppression begins with the Burgundians and ends with the Dutch monarchs. More crucially however, the ‘Belgian’ Middle Ages constitute no vital element in setting apart the age of foreign oppression from a more glorious past, as they did across the Luxembourg border. On the contrary, the territorial diversity that the period represented proved difficult to exploit for nationalist purposes in a country where the centrifugal elements have always been at least as strong as the centralising state.²³ An attempt to ‘nationalise’ the past was initiated by Jean Stecher, who turned linguistic and political divisions into a virtue,

²⁰ Considering the enormous breadth of the topic, the ensuing comparison with Belgian and Dutch historiography is based on secondary literature only. For a very general comparison of Benelux historiography, see the article: Marnix BEYEN and Benoît MAJERUS, National Historiography and its ‘Others’ in Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, 19th-20th centuries (forthcoming); for an overview of Belgian and Dutch national historiography see: Anton VAN DER LEM, *Het nationale epos. Geschiedenis in één greep*, p. 177-196.

²¹ Jean STENGERS, *Le mythe des dominations étrangères dans l’historiographie belge*, p. 386; and: Jo TOLLEBEEK, *Historical Representation and the Nation-State ...*, p. 342.

²² Jean STENGERS, *Le mythe des dominations étrangères dans l’historiographie belge*, p. 399-400.

²³ In his forthcoming book [no title yet], Maarten van Ginderachter argues that the compromise between Liberals and Catholics, upon which the Belgium was built, included a withdrawal of the state from the public sphere, thus preventing the rise of a wide-spread Belgian identity. This withdrawal expressed itself, for instance, in the absence of any compulsory primary education before 1914 and the general conscription before 1913. I am grateful to Maarten for sharing these yet unpublished insights.

pretty much along the motto of today's European Union: unity in diversity. What supposedly united medieval Belgium was the fact that its constituents did not belong to the categories they had been forced into; Germanic Flanders was politically part of France, while francophone Wallonia belonged to the 'German' Empire. Stecher passed on the idea to Godefroid Kurth, his colleague in Liège, and the latter's student Henri Pirenne.²⁴ For Pirenne especially the cluster of medieval principalities seemed to share a common culture and spirit that naturally led to their unification within the 'Burgundian State' – a moment of historical fulfilment.²⁵ Nonetheless, even nationalist interpretations generally focused on one specific region, which was supposed to incarnate the Belgian culture at its purest in medieval times. In Kurth's case this was Brabant, in Pirenne's Flanders. This latent regionalism emerged stronger after the First World War, with the strengthening of Flemish identity and, in reaction, the Walloon one.²⁶ While the so-called Battle of the Golden Spurs fought at Courtrai in 1302 had still been an expression of a common Belgian spirit for Pirenne, it was in the end more effectively appropriated and instrumentalised by the Flemish separatists.²⁷ The very same factor that represented an ultimate advantage in the case of Luxembourg, namely the existence of small territorial principalities in the Low Countries, hindered the medieval period's entrance into a Belgian national narrative.

In Dutch historiography, the Middle Ages are again not part of a national narrative, which takes root in the 'Dutch Golden Age' of the seventeenth century.²⁸ While elsewhere in Europe Romanticism generally nourished a new interest in medieval times, the Dutch Romantics had a predilection for that 'Golden Age'.²⁹ Hardly any influential Dutch historian of the nineteenth century, neither Reiner Cornelis Bakhuizen van den Brink, nor Robert Jacobus Fruin, for instance, focused

²⁴ Hervé HASQUIN, *Historiographie et Politique en Belgique*, p. 44-45.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 62-63 and p. 67.

²⁶ For more on the context see: Carl STRIKWERDA, *A House Divided. Catholics, Socialists and Flemish Nationalists in Nineteenth-Century Belgium*, Lanham, 1997, p. 36-38.

²⁷ The classic study is still: Jo TOLLEBEEK, *La Bataille des Eperons d'Or. Le culte de 1302 et la lutte flamande*, p. 205-218, especially p. 212-215; see also: Jo TOLLEBEEK, *Le culte de la Bataille des Eperons d'Or de la fin du XVIIIe au XXe siècle*, p. 194-239.

²⁸ Adriaan P. J. MILTENBURG, *Naar de gesteldheid dier tyden. Middeleeuwen en mediëvistiek in Nederland in de negentiende eeuw. Vier studies*, p. 179.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

their research on medieval times.³⁰ There are several reasons for this. From the Dutch perspective, the seventeenth-century's significance lies in the rise of the nation in its struggle against Spain. It was led in this endeavour by the House of Orange, still in power in the nineteenth century and thus created as much an idea of continuity as the kingdom's borders, which after 1830 were again very close to those of the Republic. The main reasons that rendered the medieval period unattractive were, as for Belgium, the lack of political unity as well as the peripheral location within the Holy Roman Empire. There were only a few exceptions to this: for instance, Willem Bilderdijk's *Geschiedenis des Vaderlands* (History of the Fatherland) that appeared during the first three decades after 1800. Bilderdijk's autocratic and anti-liberal ideals as well as his especially pious character attracted him to the Middle Ages.³¹ His stance did not survive among his successors. The dominant discourse was not only based on dynastic and political viewpoints, but it was also largely influenced by religious motivations. Since the medieval epoch also stood for a dominant Catholic Church, the Protestant mainstream had yet another reason to reject it as a dark age, while it gave reasons to the Catholic minority to identify with it.³² Again the period stands in contrast to the interpretation of the 'Golden Age', which was seen as a time of the Calvinist Reformation, the resulting secularisation and the slow onset of Enlightenment. One has to wonder to what degree even Johann Huizinga's *Autumn of the Middle Ages* (1919) was influenced by this prevalent mindset. He certainly did not contribute to a respectable or laudable image of the epoch, but presents it instead as an age of superficial piety, an obsession with death and a debauched lifestyle. This speculation can even be taken a step further: interestingly, Dutch people from the mainly Protestant regions north of the rivers use the word *Bourgondiërs* (Burgundians) to designate both people from the predominantly Catholic southern provinces and gluttonous *bon vivants* – Burgundian times, Catholicism and decadence find themselves again reunited.³³ As with Belgium, the Middle Ages could

³⁰ Raymond VAN UYTVEN, Johanna A. KOSSMANN-PUTTO, and Philip DE VRIES, *De Geschiedschrijving in de Nederlanden*, p. 469-470.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 468-469.

³² The idea is borrowed from Peter Raedts, which he developed in his paper 'A Serious Case of Amnesia: The Dutch and their Medieval Past', given in Oxford on 7 April 2006. The paper will be published as part of the conference proceedings.

³³ The earliest references that the *Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal* provides for a moral usage of the word, rather than a historical-geographical, is indeed from Huizinga's *Autumn of the Middle Ages*:

not be linked to the idea of national unity in the Netherlands either. Protestantism prevented a closer identification with the medieval period in the Netherlands, but it did not in Catholic Luxembourg. Nonetheless, it is striking how sharp a contrast there was between historical perceptions of the Netherlands and those of the grand-duchy, considering the unity of the crowns from 1815 to 1890 and their similar political developments, such as the rise and decline of liberalism, as the backdrop to the development of a national historiography in both countries.³⁴ It also illustrates the self-contained national-centric contexts that nationalist historiographies had confined themselves to. They may well have borrowed concepts from elsewhere, such as the infamous ‘foreign dominations’. Yet, these elements were subsequently woven into entirely different narratives, such that each nation was given a historical destiny divorced from its political neighbour.

* * *

Whereas some studies of *lieux de mémoire* convey a certain feeling of nostalgia, not least Pierre Nora’s initial model, one has to conclude that in Luxembourg medieval subjects are still alive and even developing further, their mutations actually assuring their continued existence. In addition academic historians have been reshaping the highbrow view of history since the 1970s, and increasingly so since the 1990s, rejecting the old narrative and allowing especially for a return of long-neglected elements such as Count Conrad I, or Emperor Sigismund. The establishment of the University of Luxembourg in 2003 and the recruitment of quite a few younger medievalists within its research staff even points to a promising future. One still notices the strong continuity of certain factors that have been actively shaping collective memory in Luxembourg: the monarchy still remains in place as the representative of the State, the Christian Democrats have been in power for the vast majority of time since 1919, the relationship between the State and the Catholic

“Eigen aan (den levensstijl van) de Bourgondiërs; in de aanh. meermaals in verband gebracht met praalzicht, overdadigheid en huichelachtigheid. ‘Hoe geweldig Bourgondisch is die pompeuze en statige opzet, die ernstige vormen voor een gracieus vermaak’, Huizinga, *Herfstijl* 199 [1919].” Bourgondisch, in: *Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal*, consulted online at <http://wnt.inl.nl> (last visited: 26/09/2007). I am very grateful to Joep Leerssen for pointing this out to me.

³⁴ For the situation in the Netherlands, see: Henk TE VELDE, *Gemeenschapzin en plichtsbef. Liberalisme en Nationalisme in Nederland 1870-1918*, p. 12.

Church has been marked by rather cordial ties, and historians rarely split into differently minded factions. Nonetheless, there are reasons to assume that upcoming visions of medieval Luxembourg (or local history in general) may transform more radically than ever before. Three factors particularly urge prudence when establishing any forecast, even for the near future.

Firstly, the results of local historical science remain unpredictable. The introduction of international standards and the growing international ties of local historians have not only lead to some far-reaching re-interpretations, but the necessity for those has become stronger than ever. While many twentieth-century historians still saw it as a virtue to work in the tradition of their intellectual forefathers, today's scholarly careers depend on the production of novel and innovative ideas. In addition, it is still extremely difficult to discern in which direction any future narrative will turn. The 'foreign dominations' have long been abandoned, but the prevailing mindset of dividing history into artificial periods, which gives headaches to late-medieval-early-Renaissance scholars everywhere, seems to support the traditional narrative beyond its grave. The rule of the Burgundian dukes in particular (especially post-1444) remains neglected, having produced very little research in Luxembourg since the nineteenth century. On the other hand, while the fifteenth century may have been neglected, the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries have traditionally attracted the interest of a high number of historians in Luxembourg, not only because of the period's traditional status, but also for more practical reasons. The majority of sources for this period can be found locally, and a large section of them has been carefully edited by Camille Wampach and some recent successors. A serious political study of local early modern history is likely to require journeys to Brussels, Madrid, Paris and Vienna. One clear trend that can be observed is an 'opening'. While popular images largely remain within the framework set about a century ago, representations by scholars and many politicians have moved on to include what could be labelled as a post-nationalist perspective: a focus on trans-national elements, such as the 'Greater Region' or a European dimension. It explains the re-interpretation of John of Bohemia, the survival of Ermesinde and Melusine, and the current decline of Sigefroid. In the same spirit Michel Pauly took up a chair at the new university in 2006 as professor of

“Luxembourgian transnational history” – a post that would probably have existed without the “trans-” only twenty years ago. Endowing medieval times with a ‘European’ dimension is of course problematic; the danger of anachronism is great. In addition, there is a risk, particularly in ‘small’ Luxembourg, of elevating oneself to the position of good European since historic times. Doing so would represent no change from the self-indulgent style of the nationalists, only in content.

This leads directly into the second factor: the changing Luxembourgian society at large. By comparison with its European neighbours Luxembourg has a very large immigrant population.³⁵ So far at least, and this thesis must have shown it with respect to the medieval period, these immigrants have not really intervened much in the construction of local history, nor have any of them expressed an identification with it. The question is how this will change once they demand or receive a larger amount of political influence and representation. Social cohesion is still assured and glued together by the consistently high GDP per capita. Economic stability would well guarantee smooth integration over the next thirty years, but equally imaginable is a less peaceful disintegration of the several parallel societies, especially in the case of a serious economic recession. In either case, one needs to reflect on whether descendants of the immigrants will adopt the more traditional views of local history, or integrate the local past at all into their own self-understanding, or will they instead replace it with their own reading, or even ignore and reject it entirely. Maybe the buried early modern ‘foreign dominations’ will be resurrected in some other shape and have a ‘pro-European’ future. But will this have any impact on the view of the Middle Ages? The descendants of foreign immigrants will likely contribute to a ‘de-nationalisation’ of history, a vision that stresses the continuous migrations that have affected the territory and the impact of outsiders on the local culture. This new vision of the medieval past could include the missionary St Willibrord, as much as, possibly even, the Limburg dynasty in an immigrant’s guise.

The third factor is the general role of the medievalist and his object of passion in and for society. Everywhere in Europe, nationalist perspectives had provided history with an undoubted *raison d’être*; the role of the Middle Ages was generally

³⁵ See appendix 1.

that of providing the nation with its origins. Things have changed and the medievalist's art and trade is under stronger scrutiny than ever. To give another example from a Luxembourg context: when the University of Luxembourg introduced a new Master programme in European History, the governing council enforced the title "*Contemporary European History*", against the intentions of the department that had aimed at a larger vision.

While nationalism starts to decline in importance, the medieval past increasingly leaves the world of politics that once united most visions of it. The consequence has been an increasing rift between medieval studies in an academic context and the usage of medieval history in a popular one. As can be observed in this thesis, popular culture continues to demand a very romanticised image of the Middle Ages, which habitually perpetuates existing myths about the past. Academic culture instead aims to develop new models and concentrates on the destruction of myths. The mid-1990s have shown how easily general interest in medieval subjects can be awoken, in historians, politicians and the wider public alike. Yet the general trend seems to point towards a decrease in the presence of medieval *topoi* for the benefit of contemporary ones. The two polls carried out in 1989 and 2004 help to illustrate this.³⁶ Although two medieval figures, John of Bohemia and Sigefroid, made it into the top ten in 2004, they both had suffered in popular esteem. While King John had been the uncontested number two in 1989, he fell to sixth place in 2004. He was then not only trailing Grand-Duchess Charlotte as in 1989, but was also behind the recently-deceased former prime minister Pierre Werner (second), the nineteenth-century poet Dicks (third), the 'father of Europe' Robert Schuman (fourth) and the present-day grand-duke (fifth), who has only been in power since 2000. What we can observe is a shift towards the present-day: except for Charlotte and Dicks, the choice of figures expresses a growing significance of contemporary issues over the past, and certainly over the medieval past. The same is reflected by the fact that the national holiday was voted the third most important date in national history. The day originated as the grand-duke's birthday and it remains officially a holiday granted by the monarch; it contains no reference at all to any historic event,

³⁶ Iles-Tageblatt Umfrage zur Luxemburger Geschichte, in: *Tageblatt*, 18/04/1989, p. 4; and the poll realised in November and December 2004, and commissioned by Fernand Fehlen and his the research project FNR/02/05/06 based at the University of Luxembourg. See also my general introduction.

but represents a re-occurring celebration in the yearly calendar. This development does not mean that the Middle Ages should be declared dead, but that their importance to Luxembourgian self-understanding may have declined in recent years. Which way exactly the trend will head in future remains to be seen.

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In my first term as an undergraduate student at university, I was told that serious academic research cannot be undertaken on one's own. It was a blow to some of my egotistic aspirations. Never before did the veracity of that basic advice feel more evident than during the research for this study. At every stage of this thesis, from its conception to the composition of the last lines, I could rely on the helping and correcting hands of many friends and colleagues. Without them the entire project would have remained an impossible task.

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Abbreviations used:

ANL Archives Nationales du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg

PSH Publications de la Section Historique de l'Institut grand-ducal de Luxembourg

SHL Archives de la Section Historique de l'Institut grand-ducal de Luxembourg

UQB Camille WAMPACH (ed), *Urkunden- und Quellenbuch zur Geschichte der altluxemburgischen Territorien bis zur burgundischen Zeit*, 10 vols., Luxembourg, 1935-1955.

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¹ Because of the nature of this thesis, it will for the most part be impossible to distinguish between primary sources and secondary literature.

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Appendix 1

Luxembourg: geography, history and trilinguality

The aim of this appendix is to offer a small amount of background knowledge on Luxembourg; this seems the more important considering that there is still no scholarly account of local history available in English.¹

Today's Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg borders Belgium to the west, Germany to the east and France to the south.² With its maximum dimensions of about 80 by 50 kilometres (50 by 30 miles), the country's 2586 km² (998 square miles) make it one of the smallest in Europe. It cannot be considered a city-state, since only about a fifth of its population lives in or around the capital city of Luxembourg. The total territory counts today roughly half a million inhabitants in total.³ It lies on the very south-eastern edge of what is often referred to as the Low Countries, although one can question whether it should belong to these on geographical grounds. The entire northern third of the country is geologically part of that arc of forested hills that stretch from north-eastern France and eastern Belgium to western Germany, and is referred to as the Ardennes in the French-speaking regions and the Eifel in Germany. The southern two thirds of the country are part of a relatively flatter and more fertile

¹ For reading on the history of Luxembourg see for instance: Christian CALMES and Danielle BOSSAERT, *Histoire du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg. De 1815 à nos jours*, Luxembourg, 1995; and: Gilbert TRAUSSCH (ed), *Histoire du Luxembourg. Le destin européen d' un 'petit pays'*, Luxembourg, 2002. For the development of a national consciousness in Luxembourg see: Daniel SPIZZO, *La nation luxembourgeoise. Genèse et structure d' une identité*, Paris, 1995. Statistical information can be found in: STATEC (ed), 2006. *Le Luxembourg en chiffres*, Luxembourg, 2006. The brochure can be downloaded from the STATEC website: www.statec.lu

² See the map at the end of this appendix.

³ The official number for 1 January 2005 was 455,000. See: STATEC (ed), 2006. *Le Luxembourg en chiffres*, p. 9.

plain, occasionally scarred by the valleys of rivers and creeks, which stretches from Lorraine, through Luxembourg and into parts of western Germany.

The region and specifically the city of Trier, became an important part of the late Roman Empire. Thereafter the Franks made it part of their heartland, based around such important sites as Merovingian Metz or Carolingian Aachen. After the treaty of Verdun (843), the Austrasian region became part of the middle kingdom, which in the subsequent century and a half was to be contested by both its neighbours. The noble House of Ardenne was deeply involved in these struggles and by siding with the Ottonians from an early stage influenced the region's absorption into the Holy Roman Empire. The members of one branch of the Ardenne family had bought the site of a small castle called Luxembourg and had made it the political centre of their territorial possessions by the late eleventh century. The emerging 'county of Luxembourg' became regularly absorbed in the political quarrels in the wider region, also after the establishment of a new dynasty in the thirteenth century that helped to reform local administration. The ongoing consolidation of the principality culminated in 1353 when its different lordships were fused together to form the Duchy of Luxembourg. By that time the ruling dynasty had managed to secure a prominent position within the Empire and extended its *Hausmacht* well into Central Europe, claiming at one point the crowns of the Romans, Bohemia and Hungary. Their descendants could not prevent the assimilation of the ancestral duchy into the territorial cluster of the dukes of Burgundy, who gradually took possession of the duchy in the first decades of the fifteenth century. While until this point political development in Luxembourg had been similar to those in the wider region between the North Sea and the Rhine, it was now to be entirely shared with the remaining Southern Low Countries. The city of Luxembourg had always been the main urban centre of the county (and later duchy), but remained very small compared to the towns of Flanders or the Rhinelands. In consequence the late medieval Estates were still entirely dominated by the landed nobility, while those in other parts of the Low Countries often had a majority of the burghers. Medieval and early modern trade centred on textiles and wine, although agriculture remained firmly the dominating sector until well into the nineteenth century. After Burgundy the region fell under Habsburg authority, and rule alternated between the Spanish and Austrian

branches of the House, with two short-lived French conquests of the duchy (1684-1697 and 1795-1815). Lacking any major economic resources or centres, the duchy gained its attraction mainly from its strategic significance, providing its Habsburg rulers with a defensive post against France, and its French occupants with a foothold in the Low Countries and access to the Rhinelands. In consequence the fortress of Luxembourg was extended to an impregnable size so as to dominate two thirds of the city's surface. The Habsburg presence also prevented the Protestant faith from gaining much of a presence inside the duchy, with the result that Catholicism remains the largest religious orientation to this day. At the same time the duchy was never the centre of any bishopric and the principality was split among several ecclesiastical provinces until establishment of a see in 1873.

It remains somewhat difficult to clarify when exactly the principality became an independent state. From the negotiations at the Congress of Vienna (1815), the principality emerged as a de-jure independent grand-duchy within the German Confederation and with a federal garrison in the fortress; at the same time it was to be ruled in personal union by the King of the Netherlands. It was the only principality in the Low Countries to be awarded, at least officially, an independent status – though not because of the desire of its people, but rather by decree of the great powers. Remembering their common Habsburg past and expecting lower taxation, most of the inhabitants willingly joined their Belgian neighbours in 1830 so as to form a new kingdom. With the Dutch king unwilling to lose more of his territories and the German garrison ready to defend its stronghold, the principality was split in 1839: the western French-speaking half officially united with Belgium as the Province of Luxembourg and the eastern Germanic half was declared once more independent, remaining a grand-duchy (though the title became even more of a euphemism). The moment saw the political rise of those men who had stayed loyal to the Dutch crown; their liberalist tendencies gave shape to most politics until the turn of the century.⁴ The first occurrences of the idea of a Luxembourgian 'nationality' were launched by these *Orangist* politicians in the 1830s as a counter-argument to adherence to the Belgian Kingdom. However, the fact that most of the population,

⁴ Unlike Belgium, the formation of an influential Catholic political group that outbalanced the Liberals took longer in Luxembourg. For Belgium, see: Carl STRIKWERDA, *A house divided. Catholics, Socialists and Flemish nationalists in nineteenth-century Belgium*, p. 27-33.

including the bourgeoisie in the capital, intended to join newly-founded Belgium illustrates the non-existence of a national sentiment. Even the frequently used term of ‘nationality’ included the connotations of a free political determination and did not express any ethnic concept.⁵

When in 1866 Napoleon III of France attempted to purchase the territory from William III of the Netherlands, Prussia saw its interests severely threatened. The crisis was only solved by the dismantlement of the fortress – Luxembourg’s only feature of international desire – and by declaring the country politically neutral for eternity. In its aftermath the grand-duchy gained the right and responsibility to defend itself. The time was also one of great economic change. Unlike Belgium, Luxembourg was industrialised at a late stage, starting with manufacturers around the capital. The discovery of Sidney Thomas’s ‘basic process’ in 1878 helped to transform the phosphorous iron ore found in the southern parts of the country into fine steel. The metallurgic industry provided the entire region with an economic boom and remained the main economic sector until the mid-1970s. In terms of rulership, the family pact of the House of Nassau opposed the ascension of Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands (Orange-Nassau) in 1890, and the grand-duchy fell to the other branch of the family, the House of Nassau-Weilburg, a dynasty that had been dispossessed by the Prussians of their homeland duchy in the Prusso-Austrian war.

The First World War saw an occupation by German forces. The helplessness of the government and the alleged collaboration of the ruling dynasty plunged the country into a severe constitutional crisis. Although a Socialist revolution was avoided and both independence and the ruling monarchy kept in place after a referendum in 1919, the country opted for an economic realignment with Belgium and away from Germany (1923). At the same time the more conservative Catholic party gained a parliamentary dominance – also largely due to the introduction of general (male and female) suffrage – which it has retained until the present day. In the time before and after the Great War, the national identity discourse in Luxembourg received a more definite shape and started to include ideas that suggest an ethnic conception of the Luxembourgian nation. A number of literary authors and

⁵ Daniel SPIZZO, *La nation luxembourgeoise ...*, p. 150-160 and 171.

intellectuals created a concept generally referred to as the *Mischkultur*. The idea entails that the culture of Luxembourg is unique and special, since it is made up of the best of both the French and German worlds. At about the same time, ‘Luxembourgian’ was promoted as a language (rather than a German dialect), especially by members of the far-right, who united in the nationalist movement *Nationalunio’n*. It was also in 1918 that Arthur Herchen published his history textbook that for the first time presented the national narrative to a wider public. He presents the national history in three parts: an independent Luxembourg in the Middle Ages, a series of foreign domination (*Fremdherrschaft / dominations étrangères*) in the early modern times and a resurrection of the independent state in the nineteenth century. His interpretation includes a teleological outlook that suggests an essentialist definition of the nation.

The Second World War marked the next important rupture. The country fell once more under German occupation (1940). Its totalitarian tendencies and vigorous Germanisation policies left more of a traumatic impact, than the bombings during the liberation and the German counter-offensive in the winter of 1944/5. In the aftermath the country abandoned its ‘perpetual neutrality’ and became a founding member of the United Nations, NATO, and of more economic importance the Benelux and European Coal and Steel Community. Luxembourg City became one of the seats of the European Community, alongside Brussels and Strasbourg. At the same time, the slow decline of the steel industry from the 1950s until 1974 meant that the local economy had to re-orient itself and efforts were made towards the establishment of the financial sector. Banks and increasingly also shareholding companies dominate today’s economy, followed by the selling of cheap petroleum in second place. Having been one of the poorest areas in the region for much of its history, it was now catapulted to having one of the highest GDPs per capita in the world.⁶

The linguistic situation is one of the most confusing aspects about Luxembourg.⁷ The historic duchy had been geographically bilingual: the territorially

⁶ Luxembourg’s GDP per capita for 2004 was 54,852.195 Euro according to the International Monetary Fund. See: <http://www.imf.org/external/data.htm> (last visited: 26/09/2007). In most international comparisons, Luxembourg ranges among the top three in the world.

⁷ For reading on the linguistic situation in Luxembourg see: Gerald NEWTON (ed), *Luxembourg and Lëtzebuergesch. Language and Communication at the Crossroads of Europe*, Oxford, 1996; and:

larger part to the west spoke a French dialect, while the smaller but more populous eastern part spoke a Germanic one. At the same time French took an increasingly important place in administration from the late thirteenth century onwards, replacing Latin as a written language, while German was only slowly added from the fourteenth century. After the arrival of the dukes of Burgundy and increasing administrative links to Brussels, French retained its official function for all of modern times. This tradition as well as the introduction of the French Code Napoléon as the basis for law assured that French still remains the main *written* language in law, politics and administration. This process may seem the more astonishing considering that the vast majority of the population has been speaking a Germanic tongue since the partition of 1839. German became the main language of the media, even more so in the twentieth century. It remains the preferred foreign language of the middle classes, who tend to favour German television or books over French media for mere practical reasons. As mentioned, the population rejected the long held belief that it was a German-speaking nation around the time of the First World War and the notion of Luxembourgian as a separate language has increasingly gained ground. The 1984 law on the country's official languages declares the country trilingual, allowing French, German and Luxembourgian all to be used for official purposes and at the same time making the latter a language by law.⁸ 'Luxembourgian' refers to the language spoken by most locals.⁹ It is a Germanic dialect: the grammar and the etymology of most words show strong links to both German and Dutch dialects. Due to its prestige and continuous presence in the country, French has a strong influence on its vocabulary. The rise of Luxembourgian linguistic awareness has transformed the language into one of the main points of identification for the 'indigenous' population, i.e. those who like to perceive themselves as such.¹⁰ Luxembourg's 'trilinguality' is not of geographic character, as it is for Belgium, Switzerland or Finland, for instance, but applies to situation and

Kristine HORNER, *Negotiating the Language-Identity Link: Media Discourse and Nation-Building in Luxembourg*, Buffalo, 2004 (PhD Thesis, State University of New York at Buffalo).

⁸ This refutes the old witticism (attributed to Max Weinreich) that a language is a dialect with an army and navy – since Luxembourg is landlocked, it lacks the latter.

⁹ I prefer the word "Luxembourgian" to "Luxembourgish", mainly for aesthetical reasons; both terms are acceptable in English though.

¹⁰ See: Benoît MAJERUS, D'Sprooch, 17-22.

circumstance. To use an illustrative example: new laws are discussed in parliament in Luxembourgian, codified in French and published in the newspapers in German.

The linguistic situation has not lost any of its complexity, due to the large number of immigrants. While the territory (as almost every other) has always been a land to which and from where people migrated, the second half of the twentieth century has accelerated this process. Late-nineteenth-century industrialisation had brought with it a wave of Italian immigrants, but their number was relatively small so that for many only family names bear witness today. From the 1960s much larger waves of Portuguese immigrants have altered the social topography more considerably and have helped to increase the proportion of the international community living in Luxembourg to 39% (in 2005) of the population.¹¹ Their Catholic background allowed for a smoother integration (or living side-by-side) than that of Muslims in many other European countries. Their Romance language however not only favoured the additional presence of French as a language of communication in daily life, but it also hampered a fuller social integration – their children have to undergo a trilingual schooling system that addresses primarily the speakers of Germanic tongues. The international character of public life in Luxembourg is further marked by over 100,000 cross-border workers who flood to Luxembourg everyday, while having their homes in the economically poorer regions of Lorraine, the Belgian Province of Luxembourg and, to a lesser degree, across the German border. This workforce is absolutely essential for the Luxembourg job-market, to which it contributes a share of about 30%.¹² This group has a great share in transforming the capital into a pre-dominantly French speaking city in the daytime hours. In recent years a third group has received an increasing presence among the international community, namely that of the diplomats and bureaucrats working for the European Union. This latter group is less integrated into the wider society, mainly because it uses many of its own facilities (e.g. the European School) and because most of its representatives only stay in the country for a limited number of

¹¹ STATEC (ed), 2006. *Le Luxembourg en chiffres*, p. 9.

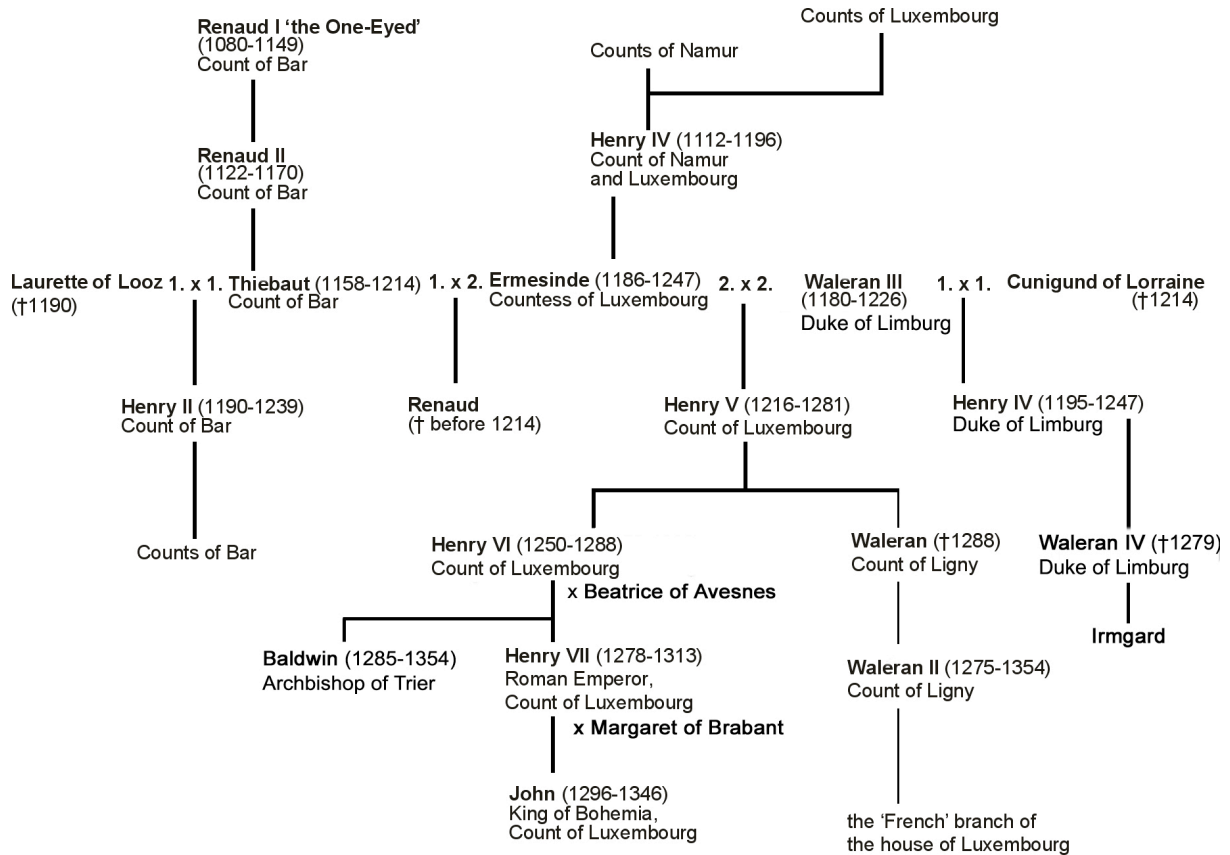
¹² In 1995, there were 47,000 cross-border workers among the 213,800 strong workforce in Luxembourg, and they accounted thus for 21.9% of the total workforce. Their number rose to 109,300 (36.2% of the workforce) in 2005. See: STATEC (ed), 2006. *Le Luxembourg en chiffres*, p. 12.

years. In addition the dominant language spoken among ‘the Europeans’ tends to be English, further contributing to the complexity of the situation.

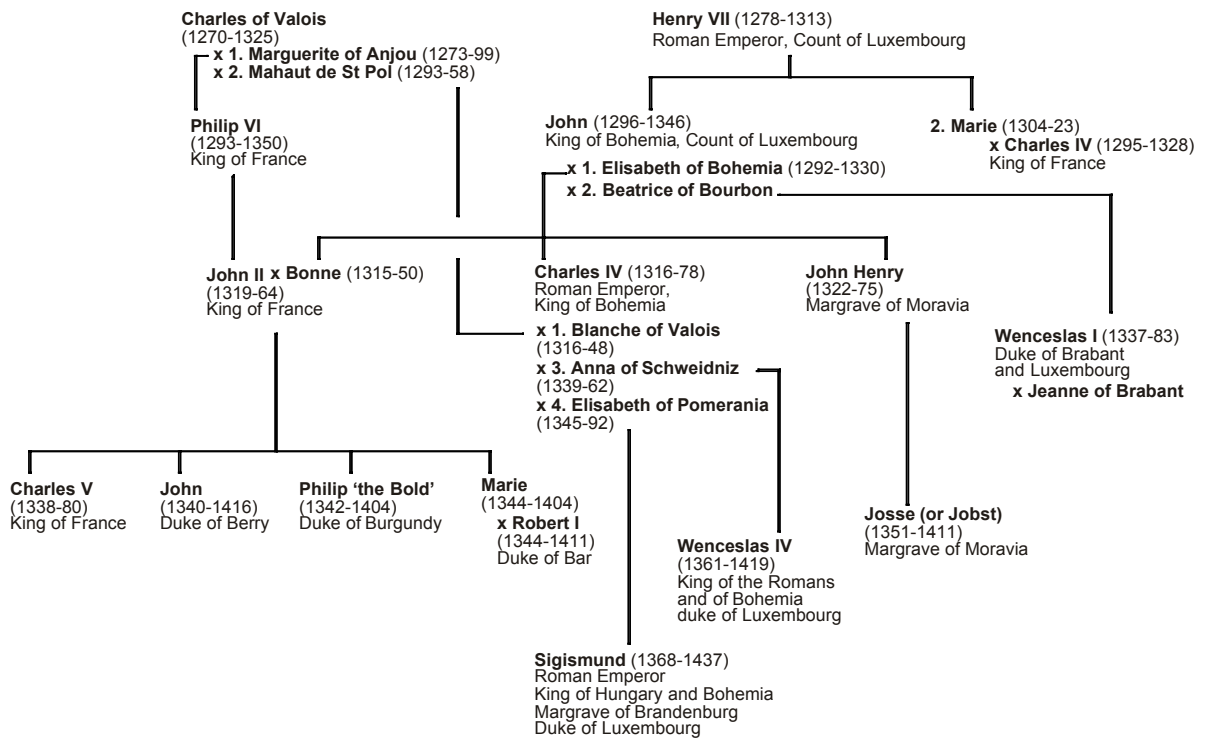
Map of Luxembourg



2) Bar – Namur – Limburg (twelfth to fourteenth century)



3) Limburg-Luxembourg – Valois (thirteenth to fifteenth century)



APPENDIX 3

Figures



Figure 1
The Decayed Tooth (*Huelen Zant*)
Photo by Pit Péporté.

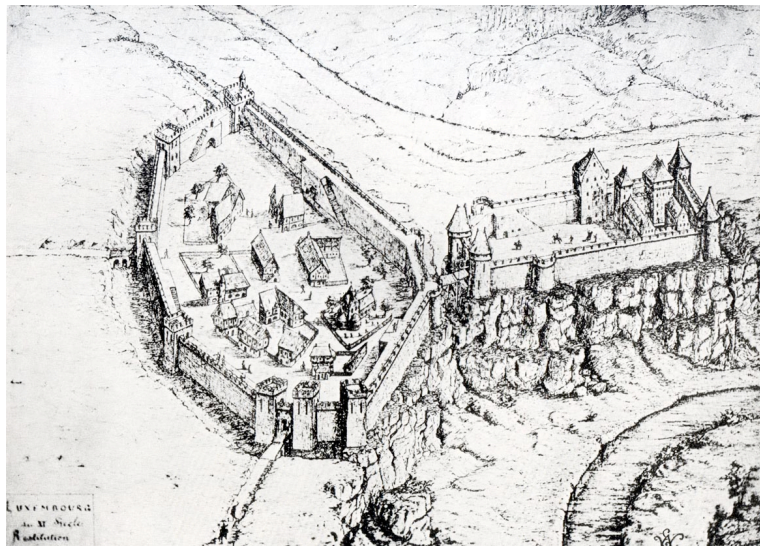


Figure 2
Ernest Werling, Luxembourg au XI siècle. Reconstruction.
Published in: Jean-Pierre Biermann, *Abrégé Historique de la Ville & Forteresse de Luxembourg*, Luxembourg, 1890.

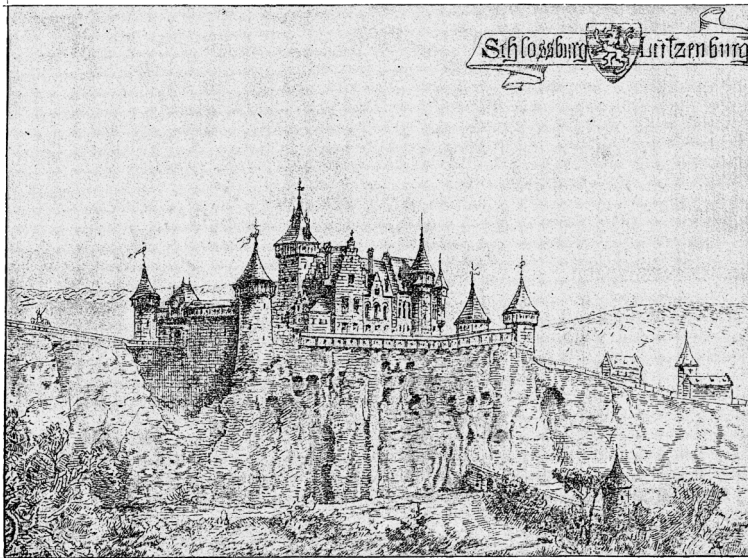


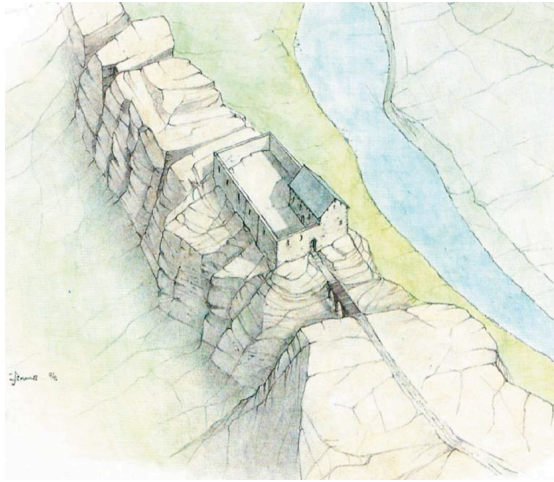
Figure 3
 Charles Arendt, Die Lützelburg.
 Published in: Charles ARENDT, *Hypothetischer Plan der ehemaligen Schlossburg Lützelburg auf dem Bockfels zu Luxemburg*, Luxembourg, 1895.



Figure 4
 Michel Engels, Die Lützelburg auf dem Bockfels 963-1543.
 Musée d'Histoire de la Ville de Luxembourg, Luxembourg.

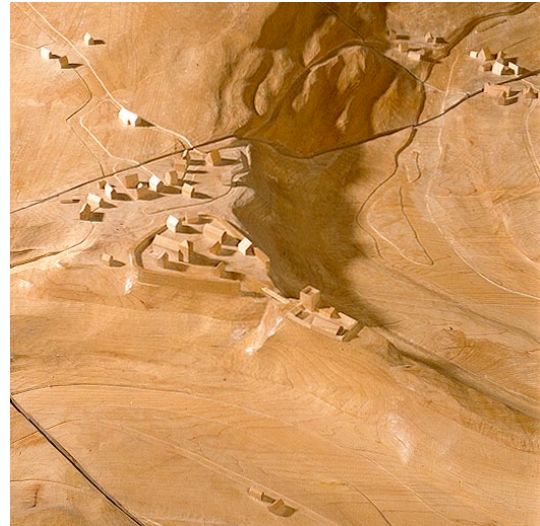


Figure 5
 Pierre Blanc, Construction du château de Luxembourg au Bock par Sigefroid en 963.
 Musée National d'Histoire et d'Art, Luxembourg.



Left: Figure 6
 Reconstruction of the castle of Luxembourg at the end of the tenth-century by John Zimmer.
 Published in: John ZIMMER, *Die Burgen des Luxemburger Landes*, vol. 1, Luxembourg, 1996.

Right: Figure 7
 A wooden scale model of the castle of Luxembourg and the surrounding settlements around the years 1000 as shown in the Museum of the History of the City of Luxembourg.
 Photo by C. Weber, © Musée d'Histoire de la Ville de Luxembourg, Luxembourg.



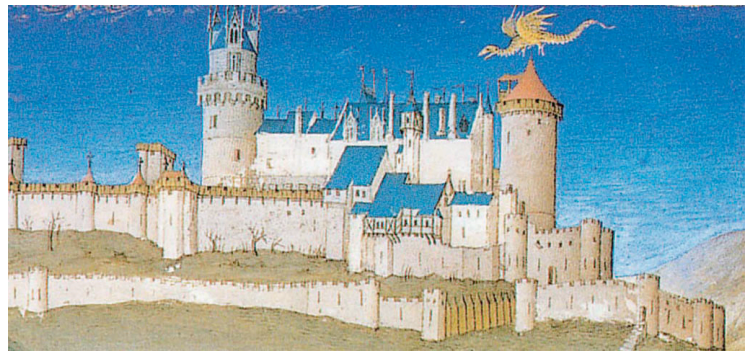
Figures 8 and 9
 Two twentieth-century reproductions of Charles Arendt's model. In colour on a celebratory plate from 1963 (above); on the opening page of the 1990s Luxembourg passport (left).
 Photo left by Simone Weny.
 Photo above by Patrick Dondelinger.



Figure 10
 Plate at the location of the medieval castle commemorating the acceptance of Luxembourg's old town as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
 Photo by Pit Péporté.



Figure 11
 Bronze relief with the bust of Robert Schuman at the site of the old castle.
 Photo by Pit Péporté.



Figures 12 and 12a

The castle of Lusignan by the brothers Limbourg.
 March, in: *Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*. Chantilly,
 Musée Condé, MS 65, fol. 3v.

Figure 13

The 'Melusine' on the crest of the counts
 of St Pol.

Jean, bâtard de Luxembourg-Ligny, in: *Le petit armorial
 équestre de la Toison d'Or*, Lille, mid-15th c.



Figure 14

Cover sheet from: Estienne DE CHYPRE
 DE LUSIGNAN, *Les Généalogies ...*, Paris,
 1586.

Figures 15-17: Melusine naked through the ages



Figure 15
Mélusine se baignant au pied la citadelle / Die Melusina badet in der Alzette, by Auguste Tremont.
Published in: Luxembourg Illustré 22, 1929, p. 337 (front cover).

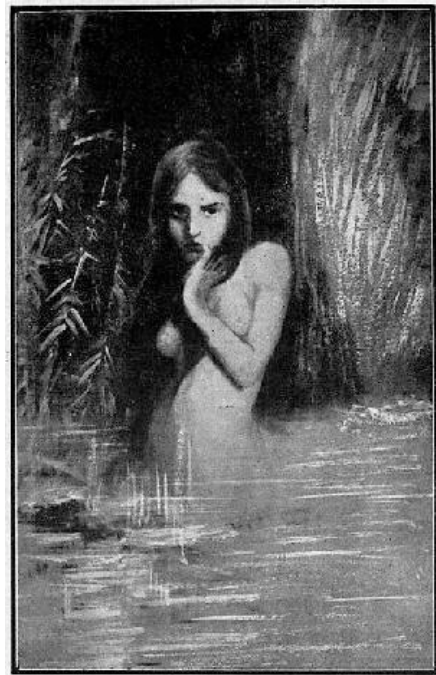


Figure 16
Mélusine, Nymphe de l'Alzette by Michel Heiter.
Published in: *Le Grand Almanach*, Barbert 1918, and reprinted in: Luxembourg Illustré 22, 1929, p. 341.

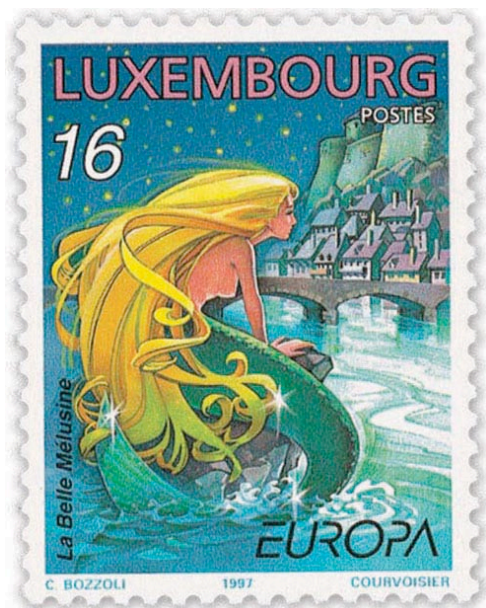


Figure 17
Luxembourgian post stamp from 1997. Melusine sits on the shores of River Alzette below the walls of Luxembourg.
Photo by the Office des timbres, Luxembourg.

Figures 18-19: Melusine as a local mascot



Figure 18
The logo of the Sub Aqua Club
Luxembourg.
Photo by Martin Uhrmacher.



Figure 19
The computer mouse distributed
by the Luxembourg City Tourist
Office.
Photo by Pit Péporté.



Figure 20

Ermesinde donates the charter of enfranchisement to the burghers of Luxembourg. Relief on the façade of the *Cercle Municipal* on the *Place d'Armes* in the centre of Luxembourg City.



Figure 21

Stain-glass window in the chapel of Clairefontaine. Photo by Claudy Raskin.

Figure 22

Ermesinde hands the charter of enfranchisement to Grande-Duchess Charlotte during the 1936 ceremony in Echternach.

Taken from: AZ. Luxemburger illustrierte Wochenschrift 32, 1936, p. 16.



Far left: **Figure 23**
Seal of Countess Ermesinde.
Photo by the Landeshauptarchiv
Koblenz.

Left: **Figure 24**
Grande-Duchess Charlotte
after her return from exile in
1945.
Photo published in: Sonja KMEC et
al (ed), *Lieux de mémoire au
Luxembourg*, Luxembourg, 2007.

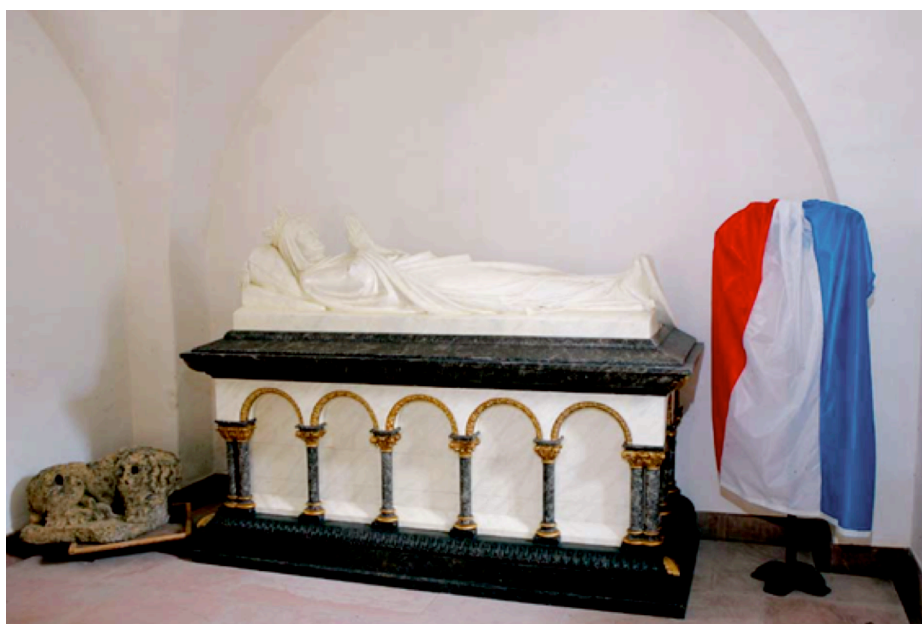


Figure 25
Ermesinde's
sarcophagus in the
crypt of the chapel
of Clairefontaine
after the
refurbishments of
1997 and her
reburial in 2000.
Photo from the
Luxemburger Wort
archives.

Figure 26

Stain glass window in the Cathedral of Luxembourg.

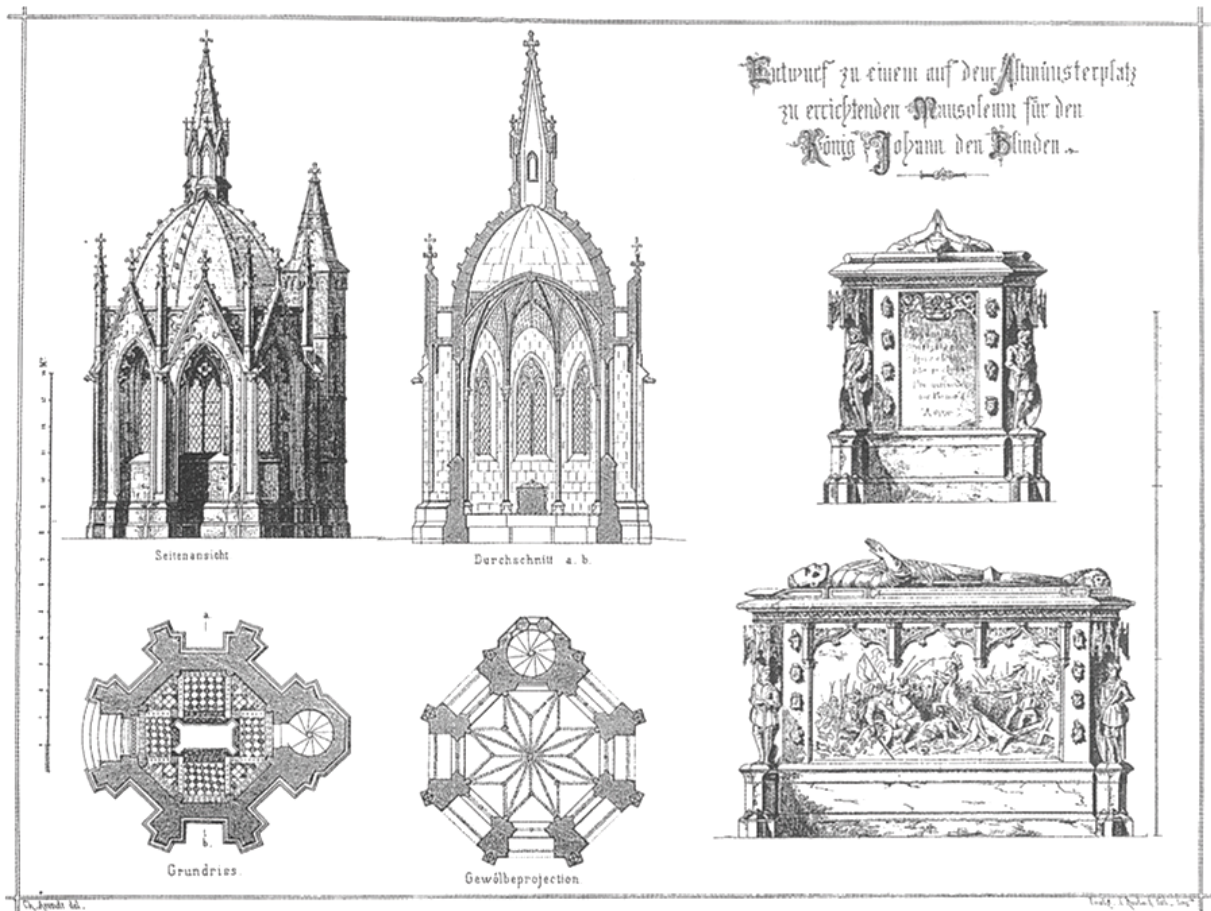
Photo by: Marcel Schroeder. Published in: Michel MARGUE (ed), *Ermesinde et l'affranchissement de la ville de Luxembourg. Etudes sur la femme, le pouvoir et la ville au XIIIe siècle*, Luxembourg, 1994 (Publications du Musée d'Histoire de la Ville de Luxembourg, Publications du CLUDEM 7).



Figure 27

Charles Arendt's plans for a new mausoleum for John of Bohemia (1872).

Published in: Charles ARENDT, Entwurf zu einem Monumente für Koenig Johann den Blinden, in: *PSH 27*, 1872, p. 244-249, reprinted in: Michel MARGUE (ed), *Un Itinéraire Européen*, Luxembourg, 1996.



Figures 28-31: The Black Prince discovers the body of John at Crécy



Figures 28 and 29

The Luxembourgian views

Top: Michel Sinner, 1845.

Bottom: Nicolas Liez, 1845-53.

Musée National d'Histoire et d'Art, Luxembourg.



Figures 30 and 31

The English views

Top: Benjamin West, 1788.

Photo by Barbara Gribling.

Bottom: Julian Russel Story, 1888.



Figures 32-39: John of Bohemia and the modern-day monarchy



Figures 32 and 33

The Salle d'Armes of the grand-ducal palace in Luxembourg City.

Left: The fireplace decoration during the first years of the German occupation (1940-45). The 1890s coats of arms on the wall and the representation of John on the chimney are joined by a portrait of Adolf Hitler.

Right: The same fireplace after the renovations of 1995. The wall behind it now shows a vague allusion to the former fresco.

Photos published in: Roland BALDAUFF and Alex FIXMER (ed), *Le Palais grand-ducal*, Mersch, 1997; and in: Sonja KMEC et al, *Les lieux de mémoire au Luxembourg*, Luxembourg, 2007.



Figure 34-37

The 'repatriation' of John's remains in 1946.

Top left: Departure in Kastel. Top right: crossing the border into Luxembourg.

Bottom left: representatives of the capital welcome the coffin at the location where the medieval castle stood.

Bottom right: the main ceremony on the Place Guillaume in the heart of the capital.

Photos from the collection of Ger Schlechter: published in Michel MARGUE (ed). *Un Itinéraire Européen*.

Figures 38-39

Witnesses of the hype of 1946.

Right: Card issued by the National Charity Fund during their Christmas appeal 1946.

Below: the first Luxembourgian coin minted after Second World War uniting the crown-prince John of Luxembourg and John of Bohemia.

Published in: BCEE (ed), *Le centenaire de notre dynastie raconté par les monnaies et médailles*, Luxembourg, 1990.



Figures 40-42: The *Schobermesse* re-invents itself



Left: Figure 40
The only freestanding monument for John in Luxembourg. Erected in 1975 by the association of showmen.
Photo by Pit Péporté.

Right: Figure 41
A commemorative plate issued in 1990 for the 650th anniversary of the *Schobermesse*.
Photo by Pit Péporté.

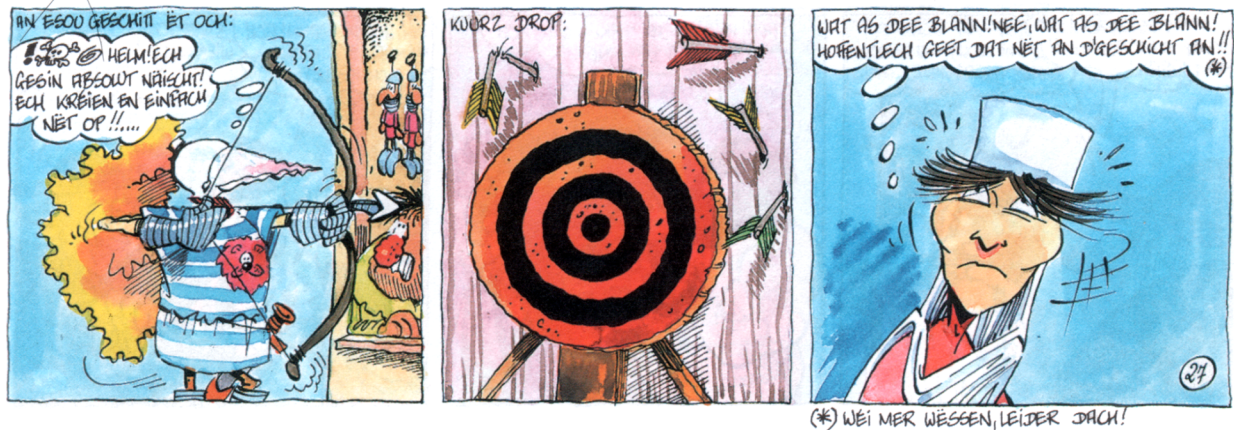


Left: Figure 42
A beer tent at the *Schobermesse* named after John of Bohemia (since 2005).
Photo by Pit Péporté.

Figures 43-45: John of Bohemia as a comic book figure



Top: The historicised John of Bohemia, rash and heroic as seen by Marc Angel and Paul Margue (1989). Marc ANGEL and Paul MARGUE, *D'Geschicht vu Lëtzebuerg a Bandes Dessinées*, p 51.



Middle: The consciously caricatured John of Bohemia by Roger Leiner and Lucien Czuga (1989). Roger LEINER and Lucien CZUGA, *De Superjhem*. *Dynamit fir d'Dynastie*, p. 29

Bottom: The less self-aware manga-style caricature by ND! Genen and Lucien Czuga (2006). Lucien CZUGA and ND! GENEN, *De leschte Ritter. De Schatz vun Draachsteen*, p. 23.



Figures 46-50: John of Bohemia outside Luxembourg



Figure 46:

Sign in front of the *Hôtel Jean de Bohême* on the central square in Durbuy (Belgium). Note the absence of ‘nationalist’ or ‘regionalist’ instrumentalisation of the medieval king; instead of a heraldic lion a deer is used as a logo, instead of ‘de Luxembourg’ he is referred to as ‘de Bohême’. Photo by Marian van der Meulen.

Figures 47 and 47a

The *Schinkelbrunnen* in Mettlach (Germany) with a close-up of the statue. In the background the Villeroy & Boch porcelain factory in what was previously a Benedictine monastery. Photos by Marian van der Meulen and Pit Péporté.





Figures 48, 49 and 50: John's former tomb in Kastel (Germany)

Above: outside and inside Schinkel's chapel high above the River Saar.

Below: the family tree around the entrance inside the chapel; it links John of Bohemia (above the entrance) to William Frederick IV of Prussia (left) and his wife Elisabeth of Bavaria (right). Photos by Marian van der Meulen.





Figure 51

Logo of the armed forces' fencing club. Not the seal of John of Bohemia, but that of Henry V Blondel represents the club. Equally heroic, but considered more original.