

PHD RESEARCH

A short overview of recent PhD research on Belgian modern and contemporary history

CHRISTOPHE BECHET

Crossing Belgium? From national independance to the Schlieffen Plan (1839-1905) - [Original Title : *Traverser la Belgique ? De l'Indépendance au Plan Schlieffen (1839-1905)*]

Académie universitaire Wallonie-Europe, Université de Liège, Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres, Département des Sciences historiques, 2012. Supervisors : Catherine Lanneau & Francis Balace.

The rivalry between Prussia/Germany and France throughout the nineteenth century and on the eve of the First World War has led historians to assume a continuity of assumptions within military circles about the strategic role of Belgian territory in the event of war, particularly in Paris, Berlin, and London. In return, these foreign reflections are assumed to have influenced the strategic thinking of Belgian officers. In this thesis, the question of Belgian lines of communication in relation to national defence policy and the war plans of neighbouring powers has been studied in a systematic way, from the Treaty of London in 1839 to the Schlieffen Plan (1905/1906). Following Marie-Thérèse Bitsch's thesis – *La Belgique entre la France et l'Allemagne (1905-1914)* – the concept of 'crossing Belgium' between France and Germany has been chosen as the main axis of analysis, based on the examination of numerous military and diplomatic documents. Using this method enables a number of permanent geopolitical and geostrategic features to emerge. This thesis contributes to a better definition of Belgian military geography before the Great War, focusing on railways, roads, rivers, and fortifications.

PIERRE-OLIVIER DE BROUX

The Law relating to the Network Industries 1830-2010. An evolution of the State's role as a founder of a law for the public services - [Original Title :

Le droit des industries de réseaux 1830–2010. Une histoire de l'évolution du rôle de l'Etat fondatrice d'un droit du service public]
Facultés universitaires Saint-Louis, 2011. Supervisors : Jean-Pierre Nandrin & Xavier Rousseaux.

This thesis follows the evolution of interactions between the public sector and the private sector to create, organize, manage, and finance public services such as transport, communications, water, and postal services. It focuses especially on the rules and statutes adopted during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Belgian, international, and European law. For the history of contemporary Belgium, the research intends primarily to clarify the role occupied by these sectors in the construction and evolution of the Belgian state. This fascinating history exerted, from the nineteenth century, an exceptional influence on the functioning of the state. Political science often describes this operation in three successive models : Liberalism in the nineteenth century; the Welfare State at the heart of the twentieth century, and finally, since the late 1980s, the emergence of a new model, sometimes called the Regulatory State. Network industries have always been at the heart of these transformations. Historical analysis also reveals the shortcomings motivating the choices made by governments, notably through the political instrumentalization of these choices. The originality of this thesis lies finally in an interdisciplinary approach, with de Broux using his wide-ranging historical research to enrich an understanding of legal theory.

BRECHT DESEURE

A usable past. The politics of history in Belgium during the French Regime (1792-1814) - [Original Title : *Een bruikbaar**verleden. Geschiedenispolitiek in België tijdens de Franse periode (1792-1814)*]*Universiteit Antwerpen, Departement Geschiedenis, 2011. Supervisor : Bert De Munck; Joint supervisor : Marnix Beyen.*

Until very recently our knowledge of the political culture of the French regime in Belgium has remained hidden by the clichés of a body of antiquated patriotic historiography. This dissertation parts the clouds through a detailed study of the public discourse, verbal as well as visual, of representatives of the French regime in Antwerp and Brussels. By focusing on the politics of history it brings to light the remarkable versatility of that discourse. Contrary to the established idea of the French administration as a centralizing and homogenizing force, administrators showed a remarkable willingness to adapt their discourse to the local context. With a view to making official discourse recognisable to the inhabitants of the occupied and annexed territories, ideological orthodoxy was purposely sacrificed in order to accommodate local historical sensitivities. As a result the universal ideals of liberty and equality were used to connect such apparently incompatible themes as Brabantine constitutionalism and local old-regime history. Furthermore, such adaptation did not stem from local initiatives but was encouraged from above during the Directory, the Consulate, and the Empire. These findings not only readjust the image of French administration as alien to the local context, but also unveil a hitherto unacknowledged aspect of the politics of history of these successive regimes.

PASCALE FALEK-ALHADEFF

A Precarious Life. East European Female Jewish Students in Interwar Belgium

European University, Florence, History and Civilization Department, 2011. Supervisor : Philipp Ther.

This thesis takes a variety of approaches from different research fields : social history, gender studies, Jewish studies, the history of higher education, and migration studies. Combining macro- and micro-level perspectives, the narrative follows the life story of a thousand female students. This global picture is complemented by individual case studies, providing both personal details and general narratives. In order to assess the experience of these female migrants, they have been systematically compared with local students, with male Jewish students, and with Eastern European female university graduates who studied in France, Germany, and Switzerland. This thesis demonstrates that precariousness was the price these women had to pay to climb the social ladder. They took major risks : they left their homeland, and with it the secure, comfortable middle-class environment in which most of them grew up. They consciously made the choice to challenge their condition and they took the gamble that they would improve their lives and achieve their dreams by taking such a chance. They were full of fighting spirit and had real ambitions to succeed.

VIRGINIE JOURDAIN

Brussels Hotel Industry 1880-1940. Actors, structures, and the spatial logics of a multi-faceted sector - [Original Title : *L'hôtellerie bruxelloise 1880-1940. acteurs, structures et logiques spatiales d'un secteur multiforme*]

Université Libre de Bruxelles, Faculté de Philosophie et lettres, section Histoire, and Université de Neuchâtel (Suisse), 2011. Supervisors : Serge Jaumain (ULB) & Laurent Tissot (Université de Neuchâtel).

This thesis suggests that temporary accommodation in the city should not be seen as a one-dimensional sector : lodgings as well as luxurious hotels have been deeply involved in Brussels' urban development. They served to regulate demographic and migratory flows to the capital. Moreover, the hotel sector should not be considered an industry focused exclusively on tourists' habits or as being confined to providing lodgings for poor workers. Between these extremes, different kinds of institutions offered specific services to a multitude of clients. Taking Brussels – a capital city – as an example offers a wide perspective for studying the urban hospitality industry between 1880 and 1940. This thesis focuses on three main points for considering the complexity of the sector : firstly, it characterizes the multi-faceted nature of accommodation in the city; next it identifies the hotel industry's actors, their social role, and their ambitions; thirdly, it analyses Brussels' hotel sector as a physical reality through the provision in the thesis of several original location maps and the definition of a new hotel typology.

CÉLINE PRÉAUX

The decline of an elite. The evolution of public discourse of the French-speaking community in Antwerp and the English-speaking in Montréal - [Original Title : *Le déclin d'une élite. L'évolution du discours communautaire public des francophones d'Anvers et des anglophones de Montréal*]

Université Libre de Bruxelles, Section Histoire, 2011. Supervisor : Serge Jaumain.

Summary not received.

ALINE SAX

'For Führer and Flanders'. The motivation and world view of Flemish collaborators during the Second World War - [Original Title : *Voor Vlaanderen, Volk en Führer, de motivatie en het wereldbeeld van Vlaamse collaborateurs tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog*]

Universiteit Antwerpen, Faculteit Letteren en Wijsbegeerte, departement Geschiedenis, 2012. Supervisor : Herman Van Goethem

Historiography as well as the collective memory in Flanders has long been dominated by a very narrow and restricted view of collaboration with the German occupying forces during the Second World War. This view has put a strong focus on Flemish nationalism, ignoring possible National Socialist elements in the motivation or thoughts of pro-Nazi collaborators. This dissertation draws up a new typology, grouping collaborators who share the same sets of motives, and investigates their ideology and world view. Based on a discourse analysis of ego documents, the author draws four important conclusions : 1) collaboration was not only an economic or ideological decision, but also a social act; 2) ideological collaborators adopted a double identity; they identified themselves with the

Germans and national-socialism, but also remained true to their Flemish identity; 3) Hitler was seen as the ‘ultimate leader’, who would lead them into a brighter future; and 4) this brighter future could only be achieved through a very strong commitment.

DIETER VANDENBROUCKE

Dancing on a volcano. Victor J. Brunclair as a representative of the activist anti-tradition in Flemish literature (1899-1944) - [Original Title :

Dansen op een vulkaan. Victor J. Brunclair als representant van de activistische tegentraditie in de Vlaamse letteren (1899–1944)

Universiteit Antwerpen, Departement Letterkunde, 2012. Supervisor : Kris Humbeek

The central topic of this work is the complex role played by Victor J. Brunclair (1899-1944) –one of Flanders’ most important pioneers of literary expressionism – in both politics and culture during the interwar years (1919-39). His general value as a cultural ‘symbol’ was primarily connected to his struggles with the duality of ethical and aesthetic concerns which are inherent to every politically conscious writer. The fact that his Flemish idealism was to a large extent influenced by Flemish Activism and its post-war after-effects, is of the utmost importance. This thesis successively treats Brunclair’s early steps as a writer in the broader context of the pro-Flemish climate during the First World War, his colorful role as an avant-garde artist during the 1920s, his battle for artistic freedom during the 1930s, and finally his role as resistance hero (for one side) and collaborationist activist (for the other side) during the Second World War, ending with his death in a German concentration camp.

LIES VAN DE VIJVER

Gent Kinemastad. A multi-disciplinary research project on the history of film exhibition, programming, and cinema-going in Ghent and its suburbs (1896-2010) as a case study within New Cinema History research - [Original

Title : *Gent Kinemastad. Een multimethodisch onderzoek naar de ontwikkeling van de filmexploitatie, filmprogrammering en filmbeleving in de stad Gent en randgemeenten (1896-2010) als case binnen New Cinema History onderzoek*

Universiteit Gent (Vakgroep Communicatiewetenschappen, CIMS / Centre for Cinema and Media Studies), 2011. Supervisor : Daniel Biltreest.

This doctoral thesis is inspired by the perspectives of New Cinema History which seeks to achieve a social history of a cultural institution and aims to identify film as a cultural artefact consumed by a variety of audiences. Using these three perspectives, the doctorate focuses upon the history of film exhibition, film programming, and cinema-going in Ghent and its suburbs (1896-2010) using a combination of different methods. First, a longitudinal database has collected historical data on the differentiated forms of film exhibition (such as personnel, financial data, architecture, and infrastructure) based on archival material. Second, this historical reconstruction of the film exhibition scene is complemented by film programming research done in local newspapers-archives from the 1930s to the 1970s, with a particular focus on the *Capitole* cinema. The films shown, the popularity, and the distribution of mostly foreign films were analyzed to reveal the distinct programming strategies of cinemas and a flux distribution hierarchy. Third, large-scale oral history research was

conducted to analyze accounts of film-going and everyday life in and around the city. As such, trying to triangulate the results of these three distinct research phases, the doctorate discusses the tensions between commerce and pillarization, cultural and social practices in their urban context, and the experience of modernity and everyday life.

GENEVIÈVE WARLAND

The public use of history : nation and Europe in the works of Blok, Lamprecht, Lavisse, and Pirenne; Ferry and Rüsen - [Original Title : *L'usage public de l'histoire. Grammaires de la nation et de l'Europe chez Blok, Lamprecht, Lavisse, Pirenne; Ferry et Rüsen*]

[Original Title : *L'usage public de l'histoire. Grammaires de la nation et de l'Europe chez Blok, Lamprecht, Lavisse, Pirenne; Ferry et Rüsen*]

Interdisciplinary thesis in History and Philosophy, 2012. Supervisor : Nathalie Tousignant (FUSL).

The public use of history is related to the creation of a historical consciousness in society. During the period 1870-1920, this was principally oriented towards the creation of a national consciousness by showing the continuity between the past and the present. The national histories of the Liberal historians, Blok, Lamprecht, Lavisse, and Pirenne, which are at the heart of the analysis, best demonstrate the double purpose of such historical writing, which was primarily intended to establish history as a science without, nonetheless, neglecting its civic purposes. Their historical writings also showed the interrelatedness between European countries, which served also as a plea for the maintenance of peace. At the end of the twentieth century, the philosophers, Ferry and Rüsen, reflect on the atrocities of that period of history, in particular the Holocaust, by paving the way for a responsible historiography, which aims

for the mutual recognition of the differences among cultures and countries and looks to the construction of a European civic society. In both cases, historians and philosophers ascribe to history an ethical value for the sake of humanity.

ANDREW G.S. WILSON

What sways generals ? Personal factors, including age, in military decision-making in the wars of 1870-71 and 1914-18

K.U. Leuven, Department of History, 2011. Supervisor : Luc de Vos; Joint supervisor : Louis De Vos.

This thesis identifies individual psychological and emotional factors in the making of crucial military decisions. As well as dealing with senior military commanders, it also analyses the behaviour of civilian leaders with strategic responsibilities in the two wars in question. The experience of war in 1870-71 is identified as a particular emotional factor in decisions taken in the subsequent war; as was the British experience of the Boer War in South Africa (1899-1902). Conceived as an essay in military history, and specifically that of two wars which largely determined the present shape of Europe, the thesis starts by recalling the common theme of European poetry and literature in the 1920s, to the effect that the great suffering of the war of 1914-18 was attributable to the conceit of an elite of 'old men'. It then sets out to provide a psychological and human explanation as to how that experience became possible when power was located in the hands of nationally respected leaders.

WILFRIED WOUTERS

**Catholic Brothers in the Education
System for Art and Architecture.
The Saint Luke Schools in Belgium**

1866 -1966 - [Original Title : *Broeders in het
kunstonderwijs . De Sint-Lucasscholen in
België 1866-1966*]

K.U. Leuven, department Geschiedenis, 2011.

Supervisor : Jan De Maeyer

The Saint Luke Schools make up the Catholic education system for art and architecture in Belgium. The institutes in Brussels, Ghent, Tournai, and Liège constitute in total more than six thousand students in higher education. This doctorate outlines the origins and development of these institutes. The creation of these institutes was made possible thanks to the generous financial support of the Catholic elite, both men and women. At the same time the dissertation analyses the methods and behaviour used by the congregation of the brothers of the Christian School, to take over during several decades almost half of the art and architectural education in Belgium. This organizational and material feat was only made possible by the obligation on the brothers to lifelong voluntary work for their congregations. To achieve this goal the brothers were bound by three vows and strict monastic rule. In contrast to their material success stood their pedagogical and artistic failure. Due to the restrictions of monastic life, a flexible art education was impossible. Only from 1958 onwards, after the school was taken over by laymen, did it become possible for these institutes to evolve as modern schools of art and architecture. Since the 1960s the graduates of the architectural section have played an important role in the architectural history of Belgium.