

Flemish Renaissance Revival

A very Belgian story

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This paper is a history thesis about the development of the architectural style called Flemish Renaissance Revival. It is a study about the development of the style in Belgium and abroad from the XIXth century onwards as well as its repercussions. The assignment came from the History thesis course during the first year of my master's degree at TU Delft University. This exercise is about conducting academic research about a chosen historical and architectural topic.

My interest in this specific topic came from my Belgian nationality. I lived in Wallonia my whole life, which is the south and French-speaking part of the country. My dad is Flemish and I always had a connection with Flanders and strongly think that as a multilingual and multicultural country, we should aim to understand each other's and understand this difficult history.

The difference in language, religion, culture, economic and political stance between the south and north can be an obstacle and a division for the country. However, the chaotic course of history created this country and it is consequently even more interesting and constructing to understand.

I would like to thank my tutor for her guidance, advice and knowledge she offered during this course and the writing of this thesis even though the pandemic and the remote education made the process of writing more difficult.

I hope you enjoy your reading!

Sophie Soenen

Delft, April 8 2021

The **Flemish Renaissance Revival** is a style developing around the middle of the XIXth century in the newly created Belgium, in pursuit of identity. The movement draws its inspiration from the **Golden Age of Flanders** during the Renaissance which had a strong architectural identity. The style started in **Antwerp** where it became really popular and rapidly spread to Brussels. The pavilion presented for the International Exposition of Paris in 1878 embodied this national style. Despite all of this, the style did not manage to become widely used in the whole country and even less in Wallonia, the French-speaking part of the country. How did a style that was intended to be national and represent the whole nation is now a symbol of **Flemish separatism**?

Through examining contemporary and modern sources on the subject, the Flemish Revival will be explored with an architectural but also social and political approach.

The **historical, social, political and linguistic** situation implies the **division** between the communities since the creation of the country. The lack of representation and the sense of belonging from a part of the population and the rise of the Flamingant movement at the same period influenced the Flemish Revival's tracks. The style stayed restrained to a small **Flamingant, liberal and bourgeois** part of the population and is now seen as the Flemish style, as its name implies, without representing the whole country.



Figure 1: Caserne des Carabinier in Schaerbeek by Otto Geerling built between 1890 and 1894

Every six years in Belgium the same usual comedy takes place during elections times. The burning questions are obviously «Are we going to have a government this year? » but also the more and more pressing «Are the separatists going to rise and gain the majority this time around?» If the rising Flemish separatist party was to secure the majority at the elections it would mean undertaking the separation of the country into two distinct entities: Flanders and Wallonia. Since the creation of the country in 1830 after the bourgeoisie revolted against the Kingdom of the Netherlands, social, political and linguistic tensions have been recurrent but the nation always managed to keep itself in one piece. The maxim of the Belgian country is indeed «Strength in unity.» During the end of the XIXth century, a stylistic movement called Flemish Revival Style or Flemish Neo-Renaissance, tried to unite the two disparate parts together and establish a new identity for the newly united nation.

The Flemish Revival is an architectural style born during the middle of the XIXth century after a rise of interest in the history and the past of the nation. This style gathers inspiration from the Dutch Golden Age and Middle age architecture but incorporates all of the modern techniques and facilities. By taking parts of the French tradition and fuse it with the Dutch culture, a new style was created that was supposedly tailored to represent each side of the country equally. The movement was frequently used as a nationalist political statement by the liberal party and was their answer to the lack of coherence of the nation. The style first appeared and then developed in Antwerp, considered to be an exemplary Belgian city since the Renaissance for its wealth, culture and architecture. At the time the port city happened to be remodelling its southern district right while the Flemish Revival was rising in popularity. The Flemish revival style was therefore used to create large coherent ensembles in these newly created streets. Space is given to art and artisans but also the modern techniques that were used made the Neo-Flemish Renaissance an intrinsically social movement that eventually leads to the Art Nouveau style.

From the beginning, the Flemish Revival was intended as a national style and was even presented as such for the Belgian Pavilion during the international exposition of Paris in 1878. As we are going to explore the style in more depth in the following thesis, it will become apparent that it didn't achieve all of its promises. The south and French-speaking part of the country did not feel represented by the style and argued that the north and Dutch culture was more put forward. To this day this style is remarkably similar looking to the architecture from the Middle Ages in Flanders and a non-informed eye could understandably confuse both styles. Walloon architects even attempted to develop their vision of the Belgian style to oppose it to the Neo-Flemish without a lot of success. The flamingantist movement, which is a group defending the Flemish culture and language used the Flemish Revival in their quest for recognition but the style also cultivates connections with the separatist movement.

The fundamental question prevails: how did a style that was intended to represent an entire nation evolve to become an icon of the Flemish separatist movement and leave half of the country unrepresented? Another question can therefore be asked given the fact that the Flemish separatist movement is still strong to this day and the Flemish School of architecture is significantly important. Flemish architecture is very distinct compared to the architecture of the rest of the country and is highly publicised. Moreover, it gets more and more influential at each new generation of architects coming out of its door. Is there a relationship between the Flemish Revival at the time of the rise of flamingantism and the current modern Flemish architecture?

This research is conducted by examining contemporary books and papers dating back from the XIXth century to current publications as recent as 2019. The writings range from books, theses, research papers, collections of images, theoretical analysis of the functioning of the political structure in relation to the study of the social and linguistic problems the country faced since its creation in 1830.

To be able to appreciate the style in its entirety, it is required to understand the history of the country and the problems it faced. The subjects range from the ambition of the style to the evolution with time and the repercussions this had on the county but also on a wider scale. This subject has not been as addressed as much as a lot of other European styles. Nevertheless, a compilation of research has been carried out throughout the years and by combining all aspect of this research a complete picture of the Neo-Flemish Renaissance can be depicted for the whole country and even abroad.

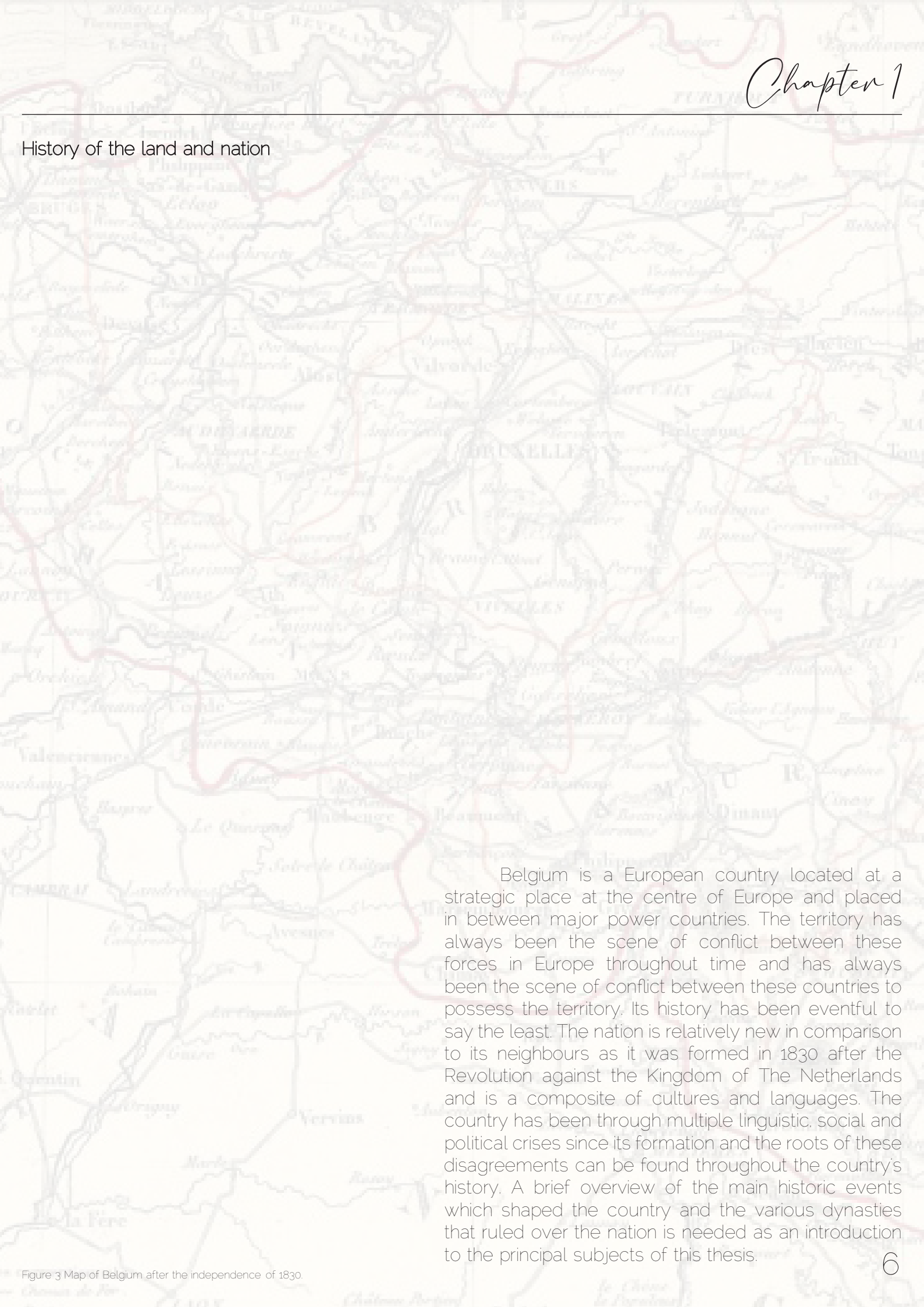
This thesis is organised in chronological order. It starts with the history of Belgium and how the country came to constitute a distinct entity, including the political, linguistic and social problems already faced at the time of the creation of the country. A brief introduction to the Flemish Renaissance and Golden Age will follow to understand the connection with the style which took direct inspiration into the period. The focus will subsequently be on the commencement of

the style in Antwerp through an introduction to the city and its history. The way the style was created, introduced and developed but also its characteristics and messages are going to be elaborated. The Vlaamse Kaai is taken as a reference to illustrate the urban use of the Flemish revival during the second Golden Age of Antwerp. This street is a prime example for the subject because it was developed at the same time as the Neo-Flemish style was gaining significance and therefore the integration to the urban fabric will be examined. The following chapter is about the spread of the movement in the whole country and even abroad. Flemish Revival quickly gained importance in the rapidly growing capital of the county, Brussels. The transmission of the Revival in the rest of the country is gradual, slow and fairly moderate in the rest of the nation is slow and we only have a few examples in the rest of Flanders and Wallonia to this day. This research will be concluded by the exploration of the reminiscence of the Flemish revival in the current Belgian architecture and specifically Flemish architecture.



Figure 2 Gustave Janlet's house, 1877 by Emile Jalet

History of the land and nation



Belgium is a European country located at a strategic place at the centre of Europe and placed in between major power countries. The territory has always been the scene of conflict between these forces in Europe throughout time and has always been the scene of conflict between these countries to possess the territory. Its history has been eventful to say the least. The nation is relatively new in comparison to its neighbours as it was formed in 1830 after the Revolution against the Kingdom of The Netherlands and is a composite of cultures and languages. The country has been through multiple linguistic, social and political crises since its formation and the roots of these disagreements can be found throughout the country's history. A brief overview of the main historic events which shaped the country and the various dynasties that ruled over the nation is needed as an introduction to the principal subjects of this thesis.

History of the land and nation

Belgium before the creation of the country

The country Belgium is today was only formed in 1830 but the occupation of the land can be traced back to the Neolithic period (Tesch, N. 2014, p3). Celts tribes lived on the territory of what Belgium is today and was called Gaul. Julius Ceasar invaded Gaul around 50BC and the land was referred to as "Belgica." During the Roman Empire, it was considered as a strategic location for the communication network and abundance of resources (Tesch, N. 2014, p7).

Clovis I took over all of Gaul after the fall of the Roman Empire and a linguistic border appeared between the more Romanized areas and the ones belonging to these barbaric tribes. Carolus Magnus expanded Franc's territory during the VIIIth century at the head of the Merovingian's dynasty. This territory was divided when his son died and his three grandsons inherited each one part of the Empire. These three nations would later become France, Italy and Germany. The territories occupied by the Netherlands and Wallonia are attached to Lotharingia and a part of Flanders to Occidental Francia but remained connected to the Netherlands from a cultural and economic point of view because of the shared language (Donaldson, 1983, P21). From the XIIIth century, Flemish and Walloon cities are thriving due to the international trade and port towns like Antwerp, Ghent or Leuven gain importance.

The Netherlands and a part of Belgium are progressively united under the rule of the Dukes of Burgundy. Phillip The Good managed to assemble the majority of the land but never achieved to rally Luit's Principality and Stavelot Malmédy. The rest of the country is unified under the name of «Belgia Regia» during the XVth and XVIth century. The land is transferred to the Habsburg family when the daughter of Charles The Bold, a Duke of Burgundy gets married to Maximilian I of Austria, the future emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. Their son is the famous Charles V, or Charles Quint, who inherited his father's titles in as well as becoming the Lord of the Netherlands. His marriage to Isabelle of Portugal gave him the crown of Spain. Charles V was one of the most powerful rulers of his time.



Figure 4: The Netherlands during Charles V's rule, round 800



Figure 5: Europe after the division of Charles V's Empire in 843



Figure 6: Territories united by the Dukes of Bourgogne during the XV and XVIth century

History of the land and nation

The Emperor was born in Ghent and was particularly attached to the Low countries, which was the name given to the area, the Netherlands and the area flourished under its ruling. The rebellion against his son, Phillip II is considered the first "nationalistic" movement.

The Spanish war of Succession was resolved by the treaty of Utrecht in 1713 which divided the Netherlands into two separate parts. The Catholic South of the country, which later became Belgium, had been given to the Austrian Empire and had been called "Spanish Netherlands" (Donaldson, 1983, P24). They modernized the country while respecting the freedom of its people and the bourgeoisie flourished in the main port towns like Ghent and Brugges and adopted the French language, usually used in bureaucracy, trade and administrative field (Zolberg, A. 1974, P 187). Tension grew against the Austrian Empire at the end of the XVIIIth century because of the lack of consideration for the local identities. This new patriotic feeling and the chaos caused by the French Revolution in Europe led to the Brabantine Revolution which resulted in a brief declaration of independence of the United States of Belgium in 1789. The Austrian army rapidly regains control over the land because of the lack of cohesion of the revolutionaries.

The French Empire's army led by Napoleon invaded the country in 1789 and the land was under French administration until the fall of the Empire in 1815 but French was the main language spoken by the elite (Zolberg, A. 1974, P 188). The Allies created the United Kingdom of the Netherlands at the end of the Empire by unifying the Netherlands territories and Luij's principality under Willem I's rule. The country was supposed to be a country border to contain France from invading the rest of Europe. Shortly after the creation of the Kingdom, the Catholic and Liberal bourgeoisie of the South of the Netherlands united to gain more freedom and religious liberties in the Protestant land. These disagreements led to the Revolution of 1830 and the independence of the country is declared on the 4th of October in 1830.



Figure 7. The Netherlands under Austrian and Spanish rule from 1514 to 1795



Figure 8. Belgium after the declaration of independence in 1830

History of the land and nation

Belgium after the creation of the country

Following the Revolution and the Independence, the first constitution is posted on the 11th of February 1831 and instituted a Parliamentary monarchy where the Church is separated from the State. Leopold de Saxe-Cobourg and Gotha is chosen to be the sovereign of the newly created state. The country was invaded by Germany during the First World War, despite its neutrality. Eupen and Malmédy were allocated to Belgium after the war by the treaty of Versailles, regions which were previously German. The general unrest of Europe led Belgium to renew its neutrality at

the corner of the second World War but was invaded in 1940 and Leopold III capitulated. The Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg are under occupation during the entire second world war. The authority of the king was questioned after the war because of the ambiguous relationship he had with Nazi Germany during the war. This "Royal question" gained magnitude after the war when the country promptly got back up on its feet and Flemish refused to have a king to rule the country and Walloons did not want to have Leopold as sovereign. The king abdicated in favour of his son.



Figure 9 : « Events of the september days in 1830 on the place de l'Hôtel de Ville in Brussels» painting by Gustave Wappers, 1834.

History of the land and nation

Linguistic situation

The choice of French as the national language was evident and justified at the time of the revolution. The French-speaking bourgeoisie instigated and led the revolution as well as formed the country (Von Busekist, A. 1996, page 125). "The French language was then viewed by the ruling elites as a unifying instrument, whereas Flemish was perceived and resisted as an element of disruption and fragmentation" (Beaufays, J. 1988, p64). Therefore, the Constitution of 1831 is written in French but still allowed for freedom of language in the country, with the aim of bilingualism. People could choose the language they used in their day to day lives but the official affairs and business were done mainly in French. The official language of the country has only been changed in the revision of the constitution in 1993 where Freedom of Language is seen as a right. Dutch and German were recognized along with French as an official language.

The interest in the Flemish and Dutch language have been renewed in the literary and artistic fields around the middle of the XIXst century, just after the independence of the country, the historic and cultural value was not really acknowledged before that period. This renewed interest led to the rise of political, social and cultural Flemish movements better known as Flamingant movements and had the request of equality of language between French and Dutch. However, the movement mainly interested educated bourgeois. The common people spoke different dialect in their day to day life and showed little interest in this debate. «We have already indicated that the Flemish movement

was a petty-bourgeois movement: it still is, in a very broad sense, at the end of the last century»(Von Busekist, A.1996, Page 374). The Flemish movements saw the desire to establish bilingualism by the government as a way to instate French as the only language and plead for a Dutch taught education on the same level as the French one.

Universities and education were first established in Latin and then French, Dutch was integrated slowly(Donaldson, 1983. P24). Education was taught completely in Dutch only in 1930 with Ghent paving the road. From that moment, you can only go to school in the language of your region. These conflicts in the educational system about bilingualism and language, in general, are as recent as the 1967-1968 conflict between Flemish and Walloon students at Leuven University. Their slogan "Walen buiten" is pretty clear regarding their opinion on the presence of French-speaking students in Flemish universities (Grymonprez, S., Pjotr, H., D'haene, E., Demeyere, P. 2015). The same conflicts were found in public institutions as well. The linguistic conflicts and disagreements led to the creation of the official linguistic border in 1963 after the revision of the constitution. Since then the country is composed of three linguistic regions (Beaufays, J. 1988, p65). The linguistic discord found its pinnacle in the form of Brussels, the capital. The city is located in Flanders but is mostly French-speaking therefore Walloon and Flemish made claims over the capital but Brussels gained an independent status to keep the unity.



Figure 10: Flemish student manifesting against Walloon students in Flemish universities in the city of Leuven

History of the land and nation

Political landscape

Belgium is a composite country and its political landscape is no exception. It is a constitutional and parliamentary monarchy. It means the constitution instituted the King as the real head of state but the citizens elect their parliament and government. The vote was censal at the time and the very limited number of citizens who were able to vote was predominantly French-speaking.

Two main political parties have opposed each other since the institution of the country: Liberals and Catholics. Labourer's parties emerged around 1890 and advocated for the universal vote. This democratization of the vote as well as the increased use of Dutch in the national institutions expanded the political accessibility to the rest of the population. To palliate this disproportion between Flemish and Walloon power, the Constitution was amended in 1967 and instituted the four linguistic regions: Wallonia is French-speaking, Flanders is Dutch-speaking and the German region, German-speaking. Brussels, the capital of the country is established as a bilingual region. Multiple reforms led to the Federalization of the country between 1970 et 1993. This revision gave more power to each region and their own government (Larousse encyclopedia). The balance shifted between the two parts of the country in 1960. Previously

the south was wealthier and more industrialized than the north but the deindustrialization and the closing of the mines impoverish Wallonia. Flanders experienced economic growth and strives economically as well as culturally. The political parties don't exist on the national scene but only in the region since the federalization of the country (Beaufays, J. 1988, p69).

Since the turn of the XXth century, we can observe the rise of these Flemish separatist movement, which ask for the independence of Flanders with Brussels as capital and without the King as head of state. A Walloon separatist movement exists as well and ask for the reattachment of Wallonia to France but has had little impact to this day on the country's politics. Belgium was initially envisioned and created as a unity by the social elite.

The lack of consideration over half of the country's population, language and culture gradually led to a division between the nation's people throughout time. It generated a geographical separation of the nation but also political tensions and cultural misunderstanding. The dream of bilingualism of the founders of the country is long gone, and the rulers of the nation are trying to conciliate South and North to maintain peace and alliance.



Figure 11 : Satire of Belgium's division. Drawing by Tom, published in Trow.

Flemish Renaissance



The Flemish Renaissance Revival style takes directly its sources in the Renaissance period. The XVth and XVIth century were the Golden Age for Flanders thanks to trade and the craftsmanship of the biggest port towns like Brugges or Ghent. Technology, art, culture and architecture developed up to the apogee of sophistication during Burgundy's duke's reign. The Renaissance period still has influence over Flanders and Belgium to this day.

Flemish Renaissance

As stated in the previous chapter about the history of Belgium, Flanders's borders were not the same throughout its history. For clarification, we, therefore, need to establish Flanders as the major Flemish cities like Bruges, Ghent and Antwerp. The term "Low countries" is referring to the area that is nowadays occupied by Belgium, The Netherlands. It acquired its name because of the general low altitude of the land, sometimes even below sea level (Murray,A. 2017).

Flanders has known an era of prosperity from the XIIIth century onward favoured by its geographical advantage (Tesch, N. 2014, p24) and the density of urbanization, which was the highest in Europe at that time (Murray, A. 2017 a). The development of the harbour and the increase of port activities like the trade of art and crafted objects made Flemish cities thrive. The early development of the trade gave an advantage, and they assumed a leading position in the world for the import-export of goods and the quality and refinement of the products they traded (Tesch, N 2013, p24).

Certain towns like Bruges, Gand, or Ypres were allowed certain privileges and relative autonomy from the principal power through the use of charters. Some of these charters date from the 11th century but the apogee of the freedom accorded to Flemish cities was around the 14 and 15th century. A few ruling families took, therefore, control over these cities and this freedom allowed them to

develop rapidly "Thus the city charter families are a striking manifestation of the information flows which facilitated the exchange of legal concepts and other institutional arrangements between the diverse regions of the Low Countries."The intrinsic nature of the interregional competition itself encouraged cities to stay at the best of their art and develop more quickly (Gelderblom, O ; Jonker, J. 2012, p5).

This flourishing continued up and throughout the renaissance period during the XVth and XVIth century, known as the Flemish Renaissance. This period is considered as the region's Golden-Age. A blossoming of art, culture, literature and general sophistication took place during this period. The Brugundy's court was particularly refined and wealthy and built a culture of refinement around them "Their wealth and access to Flemish craftsmen enabled the dukes to produce one of the most visually splendid court cultures in western Europe" (Murray, A. 2017 b).This desire from the court to acquire prestigious objects was satisfied by the successful industry and the talent of the craftsmen from the region. Bruges, Ypres or Ghent were renowned throughout the Renaissance for their crafts and the abundant access to waterways made trade highly convenient and effective. Fine craftsmanship was spread all over the Flemish ports, their products were praised worldwide and exported globally.



Figure 13 : The shipyard of Antwerp in 1520, drawing by Albertina Wenen



Figure 14 : Les Époux Arnolfini , Jan Van Eyck 1434

Flemish Renaissance

The discovery of the new world brought immeasurable wealth to Flemish cities, beyond what the social elite ever experienced. The expeditions to Italy and the exchange of knowledge with Italian Renaissance painters and architects opened a new realm for Flemish artists. The establishment of Italian, Spanish and Portuguese colonies in the Flemish port town also created a turmoil of creativity (Schoy, A 1879, p49). Flemish cities soon became the epicentre of culture and erudition in Europe. Today we primarily think about the masters of oil painting but in reality, every craft was represented. The goldsmithing, sculpturing, tapestry weaving and press printing and even stained glass windows (Murray, A. 2017 a). Architecture also flourished during the renaissance, influenced by the Italian Renaissance but also Spanish art. "Anyways, as soon as they were initiated, our artists succeeded to combine the elegant gothic embroidery to the delicately profiled Greco-Roman curves" (Schoy, A 1879, p49).

The architecture produced is extricated and refined. The architects kept the traditions and habits of the region while integrating elements of the renaissance.

The first Renaissance buildings were more associated with Spanish architecture, certain elements like steep roofs and ornaments were also found in Spain (Schoy, A 1879, p85)

The most obvious examples are the main square in Brussels, Grote Markt and city Hall in Antwerp, the city Hall in Leuven, but there is also the episcopal palace in Luik or the Town Hall in Binche and some examples can be found everywhere in Belgium but also in the Netherlands.

Flemish painting, represented by Jan and Hubert Van Eyck, Rogier van der Weyden or Hugo van der Goes is thriving during the Renaissance. The connections between Flanders and Italy fuel creativity and inspire both ends and realism is more and more appreciated. The new world was discovered during the Golden Age and knowledge was spreading as it never did before thanks to the invention of the printing press by Gutenberg in 1450. Antwerp was one of the epicentre of the printing industry with the Moretus Plantin printing shop continuing almost half of the printing at the time. The diffusion of knowledge was also facilitated by the creation of universities their diffusion. It is at this period that the University of Antwerp, Ghent or Leuven appeared and are still in activity to this day.



Figure 15: Leuven town hall 1448



Figure 16: Brugge town hall 1376

Flemish Renaissance



Figure 17: Moretus Plantin's printing shop and house . XVIIth century



Figure 18: Episcopal palace in Luik built in 1526



Figure 19: First atlas by Abraham Ortelius printind by Moretus-Plantin's printing shop in 1570

The beginning of the movement in Antwerp



The fight for autonomy and the creation of a new country led to a search for identity. The politicians, artists and educators with nationalists aspirations were looking to create an identity based on the glorious past of the region. They also wanted to create legitimacy for this newly created nation in the middle of these already established countries. Scholars and architects took the Flemish Golden Age as a reference since Antwerp was living a second Golden Age after the demolition of the old fortification and the reopening of the Schelde. The city was the ideal centre for the development of the style and the XIXth century gave the initial momentum to the style, which spread more widely afterwards.

Figure 20 : Bird's eye view of Antwerp from the south by Lambert van Noort and Pieter Van der Heyden, 1569

The beginning of the movement in Antwerp

The XIXth century brought a variety of changes to Flanders and the city of Antwerp. First, the demolition of the old fortifications allowed the city to expand outside of the old walls. There is also the resurgence of the historicism movement and the general interest in history and culture of Flanders. The city gained its identity during the Xth century and the renaissance. The XIXth century ambition for the city was to reconnect with this grand history, these aspirations were led by the construction of civil, military and public architecture (Lombaerde, P. 2010, p162). During this time of quest for identity, Belgian scholars turned to the past of the region to find the roots and create an architecture purely Belgian. They were in search of a nationalistic style with solid historical foundations. At the time, two main styles were present in Belgium. One was the Neo-Gothic, a style inspired by the Middle Age architecture of Europe. The other one was Neo-Renaissance architecture which was directly reminiscent of the Greek and Roman architecture and was introduced to Flanders through the Italian Renaissance around the XVth century.

(Van Impe, E 2008, p167). Educators disregarded Neo-classicism. They considered it attached to the French culture and style from which they tried to distance themselves to preserve their Dutch and Flemish roots (Lombaerde, P. 2010, p153). It was also about rejecting the restraints of the neoclassical style « In architecture as in arts, it is about coming back to pitoresque form and in line with older traditions» (Mihail, B. 1998 pg80). They found their answer with the Flemish and Dutch architecture from the so-called "Golden-Age", which corresponded to the Renaissance period but also drew inspiration from the late Middle-Ages. Flemish Revival is a blend of the German and Roman roots of the Belgian culture combined with artistry and architecture. (Mihail, B. 1998, p1019).

The reissue of publications from the renaissance like "Architectura" by Hans Vredeman de Vries is showing typical Flemish renaissance facades and the collection of cartouches from Abraham Ortélius published in 1569 had a major impact on the knowledge about the Renaissance and the Flemish architecture, artistry and culture at the time.

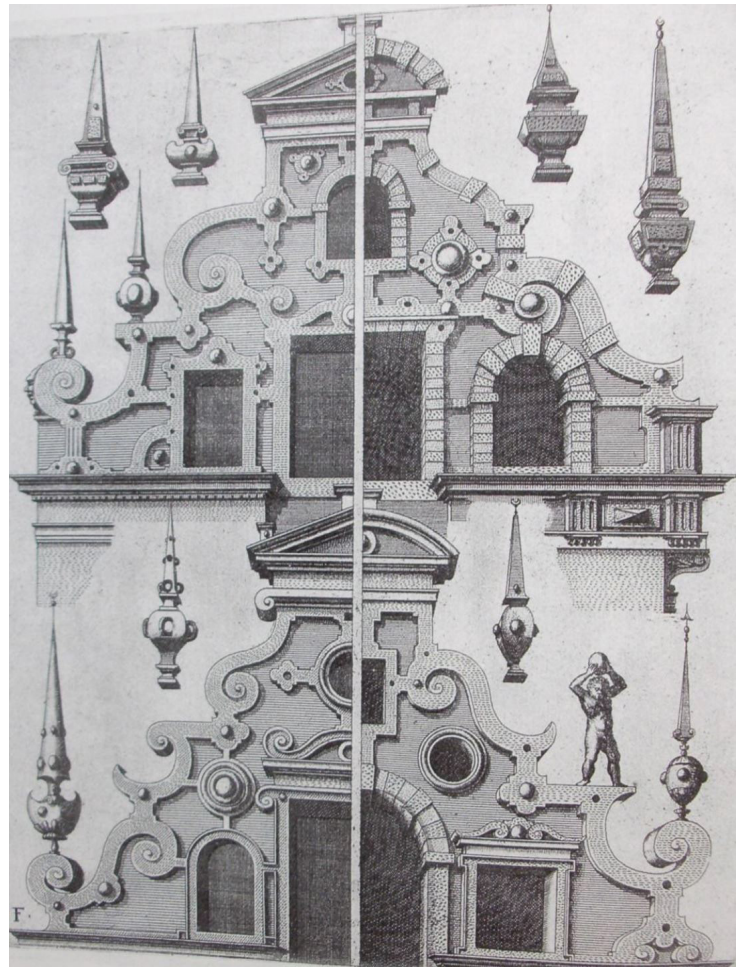


Figure 21: Hans Vredeman De Vries, Dorica-Ionica.



Figure 22 Flemish Renaissance interior of the Moretus Plantin museum in Antwerp

The beginning of the movement in Antwerp

The monuments and architecture of the Golden Age of the region were still engraved and visible in the city. The city was in the process of renovating a large amount of Renaissance buildings around the middle of the XIXth century. A few architects like the city's Pieter Jan Auguste Dens and Pierre Bruno Bourla were in charge of renovating and transforming historic buildings. (Lombaerde, P. 2010, p155). In the process, they discovered or rediscovered iconic and important Renaissance buildings as well as decors. For example, the Moretus-Plantin printing shop which is one of the only remaining printing shops of the Renaissance and a major centre of diffusion of knowledge at the time. The building was renovated and transformed into the museum, still open to this day (Bertels, I. 2007 p160). The architects gained a lot of knowledge about the Renaissance and the Flemish architecture from the Golden age through the realisations of Hans and Paul Vredeman de Vries or Cornelis Floris from the XVIth century. (Lombaerde, P. 2010, p162). The Renaissance architecture and elements discovered during the renovations inspired the architects in their contemporary work and they started to incorporate more and more historicists elements in their commissions. Supported by the booming development of the construction industry

with new materials and techniques thanks to the industrial revolution, buildings were constructed at a fast rate (Dubuisson, E in Les Nouvelles du Patrimoine. 2011, p17).

A lot of the pioneers in this architecture were also scholars, taught in the Royal Academy of Antwerp and therefore had the perfect platform to diffuse the style and movement onto a new generation of architects. Dens applied a Neo-Flemish tone to all of his work and taught at the academy (Bertels, I. 2007 p 152). Auguste Shoy was an architect and professor but also a writer, he vigorously supported the movement and demonstrated the link between Flemish Renaissance and Italian and Spanish architecture in his book «Histoire de l'influence italienne dans les Pays-Bas» (Lombaerde.P. 2010, p 153). The first elements, motifs or objects to have been associated with the Flemish Revival style date from around 1830 in some paintings within the Antwerp school sphere and from 1840 with some luxurious furniture (Willis, A. 1984, p 369). It led to the progressive apparition of Neo-Flemish constructions primarily in public buildings. These were essentially constructed to reflect prestige. The gradual emergence of the style was as much in the urban as in the rural context. (Willis,A. 1984, p



Figure 23 The Edict of Charles V by Baron Jan August Hendrik Leys. 1861

The beginning of the movement in Antwerp

The style emerging from the discoveries and research of the time is the Flemish Renaissance Revival style, also called Neo Flemish Revival. More than an architectural or artistic style, it was about the modernization of the country, economy and education through different channels like art, architecture, education and the dissemination of the nationalist values rooted in a heroic past. (Prina, D.N. 2018). At first, Neogothic and Revival elements were combined, achieving more of an eclectic style. The development and transmission of the neo-Flemish movement with time passing granted more coherence and definition to the style. The heart of the development of the style in Flanders, more particularly in Antwerp because the city was considered to be the perfect Flemish city by embodying the Belgian values and culture. It is also during this time of rediscovery of Flemish culture that the flamingantism appeared and rose quickly. «Curious coincidence that the first wave of the Neo Flemish Renaissance appeared in the city where flamingantism appeared, with the famous political party from the Meeting and to which multiple artists are affiliated with» (Benoit Mihail, 1998 page 984).

The stylistic movement, supported by intellectuals, artists, architects and politicians gained influence quite rapidly. Direct connections between Flemish Renaissance and neo-Flemish Renaissance style can easily be established. A certain romantic idea of the medieval buildings and culture was entertained but the historic models were freely interpreted (de Sejourne, D in Les Nouvelles

du Patrimoine, 2011 p16). Facades are usually richly decorated and carefully crafted. Motifs were directly inspired by Renaissance architecture and art. The alternation in the use of the red brick and stones as well as the use of patterns in the brick walls, elaborate steelwork, gable roof and rather steep tiled roofs are part of the aesthetic. (Willis, A. 1984, p55). The resemblance between a building from the Renaissance and one from the XIXth century can be striking. Even though the facades were medievaesque, the inside was equipped with all of the new technologies and comfort standards the times brought. This mostly meant plenty of light and an improvement of hygiene. The inspiration taken from the Renaissance was only about its sophistication in art and architecture, not in the technologies that was used in those times (Dubuisson, E in Les Nouvelles du Patrimoine, 2011, p17-18). Some criticized the Neo-Flemish style for being only a frontage and not all-around architecture. A few examples of the Neo Flemish style from the large architectural production in Antwerp are the city hall of Borgerhout or the neighborhood of Zurenborg in the south-west of the historical city.

Antwerp continues to provide the best historical representations for the style with a lot of buildings having remained intact. In the next chapter, the focus will be on the Vlaamse Kaai and the development of the south of Antwerp at that period in time.



Figure 24: Cogels Osylei street, in the Zurenborg neighbourhood in Antwerp

The beginning of the movement in Antwerp



Figure 25: house and studio for Jean Jacques Winters, 1882



Figure 26: Borgerhout's town hall by Leonard and Henri Blomme built between 1886 and 1889



Figure 27: Atheneum of Antwerp, 1880

Vlaamse Kaai



Figure 28 Vlaamse Kaai

Vlaamse Kaai

At the end of the 1850s, the ancient fortifications protecting the city of Antwerp were becoming too restrictive and needed to be expanded and modernized. The government decided to demolish the original defense system. This modernization revived the memory of the Golden Age (Derville, A. 2016, P. 350) and allowed the city to expand geographically and economically. The Schelde was opened and docks were created with direct access to the river in the southern part of the city where the Spanish citadel was established. The citadel was sold to the city and demolished ten years later. The vacated spaces created a vast area to build a new and modern district.

Different urbanization plans were made to accommodate docks and the new district and the final plan to develop 'The South' was made in collaboration with «Compagnie Immobilière de Belgique», a predecessor of real-estate companies. (Prims, I. de Meyer, R. 1998, p. 9). The Schelde had been closed for trade since the middle of the 17th century but Belgium purchased the right to trade on the river and reopened it in 1863. The harbour has also been dug deeper to accommodate larger and bigger amount of ships. Since that time, Antwerp has known a significant redevelopment (Lombaerde, P. 2010, p. 149) and was living a second Golden Age during the XIXth century. During the renewal period, Antwerp is still strongly associated with the flourishing port city of the Renaissance. The period inspired both the municipality and its city's architects in their attitudes towards existing architecture and the design of new buildings alike. (Bertels, I. 2007, p. 150).

Antwerp is the starting point and epicentre of the Neo-Flemish style. The city was considered to be the perfect example of the Flemish culture and successes during the Renaissance. The city preserved a large quantity of historic building dating from that enlightening period. The part of Antwerp that that is going to be focused on in this thesis is the Vlaamse Kaai. This street was part of the redevelopment of the south after the demolition of the Spanish fortifications. The authorities decided to create docks and canals to accommodate warehouses and workshops. The companies based in Flanders mainly used fluvial transport as a way of transporting goods and the commerce in Antwerp

was no exception. In 1876, the Vlaamse Kaai was created on one side of the dock which had direct access to the Schelde. The Waalskaai was erected on the opposite side of the dock. The entire South of Antwerp was divided into plots of land that were sold by the real estate company «Compagnie immobilière de Belgique». They created the «Sud d'Anvers» company to manage the distribution of the allotments. The whole neighborhood was intended to have a picturesque feel «The neighbourhood will present a particular picturesque aspect so as to provoke a fast sell of the plots» (Compagnie immobilière in Het Zuid by Prims, I. de Meyer, R. 1998 p. 12). The idea of Victor Delpierre, an architect of the SA SUD D'Anvers company was to create a new large neighbourhood that would be used as the prototype to replace Renaissance architecture from the XVth century, but also link the new district to the existing neighbourhoods.

The façade of the Vlaamse Kaai therefore became the reference for the so-called «better architecture» (Delpierre, V. in Het Zuid by Prims, I. de Meyer, R. 1998, p. 134). A combination of Neo-Flemish and Neoclassic ensembles, which were still the preference of greater number of people were built in the Vlaamse Kaai. A strong rivalry between the classical style and the so-called «modern» one developed. Critics were divided, on the subject, some denounced the monotony of the style due to its uniformity and some praise the charming association and the pleasant atmosphere of the neighbourhood. (Prims, I. de Meyer, R. 1998, p. 49). Eugene Violet-Le-Duc appreciates the efforts undertaken to find a new style and in 1884 he wrote, «The reign of the masons is over, the artists' one begins» (Violet-Le-Duc in her Zuid by Prims, I. de Meyer, R. p. 140).

The street created is remarkable by its coherence due to the brief extend of time the buildings have been built in and the relative similitude of style. The project of demolishing the old historic buildings thankfully never took place, but the Vlaamse Kaai remains exemplary in its architecture. The style developed in this pool of opportunities before venturing out of the city of Antwerp. Brussels quickly followed the lead.

Vlaamse Kaai

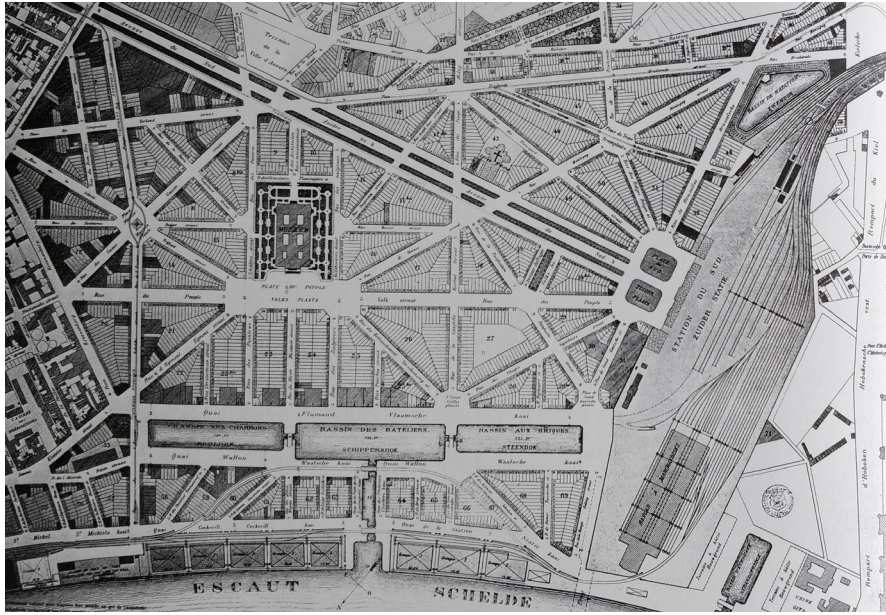


Figure 29: Urban plans for the south of Antwerp . 1883



Figure 30: view of the Vlaamsekaai and the docks. 1879



Figure 31: picture of a house on the VlaameKaai. 1883

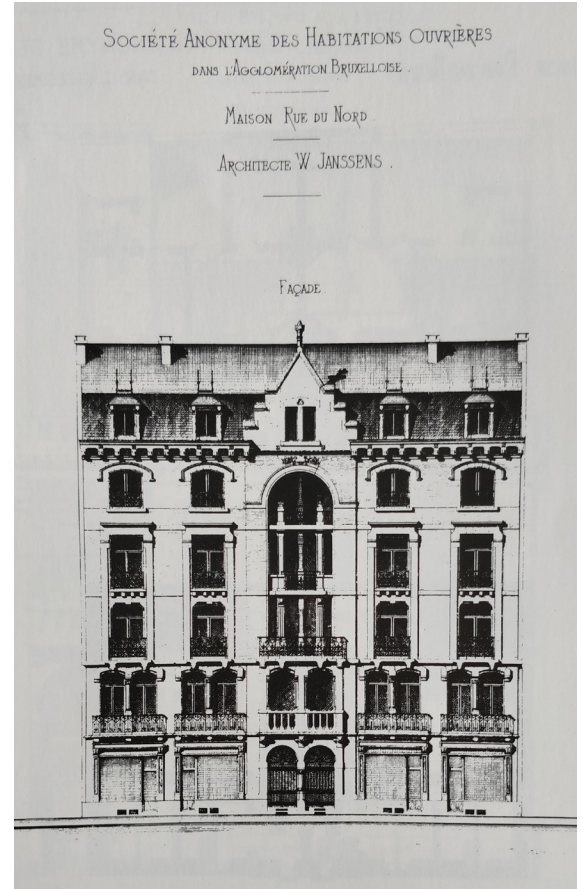


Figure 32: house on the Vlaamse Kaai



Figure 33: Vlaamse Kaai n°43, 42, 41 Antwerp

Diffusion of the Flemish Revival



Figure 34: Avenue Palmerson, Brussels.



Figure 35: Chateau de Strée, Modave, 1860 by Emile Vierset Godin

Diffusion of the Flemish Revival

The epicentre of the style's development is located in Antwerp and started around 1840 but once the movement took more magnitude, it quickly spread to Brussels first and then the rest of the country.

Brussels, the capital of the country came into contact with the style in the 1860's and this historicist trend. A multitude of buildings was constructed in a short amount because of the rapid growth of the city's population and the fast expansion of the city. A proposition to construct every new building in the capital in this "nationalistic" style was even proposed by Auguste Schoy. (Mihail, B. 1998 page 985). This frantic construction phase included a lot of public buildings like for example Schaerbeek train station and Schaerbeek city hall or the Flemish Theatre but also private houses and hotels and restaurants. The hotel du Knuyt, which was built around 1878 in an eclectic style with visible Flemish renaissance elements is one heavily decorated facades of the Renaissance Revival period. The Flemish is one of the only monuments that was built in the capital in Neo Flemish style. The facades are heavily decorated, and the alternate use of brick and stone on the frontages are an exterior sign of the style but the inside is also decorated in a Flemish style and features also a Flemish narrative with influential people's busts.

The rapid development of the outskirts of Brussels was taking place at the same time and generated a lot of commission for the Flemish Revival leading to the construction of homogeneous and harmonious streets and ensembles. Neighbourhoods like Schaerbeek, Sint Gillis or Anderlecht emerged due to the affluence of people coming from the countryside and wanting to live in the city but also wealthier people seeking to avoid the congestion of the city centre. Neo-Flemish renaissance style thrived in this nationalistic and liberal environment and a lot of buildings were constructed in the style.

Anderlecht is a notable example of the interest in the style in the capital. It is a municipality on the south out of the pentagon, which is the historic centre of Brussels and was being developed at the end of the 19th century. The town hall, the tram depot or the place de la Resistance and the Colignon square were designed according to the Flemish Renaissance architecture (Dubuisson, E in *Les Nouvelles du patrimoine*. 2011, p19).



Figure 36: Schaerbeek's town hall, 1884-1887



Figure 37: Train station in Schaerbeek, 1888



Figure 38: Flemish theatre, Rue de Laeken 146, Brussels

Diffusion of the Flemish Revival

Sint Gillis is in a similar situation and is located next to Anderlecht in the south of Brussels. It started to develop around the XIXth century due to the plethora of wealthy people, looking to live in close proximity of the central power. The gate of Sint Gillis is almost completely in Neo Flemish and a significant number of houses was built in Flemish Revival in the whole municipality.

Neo Flemish Revival was also the style of choice for academic buildings. A commentator even claimed that the style was going to instill "the taste of beauty" in students. (Mihail, B. 1998 page 1003). Even though the facades were usually relatively simple, the fundamental features of the style were present, usually in brick with carved stone elements and a steep roof. A few examples of academic buildings are Jules de Blois's public school located in Ixelles, a neighbourhood next to Sint Gillis. (Willis, A. 1984, p255), and the faculty of Law, philosophy of the Université Libre de Bruxelles, designed by Alexis Dumont. The construction of schools and universities with a Neo-Flemish style in Brussels and its links with liberalism led the style to become the emblem of laic education and facilitated the diffusion to the rest of the country.

With time passing, the Neo-Flemish style adopted more and more elements from other styles like Neo-Gothic and Neo-Classic architecture. This pushed the style into a more eclectic direction during the later period of the 19th century. (Dubuisson, E in *Les Nouvelles du patrimoine*. 2011, p21-22).



Figure 39: Avenue Ducpétiaux, n° 76 Brussels.



Figure 40: Université Libre de Bruxelles. 1924 by Alexis Dumont

Diffusion of the Flemish Revival

The style was considered as the national style only after the Universal Exposition of Paris held in 1878. Nationalism was present in every country at the end of the 19th century in Europe after the war between Prussia, and France precipitated an economic crisis and each nation was trying to define themselves and their population. The artistic and architectural style of each country and their particularities were a substantial factor in the 'national' style of each country and reflected the history and culture of the said country (Verhelst, J. 2011, p47). It is in this context that the Universal Exposition of Paris took place in 1878.

These expositions were organized to showcase the modern technological inventions but also display the prestige of your country through art, architecture and culture. In the case of Belgium,

the liberal party was rising and Emile Janlet, an openly liberal architect was chosen to build the Belgian pavilion. The building was considered «a true symbol of the Flemish neo-Renaissance, liberal, national and social.» (Mihail, B. 1998 page 1006). The pavilion contributed to the dissemination of the Flemish art and culture throughout the world (Bertels, I. 2007 p 168). The ambition of the commission and Janlet was to build a pavilion entirely Belgian, from the materials sourced from throughout the country to the technologies and techniques used. They wanted to showcase a real Belgian building embodying the spirit of the nation as well as its history and the pavilion constitutes a sort of introduction of the style and what it represents to the international public (Verhelst, J. 2011, p58).



Figure 41: Belgian pavilion for the Paris 1878 exhibition by Emile Janlet

Diffusion of the Flemish Revival

The dispersion of the Flemish Revival style in the country can be considered as slow. Flanders was touched more rapidly than Wallonia because of the proximity to Antwerp. Outside of the big port city, the north of the country was not industrialized. Flanders mainly consisted of agricultural land and farmsteads. The Neo-Flemish style developed broadly in Flanders but was mainly chosen for housing. The architecture developed in the north was not as extravagant or sophisticated as in Antwerp or Brussels but gathered the most prominent and visible elements. The architects practising in Flanders were mainly educated in cities like Antwerp, Ghent or Brussels where the style was heavily used, and they brought back

their knowledge in their practice. Even though the style did not gain as much magnitude in Flanders in general as it did in Antwerp, Ghent became a significant centre of the movement. A large number of institutions civil buildings as well as housing. However, elsewhere the production mainly stayed in the domestic architecture and the public domain remained really unexplored. The diffusion of the style was also stimulated by standardizations of the architectural forms and the production of standardized elements produced in factories around 1880 (Mihail B. 1998, p 980). Flemish Revival reached the coast to accommodate wealthy clients used to the highest standard during their vacations. (Willis, A. 1984, p 237.



Figure 42 Post office in Ghent, 1889 by Louis Cloquet

Diffusion of the Flemish Revival

During the XIXth century, the south of Belgium was more industrialized and generally wealthier and prosperous than the north, with the exception of the port towns. The mining and steel industry has been thriving since the industrial revolution and the invention of the steam engine (Rousseaux, V. 2015, p23). At this time, a plethora of newly wealthy industrials was investing their money in the construction of their estate. The rich industrials who were living in the capital built their leisure homes in the countryside thanks to the increasingly developing railways and trains.

At first, it was mainly outside Brussels but soon the style spread in the Hainaut and Waals Brabant provinces before venturing deeper into the country with Luik and Luxembourg. In order to anchor themselves and their wealth in the Belgian landscape, many newcomers opted to erect castles referring to the rich and powerful rulers from the Middle-Age. These castles were obviously provided with all of the innovative technologies and comfort of the period. The style of choice was the Flemish Renaissance Revival. «Flemish Renaissance revival and its forms inspired by the glorious hours of an idealised nationalist past had everything to attract new châtelains in quests for identity » (Resseler, M. In Les nouvelles du Patrimoine. 2011, p27). For exemple, Emile Janlet designed the Château des Caillous in Jodoigne for a rich real estate businessman. Gustave Boël, as both entrepreneur and engineer, might have

designed his chateau in La Louvière and it is a symbol of the Flemish Revival in the countryside. We can also find more subtle use of the style like in the renovation of the Chateau de Strée in Modave, deep into the province of Namen (Resseler, M. In Les nouvelles du Patrimoine. 2011, p27).

The connection between Flemish Renaissance Revival has with the political world encouraged the style to be used in civil architecture all around the country. Liberalism was in vogue because of the industrial revolution during the XIXth century. During the early days of the movement in Wallonia, banks and train stations were more often designed in Flemish Revival than domestic buildings. It was mainly to represent Belgium's culture and architecture. The post office in Ciney, a small town in Namen's province and the train station in Turnhout is a perfect example of that. «According to a Walloon writer, the main merit of Beyaert's Turnhout station is that it is Belgian, essentially Belgian, both in style and in the materials used in its construction » (Mihail B. 1998, p 1010). Public buildings are representing the country and by choosing this 'national' style and they are conveying the image of the country with the technological progress and abilities but also the resources to the public seeing the building. A substantial amount of schools and academic buildings were also built in this style as stated in the previous chapter.



Figure 43: Chateau Boel, La Louvière. 1908

Diffusion of the Flemish Revival

Flemish Renaissance Revival wasn't welcomed everywhere in Wallonia and a more local revival was preferred (Willis, A. 1984, p 349). Even though it started as a nationalistic ideal, the movement had been used as a Flemish statement and Walloons felt left out from the style and they

soon denounced the overuse of it. A few Walloon architects even tried to counter the Flemish style with the neo-Mosan, which is a revival of the Mosan architecture, a style present around Luik province around the 16th century (Phillippe, J. 1963,)

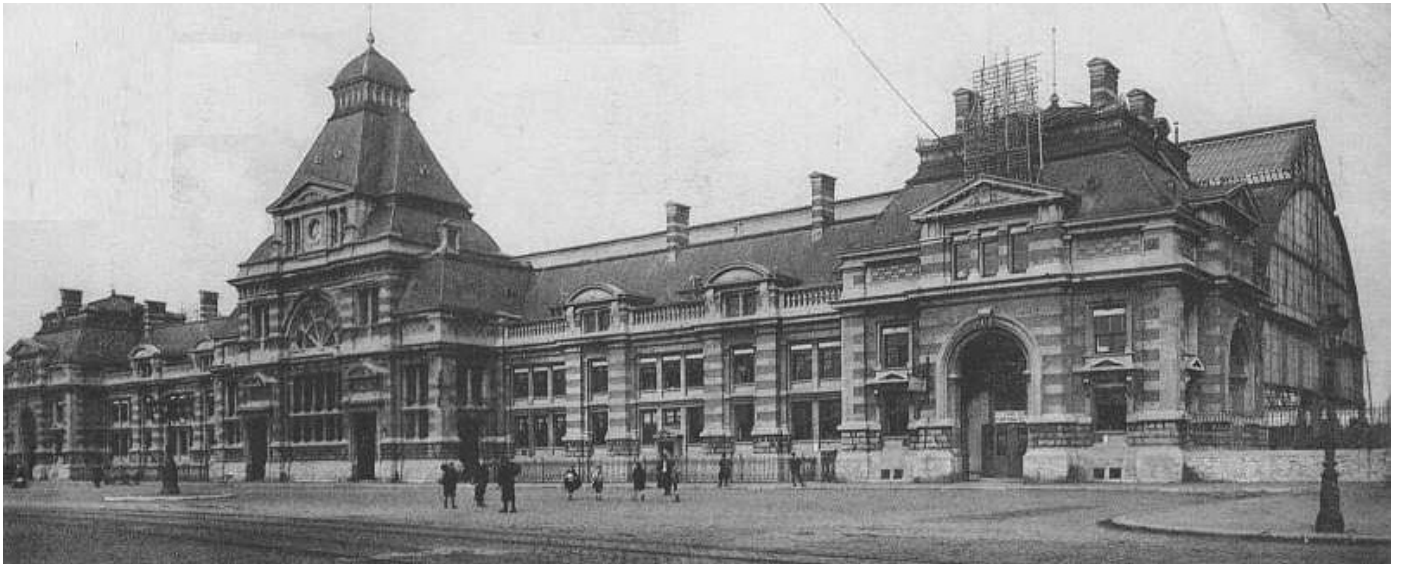


Figure 44 Turnhout's train station, 1879 by Henri Beyaert



Figure 45 Example of Mosan architecture : Curtius Palace, 1600, Luik



Figure 47 Old Library, Delft



Figure 46 Post office in Ciney

Diffusion of the Flemish Revival

A few examples of Neo Flemish architecture can be found outside of Belgium and even as far as the United States. The Netherlands and the West of Germany also have been touched by this style. A good example of the style abroad is the old library in Delft, built in the later years of the movement in 1915. More famously, the Amsterdam Centraal station, built in 1882 and designed by Pierre Cuypers is in a Renaissance Revival inspired style. ((History Amsterdam Centraal 2019))

France surprisingly also experienced a surge of Flammingantism and the Flemish movement. It was mainly a romantic discovery of the Belgian culture, also present in the north of the country, by the French (Mihail, B. 2005, p634). Calais town's hall is a striking example. Neo Flemish architecture appeared overseas around 1890 mainly on the west coast.

The style was introduced in the USA because of the Dutch colonial past in America but also a large number of European immigrants and more particularly German migrants. The first skyscraper in Milwaukee, a town in the state of Wisconsin, just under New York state, had been built in a Neo-Gothic style with visible influence from the Flemish architecture. The building has sadly been demolished but was an inspiration for the new Town Hall for the city, also very visibly inspired by Flemish architecture. A few architects also chose the style because "Flemish Renaissance Revival architecture represented the freedom to experiment with a variety of materials and architectural types as well as signifying a progressive and technological approach." (Findlay, M. 2018). The Neo Flemish buildings in the Washington state are not as sophisticated as in Milwaukee for example but carry out the general idea of the style.

Flemish Renaissance Revival ended up being disseminated in the whole country with more or less success. Antwerp provided the first impulse and Brussels followed quickly. The countryside in Flanders and Wallonia were mildly touched, but a few buildings can be found, mainly concentrated in the cities. This architecture can also be found in the neighbouring countries and even on the other side of the Atlantic.



Figure 48. Pabst building, Wisconsin avenue



Figure 49. City Hall, Wisconsin avenue 1895



Figure 50: Brussels' main square during the flower carpet days

The Flemish Renaissance Revival is an artistic and architectural style deeply rooted in the socio-political and linguistic context of the XIXth century in Belgium and the connection with the national party and the ascent of the Flemish separatist party is explored in the paper. While the style gathers inspiration in Flanders' Golden Age, the movement tries to embody the century's technological, artistic and social expectations of the whole country. Intended to represent the whole nation at first, the rise of Flemish separatists and the lack of representation of the Walloon population derailed the path of the Neo-Flemish style. Born in Antwerp which was considered as the idealised perfect Flemish town from the Renaissance, the style thrived during the second Golden Age of the port city. The dismantlement of the ancient fortification gave XIXth century's architects the perfect playground to explore this new architecture, and the VlaamseKaai is the perfect example of the development of the style with his numerous ensembles. Brussels was particularly fond of this historicist architecture and was built all around the capital in the developing outskirts. The style gained in coherence and sophistication with the decades passing and the diffusion of the style was facilitated thanks to the increasing industrialisation of the construction. The style encompassed the culture and history of Belgium and more particularly the Flemish Golden -Age but it wasn't adopted massively in Flanders outside of Antwerp and Ghent. The spread to Wallonia was slow and wasn't embraced down to the south of the country. The examples remaining today are a few rich industrial's estates, academic institutions and civil buildings.

Flemish separatist parties are still gaining importance and, as they did in the XIXth century, use art and architecture to develop the Flemish identity with the ambition to create an autonomous country. The Flemish movement and region used culture and architecture to express their history and convictions. It's still very much present nowadays

and the separatists are rising and extreme right parties are becoming more and more powerful, using culture as leverage. Each election brings back the conversation about the scission of the country. The aim of the separatists is to divide Belgium and create a Republican and autonomous Flanders, the reflection of a past Golden Age. Because of their economic upper hand, Walloons had a monopoly over the country since its establishment. We saw in the previous chapters that the Flemish movement and identity started to develop shortly after the creation of the country, around 1840. Slowly but surely, Flanders obtained more recognition and power over its land and nation but we have to wait until 1960 to see a decent representation of Flemish industrial and political delegation and for Flanders to catch up economically. (Wim Mellaerts, 2005). The Flemish movement was involved in the Neo-Flemish renaissance because it was a revival of their Golden Age. Their culture, art and architecture were studied and recognized for their quality.

A similar pattern of interest towards art, culture and architecture can be found since the middle of the XXth century when the second wave of the Flemish movement took place. The Flemish government is very much involved in the culture of the region, employing it as a platform for Flemish architects and artists to develop art and culture but also develop economically and culturally. Even if they want to promote Flemish artistry, artists are afraid that their art and culture instead of being the key to open Flanders to the world could potentially become propaganda for autonomous Flanders (Wolinski, N. 2015).

At a time when regionalism represents a phenomenon touching the whole planet, the nationalist parties are constantly trying to anchor their beliefs and agenda with art, culture and architecture «Art, like citizenship, is a means to express oneself freely as a responsible human being»(Bulletin du Centre européen) de la culture et Courrier fédéral, 1967).

Thank you for your attention!

Sophie Soenen

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