

LA EDAD MEDIA NO ES SUFICIENTE: LA CUARTA PARADOJA
Y LA MARGINALIZACIÓN DEL IMPERIO ROMANO

The Middle Ages are not enough: the fourth paradox and the marginalization of the Roman Empire

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Abstract

The palates of the nationalist authors of the 19th century found the common past exemplified by the Roman Empire to be too homogeneous a taste. Although this premise may be valid for all European nationalist movements of the 19th and early 20th centuries, the discussion here is limited to Spain's problematic national construction during the 19th century and the group formed by Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg. Spain and 'Benelux' were chosen because they represent complex problems in the construction of a key dynamic of European nationalism: a political contemporary diversity linked to pre-Roman and post-Roman pasts. Despite these political and historical connections, the paths taken by these nationalisms are significantly different.

Key words

Rome, Netherlands, Spain, nationalism, Europe

Resumen

Un pasado común ejemplificado por el Imperio Romano pasa por ser demasiado homogéneo para el gusto de los autores nacionalistas en el siglo XIX. Esta premisa puede ser válida para todos los movimientos nacionalistas europeos, pero voy a limitarme a la problemática de la construcción nacional en España durante el siglo XIX y al grupo formado por Bélgica, los Países Bajos y Luxemburgo. Ambas regiones representan similares complejidades en la construcción de un nacionalismo europeo: una diversidad política contemporánea enlazada con un pasado prerromano y post-romano. A pesar de tener conexiones políticas e históricas, el camino de estos dos nacionalismos es significativamente diferente.

Palabras clave

Roma, Países Bajos, España, nacionalismo, Europa

Romanticism, nationalism, and modernity are concepts associated with the past and a certain idea of progress, change or destiny. As such, it is my intention to unite these three concepts in order to explain how we can touch one of the theoretical foundations of nationalist ideology: the mix of cultures recovered romantically for a modernizing project. Under this perspective, a common past exemplified by the Roman Empire revealed itself to be too homogeneous for the tastes of the nationalist authors of the age of nations. This premise may be valid for all the European nationalist movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but I limit myself to Spain's problematic national construction during the nineteenth century and Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg—Benelux as they are known following World War II, or the Kingdom of the Netherlands in 1815. I chose Spain and the Netherlands because they represent complex problems in the construction of a key dynamic of European nationalism: a political contemporary diversity linked to pre-Roman and post-Roman pasts. It is important to remember that nationalism in these two European areas are interconnected. Spanish nationalism has roots in imperial possession of the Netherlands as well as in the reception of Protestantism. The tension between Catholicism and Protestantism is also at the core of Benelux nationalism, thus creating interesting rejections of both Spain and ancient and Papal Rome. Despite these political and historical connections, the path of these nationalisms are significantly different.

European Nationalism and the Roman Past

During the age of nations of the nineteenth century, scholars of ancient Rome identified the Romans with a *people*, never as a *race*. The racial category was reserved for those with more *useful* duties in the construction of the nation. During the same period, the political description of Celts or any other race was simplified for the reason that a race was a natural *being* instead of a more *artificial* set of laws imposed to people. This rejection of Rome is consubstantial to European nationalism, specifically that of nineteenth-century liberalism trapped between the rationalism of the eighteenth-century and the fascism of the twentieth-century. However, part of the Roman past proved profitable for the political projects of nineteenth-century liberalism: the Roman Republic. In any case, the marginalization of the Roman Em-

pire opened the door for other historical preferences, such as the more *natural* and sophisticated Greeks, Egyptians, Phoenicians, and Celts. From this point of view, Rome needed the so revered complex legal system because without it the Romans would have been little more than degenerate perverts, as depicted by European authors of every political inclination.

In order to see the value of this foundation to European nationalism, we must first make a distinction between nation and nationalism. As proposed by the cultural historian and philologist Américo Castro (1885–1972), nation is a middle point between essentialism and invention. On one side, the nation is a system of metaphysical values—an amalgamation of essentials before the will of men and beyond historic time. On the other, the nation is a product invented by nineteenth-century nationalism, created by the liberal state in order to legitimate the state itself.¹

The term *nation* existed before the term *nationalism*. The first came from Latin *natio*, *nationis*, meaning a group of individuals living in the same territory, such as a town or larger regions. With the French Revolution of 1789, the concept of nation was associated with the concept of sovereignty: a nation was the collectivity of individuals ruled under law and represented by the assembly that created the law. Following this, the concept of cultural nationalism or ethno-nationalism emerged. Especially since the mid-nineteenth century, cultural nationalism contemplates a world naturally divided into cultures, which ideally are political entities. Since the foundation of the nation was cultural and not legal, in the tradition of the French Revolution, the ambiguity of language, race, religion or territory had to be solved in historiographical terms. In short, cultural nationalism gave historical studies its importance.² As the medievalist Bernard Guenée (1927–2010) once put it, history is itself a symbol of national identity. There is no nation without national history because the historians are the ones who create the nations.³

Nationalism became the substitute for social cohesion through a national Church, a royal family, or other collective self-representations. It became a laic religion.⁴ The nation under the Romantic umbrella was, therefore, more than the sum of its membership: «it was endowed with a soul and spirit of its own, even a destiny. The spirit of a nation expressed itself in its language, customs, and mentality. Each nation thus represented a unique cloned world which could achieve its own form of perfection distinct from that of other nations.»⁵

Keeping these conceptualizations of nations and nationalisms in mind, it is important to make reference to Benedict Anderson and his book *Imagined Communities* (1983),

1. R. García Cárcel, “Introducción”, in *La construcción de las historias de España*, Madrid, 2004, 13–14.

2. M. Díaz-Andreu, “Archaeology and Nationalism in Spain”, in Ph. L. Kohl and C. Fawcett (Eds.), *Nationalism, Politics, and the Practice of Archaeology*, Cambridge, 1995, 40.

3. García Cárcel, “Introducción”, *op. cit.*, 14–15.

4. E. Hobsbawm, “La fabricación en serie de tradiciones: Europa, 1870–1914”, in E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger, *La invención de la tradición*, Barcelona, 1983, 313–14.

5. H. Mouritsen, “Modern Nations and Ancient Models: Italy and Greece Compared”, in R. Beaton and D. Ricks (Eds.), *The Making of Modern Greece: Nationalism, & the Uses of the Past (1797–1896)*, London, 2009, 44.

in which he mentions three paradoxes related to nationalism. The first is how the nations are objectively a modern idea from the point of view of historians, placed alongside a subjectively old past from the perspective of nationalists. The second paradox is the universality *de facto* of nationality as a socio-cultural concept: an assumption that everyone must have a nationality while at the same time, each nationality has its peculiarities and manifestations. Finally, there is the paradox of the political power of nationalism that is emphasized over its poor and incoherent philosophy.⁶

I propose a fourth paradox related to nationalism: the strong uniformity and unity of nationalism, when it claims its unique heritage from a mix of previous cultures during its early foundational period. Ironically, Anderson quotes a Daniel Defoe poem at the beginning of his book, which describes a true Englishman as a combination of Briton, Scot, Saxon, and Dane. Between these two pairs in the poem is the Roman plow, a metaphor of the Roman (foreign) domination of the island. This points precisely to the fourth paradox mentioned before, overlooking the inconvenience of the Roman Empire, around which European nationalism was centered. It is not just the fantasies orbiting the medieval foundational mythology of what is national and romantic. My hypothesis is that the medieval references were not enough: the national identity was created using the medieval linked to the pre-Roman past, marginalizing the imperial Roman period (27 BC–476 AD).

It appears to me that the modernization process in Europe, which some authors identify with the medieval revival through Romanticism,⁷ is incomplete without a more complex and ancient past. For example, in the eighteenth century national origins were always sought among the Franks, and never among the Gauls; the national patriarch was not Vercingetorix, but Charlemagne.⁸ It is not until the Directoire in France that images of the national past which tally with the Revolutionary present and its ideals are developed: Gauls sacking Rome, an allegorical illustration of the glorious Italian campaign of 1796. In a conservative Directoire, the heroic style of Greek and Roman antiquity expressed its need for prestige; but the Ossianic⁹ mode allowed artists to venture beyond these sanctioned ways. A few years later, with Napoleon, a combination of Clovis, Charlemagne, and Ossian evolves.¹⁰ Could it be that

6. B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London, 2006, 5.

7. D. Conversi and M. Fuentes Codera, "A Medieval Route to Modernity? Catalan National Medievalist Discourses in the Broader Europe", in J. Agirreazkuenaga Zigorraga and E. J. Alonso Olea (Eds.), *Estatu-nazioen baitako nazioak: Naziogintza kulturala eta politikoa, gaur egungo European*, Barcelona, 2014, 327–40.

8. A. Jourdan, "The Image of Gaul during the French Revolution: Between Charlemagne and Ossian," in T. Brown (Ed.), *Celticism*, Amsterdam, 1996, 185.

9. Ossian was the narrator and author of a cycle of Gaelic epic poems. In reality was a forgery invented by the Scottish poet James Macpherson (1736–96). This *legendary* figure was important for both the Romantic Movement and the Gaelic revival.

10. Jourdan, "The Image...", *op. cit.*, 196–201.

it was not the Celtic revival,¹¹ but a combination of the pre- and post-Roman, woven together to achieve modernism and even post-colonial positions?

Still in the French case, Henri de Boulainvilliers (1658–1722) considered the conquest of the Gauls by the Franks to be the foundation of the state.¹² Under the new nineteenth-century nationalism, Gaul and Frankish components facilitated the French nation, as Britons and Saxons did for England. Some of my examples focus on small states, like Luxembourg, where the mix between pagan, Celtic, and medieval elements was used to create the history of the great duchy.¹³ For Spain, the combination of the pre-Roman Iberian and Celtiberian cultures with the post-Roman Goths was critically important. The Enlightenment gave Spain an Oriental and African touch. The Arab element was appropriated as a cultural complement of the Goths and, fascinatingly, was confused by historians and laypersons with the Iberians from the pre-Roman past.

The Enlightenment brought about a remarkable admiration for the Greek and Roman past, but the territorial and cultural power that Rome represented at the beginning of the Christian era was uncomfortable and was disregarded as a parenthetical. While it is true that comparisons between Rome and modern societies have been made in order to find an imperial referent,¹⁴ there are a great number of examples where the Roman Empire is linked to foreign invasion and subjugation: «For moderns, the provinces' roads, baths, *fora*, and cultural studies, celebrated by Tacitus (and Monty Python), are counterbalanced by frequent oppression, savage treatment of dissidents, and an oligarchic social structure».¹⁵

After 1800, the post-Roman period lost its poor reputation commonly known as the Dark Ages, a name given during the Renaissance. The first and clearest example came from the work of Edward Gibbon (1737–94), who said that, thanks to the barbarian invasions, the Roman spirit became more vigorous.¹⁶ Rome became the anti-imperialists' enemy, and each European nation discovered their own local champion against Rome: Arminius for the German; Vercingetorix for the French; Boudicca for the British;¹⁷ and Viriathus, Indibil, and Mandoni for the Spanish.

Finally, there is another important element that characterizes the nationalism and historiography of the nineteenth century. Arthur de Gobineau's (1816–82) racial theory, laid out in the opening book of the *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* (1853), is supported by his view that human history saw a succession of great civilizations, each of which had been initiated by a white, Aryan race. Among the groups that Gobineau saw as Aryan were the Hindus, Iranians, Hellenes, Celts, Slavs, and Germans. He described the Slavs,

11. G. Castle, *Modernism and the Celtic Revival*, Cambridge, 2001.

12. I. Wood, *The Modern Origins of the Early Middle Ages*, New York, 2013, 23–24.

13. Conversi and Codera, "A Medieval Route...," *op. cit.*, 329.

14. S. Mills, "Roman Imperialism: Critics and Aspirants," in D. Hoyos (Ed.), *A Companion to Roman Imperialism*, Leiden, 2013, 333–36; D. Hoyos, "Introducción," in *A Companion to Roman Imperialism*, Leiden, 2013, 2.

15. Hoyos, "Introducción," *op. cit.*, 2.

16. Mills, "Roman Imperialism...," *op. cit.*, 335.

17. Mills, "Roman Imperialism...," *op. cit.*, 337.

taking their history way back into the prehistoric past; the Goths; the slightly less pure Vandals; the purer Lombards, Burgundians, and Anglo-Saxons. The Aryan-German race, thus, came to protect Roman civilization, but not Roman unity.¹⁸ I consider it important that Rome represented, in the eyes of the cultural nationalism and the new racism, a simple political unity and not a race.

Fragmentation and Islamic Presence in Spain

Rome was considered something decadent, not in regards to its origins in the city of Latium, which were considered excellent, but rather its imperial rule. The idea of decadence explains why France of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was identified with Rome.¹⁹ This identification was part of the cultural attack on the French from British and Spanish positions. It is precisely the moral question that allows the perception of almost all Roman characters as part of the degenerate and cruel Roman power. There are few exceptions. For the purposes of my argument, Seneca and Trajan, both born in Hispania, are the names from the Roman past that are glorified by Spanish nationalists.

Politically and historiographically speaking, Spain encountered many problems in the creation of a national history. This is due not only to the Islamic presence for seven hundred years, but also the great diversity of independent kingdoms, which remained divided until the arrival of the Habsburg dynasty in the sixteenth century. This alone does not explain the historiographical gap of the eighteenth century: there is no history of Spain published between the seventeenth century and mid-nineteenth centuries. The most recent events, with the substitution of the Habsburg dynasty by the French Bourbon, after a civil war (1701–14), made any work under the title of history of Spain inviable.²⁰

There were, however, histories of Spain written in other countries, such as the works of Claude Buffier (1661–1737) and François Duchesne (1616–93),²¹ and in 1735 the Real Academia de la Historia was created. But the plan of homologating Spanish culture to the European Enlightenment via historiography never worked. The dream of writing an official history of Spain remained a dream, like the speech written by Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos in 1788 with the title *Discurso sobre el modo de escribir y mejorar la historia de España* that was not published until the year 1843.²²

With the journalist and historian Modesto Lafuente (1806–66), author of *Historia general de España* (1850–67)—the first of this kind since the seventeenth century—a discourse was established in which Spain had a lot of sources desired by foreigners. In that manner, the *disturbance* of the Roman Empire informs the creation of modern Spain in historiography and literature. For Lafuente and other historians of the nineteenth century, the Napoleonic

18. Wood, *The Modern Origins...*, *op. cit.*, 107–09.

19. Mills, “Roman Imperialism...”, *op. cit.*, 342–43.

20. García Cárcel, “Introducción”, *op. cit.*, 24.

21. García Cárcel, “Introducción”, *op. cit.*, 28.

22. García Cárcel, “Introducción”, *op. cit.*, 24–27.

invasion was the starting point. In the war against Napoleon, the guerrillas confronted the Napoleonic army and the historiography saw Spaniards in guerrilla warfare that were similar to the *first Spaniards* of the ancient times:²³ those that confronted the Roman invasion. In *Los españoles pintados por sí mismos* (1843–44), the journalist and writer José María de Andueza (1806–65) described the *guerrillero* type as someone attached to Spain and ready to fight against foreign or domestic enemies. For this author, the *guerrillero* can be Navarrese, Catalan, or Aragonese, but is ultimately Spanish and links the pre-Roman Viriathus with the post-Roman Pelagius.²⁴

The scheme developed in the histories of the Spanish cultural nationalism follow what José Álvarez Junco calls the paradise-fall-redemption movement. The fall always represents a moral degradation, corruption, effeminacy, and anarchism, like during the Islamic conquest. All nineteenth-century historians identified the origins of the Spanish nation with the Visigothic period, with the exception of Ferran Patxot y Ferrer, who went back to the pre-Roman Iberians.²⁵ The predilection of Patxot y Ferrer for the Iberians should not be seen separately from Lafuente and other Spanish historians, on the contrary. They knew little about Iberian culture. For example, in 1860 numerous sculptures in the province of Albacete were discovered that now are considered Iberian. These and other similar findings gave rise to different interpretations of their times, relating them to the Egyptians or to Visigoth martyrs.²⁶ They may have been Iberians, Visigoths, or anything other than Romans.

Spain as a land full of riches desired by foreigners, the search for the origin of the Spanish nation, and the issue of a divided population were the principal preoccupations of Spanish historiography of the nineteenth century. All or some of these ideas were already depicted by authors like Miguel de Cervantes in his *Numancia*, or earlier in the chronicle tradition of Christian Europe. The nationalist novelty was the capacity of combining an origin identifiable either with the Visigoths as well as the Iberians; thanks to Romanticism, the Arabism perspective was added to the mix.²⁷ Antonio Gil de Zárate, author of the first handbook of Spanish literature, accepted that Latin was imposed on the Iberian Peninsula with Roman domination, but he remarks that some of the ancient dialects survived in certain regions, in addition to the languages brought by Greeks, Phoenicians, and Carthaginians. In the opinion of Gil de Zárate, in the eighth century Greek, Chaldean, Hebrew, Cantabrian, and Celtiberian were still spoken in Spain, along with Latin. Latin became a *national language* when the

23. R. López-Vela, “De Numancia a Zaragoza: La construcción del pasado nacional en las historias de España del ochocientos,” in R. García Cárcel (Ed.), *La construcción de las historias de España*, Madrid, 2004, 289–90.

24. J. María de Andueza, “El guerrillero,” in *Los españoles pintados por sí mismos*, Madrid, 1843, I, 283–84.

25. García Cárcel, “Introducción,” *op. cit.*, 31.

26. S. González Reyero, “Waving Images: Juan Cabré and Spanish Archaeology in the First Half of the Twentieth Century,” in N. Schlanger and J. Nordbladh (Eds.), *Archives, Ancestors, Practices: Archaeology in the Light of Its History*, New York, 2008, 210.

27. J. Labanyi, “Love, Politics and the Making of the Modern European Subject: Spanish Romanticism and the Arab World,” *Hispanic Research Journal*, 5, 3, 2004, 232.

Goths settled in the Peninsula. Compared to other parts of Europe, these Goths did not corrupt Latin completely and, thanks to Arab influence and the fight between the Western and Eastern civilizations during eight hundred years of Spanish history, the trend continued.²⁸

In 1828 the writer and erudite member of the Real Academia Española Agustín Durán (1789–1862) made a speech about the decadence of the old Spanish theater. He described the origin of the Spanish national character:

En ningún país del mediodía de la Europa se formó el carácter nacional tanto como en España, de la mezcla exacta del de los pueblos del Norte y del de los de Oriente; así es que nuestra poesía es el amalgama modificado de la de aquellos pueblos. Sin ser tan exacta y filosófica como la de los franceses, es mucho más rica, brillante y fluida; y sin ser tan audaz y exagerada como la de los árabes, es más verosímil y razonable.²⁹

After removing the sons of Ishmael from Spanish soil, the victors captured «una gran parte del saber, de los hábitos y costumbres y del lujo que habían aportado del Oriente y aclimatado en los países sometidos».³⁰ The problem of having a Castilian imposing a sort of homogenization was solved by Durán in this manner: «los trovadores catalanes y aragoneses vinieron a la corte del castellano Juan II a mezclar y confundir la melodía sentimental y melancólica de su poesía con la rica y ferviente imaginación de los moros andaluces».³¹ Durán and Gil de Zárate are good examples of the blurred lines that separate language and literature from national politics, and how the concept of *mix* is one of the preferred metaphors to explain the foundation of Spanish nation.

The historiographical combination of Iberians, Goths, Celts, and Arabs did not stop in the nineteenth century. In 1947, Pierre Vilar published *La historia de España*, which was immediately prohibited during the dictatorship of Francisco Franco. One of the main reasons it was banned was Vilar's argument that, from the anthropological point of view, there could not be a Spanish race, nor French, nor any other. Africanism, an intellectual school of thought connecting Spain more with Africa than with Europe, was very alive the year this book was published: for Vilar the Iberians were an African population of the Berber type that infiltrated from the East coast to the Pyrenees. At least Vilar did not connect the Iberian past with the Basque element,³² another Spanish historiographical trait that started with Esteban de Garibay (1533–1600). For Garibay, the Basque people were descended from a mythical grandson of Noah, who populated Spain and resisted the Roman invader, which transformed the Basques into the original core of the Castilian identity.³³ The connection

28. A. Gil de Zárate, *Manual de literatura*, Madrid, 1844, I, 5–13.

29. A. Durán, “Discurso sobre el influjo que ha tenido la crítica moderna en la decadencia del teatro antiguo español y sobre el modo con que debe ser considerado para juzgar convenientemente de su mérito peculiar”, in R. Navas-Ruiz (Ed.), *El romanticismo español: Documentos*, Madrid, 1971, 57.

30. Durán, “Discurso...”, *op. cit.*, 54.

31. Durán, “Discurso...”, *op. cit.*, 57.

32. P. Vilar, *La historia de España*, Barcelona, 1978, 4.

33. García Cárcel, “Introducción”, 15–16.

between the Basque and Berber languages was considered almost a fact around 1891,³⁴ when the economist, historian, and jurist Joaquín Costa (1846–1911) wrote to his pupil Rafael Altamira (1866–1951), the latter being the pioneer in the historiography in Spain homologous to European (German) features.

Religious Differences and Political Disunity in the Netherlands

While Spain enjoyed a religious unity and a non *de facto* political separation during the nineteenth century, the Kingdom of the Netherlands experienced an opposite history. The new political entity ruled by King William I emerged after Napoleonic domination. From the very beginning there were insurmountable problems, such as the religious distinction between Catholics and Protestants. This, in part, encouraged the separation of the southern part of the kingdom, Belgium, in the 1830s. Luxembourg, situated between Prussia and the Netherlands, obtained some degree of independence as well, and in the 1890s it achieved full separation from the Netherlands, becoming an independent country.

In Belgium, the legitimacy of the new state relied on a paradox constructed by historians: the state of 1830 was small, but *its* medieval past was incontestably magnificent, just as in other countries such as Switzerland.³⁵ The first national historians in Belgium—Jan-Baptist David (1801–66), Henri Moke (1803–62), Adolphe Borgnet (1804–75), and Hendrik Conscience (1812–83)—saw the land as a venerable one. They traced the Belgians back to a people known as the ancient Belgians, the remote ancestors called the bravest of the Gauls by Julius Caesar. With the idea that the Nervii and the Eburones resisted the Romans, they saw the 1830 uprising against the king of the Netherlands not just as a revolution but as a restoration, or, better still, a renaissance. The job of these historians was to prove that the young Belgian was not the artificial product of the great powers' diplomatic whims, but the political manifestation of an ancient—one might almost say natural—national consciousness that united all Belgians.³⁶

The paradox of having a magnificent medieval past in a small modern country was complemented by the fact that Belgium had not formed as an entity in the Middle Ages, after all.³⁷ This issue did not stop the law of 1835, which stipulated what had to be taught in the Belgian university: ancient history, medieval history, modern history, and the history of Belgium. Each professor combined two of these subjects, and the most prestigious combination was that of medieval and national history.³⁸

34. G. J. G. Cheyne (Ed.), *El renacimiento ideal: Epistolario de Joaquín Costa y Rafael Altamira (1888–1911)*, Alicante, 1992.

35. J. Tollebeek, "An Era of Grandeur: The Middle Ages in Belgian National Historiography, 1830–1914", in R. J. W. Evans and G. P. Marchal (Eds.), *The Uses of the Middle Ages in Modern European States: History, Nationhood and the Search for Origins*, New York, 2011, 113.

36. Tollebeek, "An Era...", *op. cit.*, 115.

37. Tollebeek, "An Era...", *op. cit.*, 116.

38. Tollebeek, "An Era...", *op. cit.*, 123.

The identification of civilization with Christianity solved this paradox of a small nation with a big past. For a Belgian historian like Godefroid Kurth (1847–1916), modern civilization had originated not in the sixteenth or eighteenth centuries, during the Renaissance or the Enlightenment, but at the point when Christianity left its stamp on history.³⁹ This valorization of the Middle Ages allowed for publications such as *Histoire de Flandre* (1847–50) by Joseph Kervyn de Lettenhove, in which five of the six parts were dedicated to this historical period. He stressed that Belgium could survive only if the power of the historical country was transferred to the young state,⁴⁰ a success exemplified with the figure of Godfrey of Bouillon, the leader of the first crusade. He was nationalized and not just romanticized: he became Belgian by being considered a Christian Hercules.⁴¹

Spanish historiography of the nineteenth century dealt with problematic pasts, such as the Islamic presence between the eighth and fifteenth centuries and the political disunity in several independent Iberian kingdoms until the sixteenth century. Language was also an ever-present problem during the romantic recuperation of ideal pasts in regions such as Catalonia, the Basque Country, and Galicia. There are similarities between nation construction in Spain and in the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg.

In Belgium, linguistic conflict transformed the way history was written and, hence, the past itself. The growing liberalism in the country had little sympathy for the admirers of the Middle Ages. As early as the mid-1840s, the Parliament opposed the granting of a subsidy to André van Hasselt for his *Histoire des croisés belges* (1846). The term *obscurantism* was used in the debate.⁴² More importantly, around 1860 the Flemish Movement had radicalized. As a result, the term Flanders was no longer used purely to designate the medieval county or the two provinces in the north of the county (East and West Flanders), but also to confer a unity on the entire northern, Dutch-speaking half of Belgium. This modern Flanders also gradually created its own past. It re-examined its own heroes and episodes from a history which was deemed splendid. The solution was a common ground in Belgium as well as in the Netherlands and in Luxembourg: the *Mischkultur*. For example, during the celebrations in 1860 around the figure of the poet Jacob van Maerlant, there was an interplay between pride in Flemish literary culture and old Belgian patriotism.⁴³

This communality was due to a return to the medieval past. Kurth, concerned with the linguistic frontier that divided the Flemish from the Walloon parts of the country, believed that the solution was for the country to become polyglot, as had been the case in the Middle Ages, with the whole population speaking both languages. Between 1896 and 1898 he published his two-volume study of *La frontière linguistique en Belgique et dans le nord de*

39. Tollebeek, "An Era...", *op. cit.*, 126.

40. Tollebeek, "An Era...", *op. cit.*, 118.

41. Tollebeek, "An Era...", *op. cit.*, 119.

42. Tollebeek, "An Era...", *op. cit.*, 127.

43. Tollebeek, "An Era...", *op. cit.*, 128.

la France. Here he argued that the Germanic settlement of the Flemish-speaking areas of Belgium took place as a result of the invasions of the fifth century.⁴⁴

Different than Belgium, the Netherlands had no interest in Catholic medieval pasts after the 1830s.⁴⁵ Everything started with the victorious revolt against the Spanish rulers in the sixteenth century. Little attention was paid to the Middle Ages. For example, the state archivist Reinier Cornelis Bakhuizen van den Brink (1810–65) customarily rejected articles on medieval history which were submitted to the journal *De Gids* with the comment that the national memory was more attached to the rebellious Dutchman who had fought for the country's freedom in the sixteenth century, than to the perfect knight.⁴⁶

But not all Dutch historiography concerned the golden age of the seventeenth century. Prehistory played its role, also. The Netherlands had the first university professor appointed to teach archaeology: Caspar Reuven (1793–1835). With a vision more connected to the Enlightenment—despite having dropped Latin language from his lectures—than to the cultural nationalism, his inaugural lecture about classical archaeology contained a question about who the Huns were, the builders of the tumuli in the Netherlands.⁴⁷ In 1826 he carried out the first modern excavation of The Hague in a place known for its many Roman ruins: Forum Hadriani, the westernmost Roman city of the province Germania Inferior and capital of the tribe of the Cananefates. Following his pursuit of finding Roman remains in the Netherlands, in 1833 he planned a trip to Drenthe, the province of ancient monuments that had already aroused his interest when he was there in 1819. He was interested in the remains of what are now known as Celtic fields. These remains of Iron Age field systems found in the sandy areas of the Netherlands had been referred to as the remains of Roman army camps in the Dutch literature since the eighteenth century. Reuven soon discovered that the banks had nothing to do with either Romans or armies. He believed that they dated from heathen times and that they were in some way connected with the bog trackway that had been discovered at Valthe in 1817. Reuven's journal reflects his great interest in what we now call prehistory.⁴⁸

44. Wood, *The Modern Origins...*, *op. cit.*, 223–24.

45. P. Raedts, "A Serious Case of Amnesia: The Dutch and their Middle Ages", in R. J. W. Evans and G. P. Marchal (Eds.), *The Uses of the Middle Ages in Modern European States*, New York, 2011; Conversi and Codera, "A Medieval Route...", *op. cit.*

46. Tollebeek, "An Era...", *op. cit.*, 116.

47. A. Brongers, "The Discovery of Prehistory in the Netherlands", in L. P. Louwe Kooijmans, P. W. van den Broeke, H. Fokkens, and A. L. van Gijn (Eds.), *The Prehistory of the Netherlands*, Amsterdam, 2005, I, 34.

48. Brongers, "The Discovery...", *op. cit.*, 34–35; R. Halbertsma, "From Distant Shores: Nineteenth-Century Dutch Archaeology in European Perspective", in N. Schlanger and J. Nordbladh (Eds.), *Archives, Ancestors, Practices: Archaeology in the Light of Its History*, New York, 2008, 26–33; L. Verhart, "Frozen in Time: Photography and the Beginnings of Modern Archaeology in the Netherlands", in N. Schlanger and J. Nordbladh (Eds.), *Archives, Ancestors, Practices: Archaeology in the Light of Its History*, New York, 2008, 222.

The Roman town of Forum Hadriani was not excavated again until the twentieth century,⁴⁹ when another archaeologist formed in classical tradition started work there in 1905. This young Leiden archaeologist was Jan Hendrik Holwerda (1873–1951). Instead of buying artifacts around Europe, Holwerda concentrated his work in romantic-style excavations in the Netherlands. He was the first to use a camera systematically in archaeological investigations and he felt very strongly about the popularization of archaeology. Without Dutch Roman remains, Holwerda conducted excavations in prehistoric sites, such as the megalithic monument of Drouwen. His classical background, however, caused him to jump to premature conclusions about archaeological finds and classical literary traditions.⁵⁰

More than any specific figure, it was the digging work in the mid-nineteenth century with its prehistoric and early medieval discoveries that put an end to the hegemony of the attractiveness of the Roman remains in the Netherlands.⁵¹ In 1918, with the foundation near Arnhem of the Dutch Open-Air Museum, the national structure of the Netherlands was thus explicitly reconfirmed. The museum also contained one prehistoric object: a stone-coffin grave from the Bronze Age—Holwerda denied the existence of that period for the Netherlands—,⁵² which had been excavated in the province of Drenthe. This exhibit pointed out to the visitors that the origin of folklore was to be found in prehistory. In other words, the Netherlands had witnessed a cultural and ethnic continuity since prehistoric times.⁵³

The stress on ethnic continuity in the Netherlands is due to reasons similar to those in the Belgian and Spanish cases. Until the first half of the twentieth century, the Dutch national character was defined in linguistic and ethnic terms. Historiographic approaches were directed by political options. If the Franconians were the first speakers of modern Dutch, this was accompanied by more political and cultural cooperation between the Netherlands and Flanders, the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium. Something similar happened in ethnic-racial terms, which also transgressed national boundaries. These primarily concerned the Frisian, Franconian and Saxon areas, Germanic tribes were supposed to have settled in the Netherlands and in parts of Belgium and Germany during the early medieval period of migrations.⁵⁴

This delicate issue was brilliantly projected by Johan Huizinga to the middle point of *Mischkultur*. In his text “The Spirit of the Netherlands” (1935) he portrays the Netherlands “as an independent member of the European community” thanks to a

process of linguistic, political and cultural differentiation from the German Empire, under the persistent influence of the French, who had long introduced the distinction between *Thiois*, the inhabitants of the Dutch areas, and *Allemands*. But this no more determined the eventual sepa-

49. J. E. Bogaers, “Voorburg-Arentsburg: Forum Hadriani”, *Oudheidkundige Mededeelingen van Het Rijksmuseum van Oudheden te Leiden*, 52, 1971, 128–38.

50. Brongers, “The Discovery...”, *op. cit.*, 37; Verhart, “Frozen...”, *op. cit.*, 222.

51. Brongers, “The Discovery...”, *op. cit.*, 36.

52. Brongers, “The Discovery...”, *op. cit.*, 36.

53. M. Eickhoff, “Dutch Archaeology and National Socialism”, in N. Schlanger and J. Nordbladh (Eds.), *Archives, Ancestors, Practices: Archaeology in the Light of Its History*, New York, 2008, 338–40.

54. Eickhoff, “Dutch Archaeology...”, *op. cit.*, 336–38.

ration of the Netherlands from the German Empire than it made inevitable the political amalgamation of all those territories—Walloon, Flemish, Lower-Franconia, Saxon and Frisian—into what would one day be known as the Netherlands.⁵⁵

For Huizinga, there was always in history a process of separation and fusion involving general factors of a formative kind as well as others of a purely incidental character.⁵⁶ For example, he applied this language principle to social and intellectual life: «What makes it possible for us to absorb foreign cultures without being assimilated by them, is that we have a language of our own. It may well prevent our word reaching the rest of the world, but it preserves our national identity while enabling us to recognize others.»⁵⁷

Huizinga already used this communality principle two years before in “The Netherlands as Mediator between Western and Central Europe” (January 27, 1933):

Another factor facilitating the mediatory role of the Netherlands was language. The Walloon-Dutch sector of the Romano-Germanic language border has run through the centre of Belgium since olden times. Here the Romanic and Germanic world impinged upon each other in an area that made contacts easier and relations wider than they could have been across the Vosges and Ardennes. It is this state of affairs that Pirenne has used to such good effect when he explained the Belgian national character. For him, the very situation that made Flanders, Hainault, Brabant, Liège, Limburg and Luxemburg meeting places of German and French culture also explained the emergence of an independent, bilingual Belgian nation.⁵⁸

Against narrow nationalisms he claims the Netherlands in its broadest historical sense—Holland and Belgium—as cultural mediator.⁵⁹ It is one of the very few times that Huizinga go back to prehistory in order to find Dutchmen characters: «They were sailors and merchants, even at the dawn of history, and archaeological finds help us to trace their role of economic and cultural mediation back into prehistory.»⁶⁰

Using this old culturally nationalistic device, he goes beyond the Netherlands, seeing everything in a European perspective:⁶¹ «Thanks to its kinship with German though, its historical links with England and its cultural bonds with France, the Dutch mind is equally receptive to the influence of all three. This vast process of cultural assimilation is greatly facilitated by the fact that we have a language of our own.»⁶² Luxembourgian culture as a mix-

55. J. Huizinga, *Dutch Civilisation in the Seventeenth Century, and Other Essays*, P. Geyl and F. W. N. Hugenholtz (Eds.), New York, 1968, 105–06.

56. Huizinga, *Dutch Civilisation...*, *op. cit.*, 106.

57. Huizinga, *Dutch Civilisation...*, *op. cit.*, 117.

58. Huizinga, *Dutch Civilisation...*, *op. cit.*, 144–45.

59. Huizinga, *Dutch Civilisation...*, *op. cit.*, 143.

60. Huizinga, *Dutch Civilisation...*, *op. cit.*, 145.

61. Huizinga, *Dutch Civilisation...*, *op. cit.*, 148.

62. Huizinga, *Dutch Civilisation...*, *op. cit.*, 154–55.

ture of both German and French was also central in the works of Batty Weber (1860–1940), Frantz Clément (1882–1942), and Marcel Noppeney (1877–1966).⁶³

Huizinga's Belgian counterpart was Henri Pirenne (1862–1935). In his *Histoire de Belgique* (1900), Pirenne continued with the idea of dissipating the tension between Flemings and Walloons, and the Middle Ages returned to an important role. In part, he was following the request of his German colleague Karl Lamprecht, who considered the ninth century the great period of nation formation in Western Europe, a century of great importance for Belgium as well. He succeeded in his synthesis because despite the context of political and social tension, Belgium was living in an atmosphere of expansion: Belgium had recently become a colonial power, the country was experiencing new economic growth, and the Brussels bourgeoisie was characterized by cultural dynamism. The *Historie de Belgique* was the expression of this self-confidence, of a new Belgian nationalism. He referred to the exceptional position of the country, which had emerged from the fusion of Romanism and Germanism. For him Belgium was a land of contrasts, the crossroads between the French Kingdom and the German Empire. As a result, a *Mischkultur* had emerged in this central zone, a syncretism of the Germanic and Romanic civilizations.⁶⁴

Pirenne is a perfect example of how this cultural nationalism feature ended with the world wars. The posthumous *Histoire de l'Europe des invasions au XVIe siècle* (1936), published one year after Pirenne's death, was the result of his period in captivity during World War I. The work was conceived of as a reply to German views of the origins of the Reich. The Belgian historian countered the Germans by presenting the origins of medieval Europe as being almost exclusively Roman, even though the emperors themselves were German.⁶⁵ The last paradox of the nineteenth-century cultural nationalism was, as Huizinga said, in order to fight against narrow nationalisms a sort of wide, multicultural but homogenous political unity had to return to the scene of the European nations-states: the Roman Empire.

Conclusion

Cultural nationalism and historiography are interconnected through the processes of modernization and nationalization inevitable cultural extinctions resulting from the layering of new culture over those of the past. For Europe, these previous cultures could be found in a past where the Roman Empire was irrelevant, carefully selected, or simply avoided. Spain built a nation-state around the aggregation of political entities and an uncomfortable Islamic past, resulting in a self-sufficient nation-state. Spanish nationalism was, albeit European, isolated in its own intellectual creation. The discussion was about the uniqueness of Spain and also how much Spanish was in European political culture.

63. M. Margue and P. Péporté, "Medieval Myths and the Building of National Identity: The Example of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg", in R. J. W. Evans and G. P. Marchal (Eds.), *The Uses of the Middle Ages in Modern European States: History, Nationhood and the Search for Origins*, New York, 2011, 97.

64. Tollebeek, "An Era...", *op. cit.*, 129–30; Wood, *The Modern Origins...*, *op. cit.*, 231.

65. Wood, *The Modern Origins...*, *op. cit.*, 243.

The separation of the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg into different states resulted in the *Mischkultur*. Like any other European nationalism, found its roots in Prehistory and/or in early modernity, ignoring not just the centuries of Roman domination, but even the Medieval times. The assimilation of a Franco-Germanic influence allowed their nationalism to go beyond their state borders. That explains, in part, the location of the European supra-national core in the Benelux countries.

The nineteenth-century concept of the United States of Europe, proposed by Giuseppe Mazzini, Victor Hugo, and also Emilio Castelar,⁶⁶ was seen as a sign of modernization by liberals, republicans, and fascists. If the idea is to create just *one* European nationalism, then we have to deal with two forms of nationalism, the self-sufficient Spanish and Benelux models. The Spanish model moves toward just an administrative European State with different nations inside and the Benelux model opens the door to the European nation and the process of cultural melding of self-sufficient nation-states. The latter Benelux model is now losing the struggle in the direction the European Union should take.

66. E. Castelar, “En favor de la forma republicana (20 de mayo de 1869)”, in J. García Mercadal (Ed.), *Castelar: Discursos y ensayos*, Madrid, 1964, 85–86.