

[Page numbers of the printed text appear at the right in bold.]

page 33

**Imaginary History and Burgundian State-building:
The Translation of the Annals of Hainault**

Robert B. Rigoutlot

During the year 1447 Simon Nockart, a councilor to Duke Philip the Good of Burgundy, observed the presentation to his master of a *Chroniques de Hainault*, a newly translated version of the half-century old *Annales Historiae illustrium Principum Hannoniae* by the Franciscan monk and schoolmaster Jacques de Guise (1334-1399).¹ The translation had been undertaken by Jean Wauquelin, whose workshop at Mons would toil another twenty years to complete the illumination of the work's three Volumes. The French-language version appears to have eclipsed its original. No more than five copies of the Latin annals exist today, compared with at least twenty manuscript copies and a sixteenth-century printed edition of the translation.²

The manuscript of the *Chroniques de Hainault* has intrigued several generations of art historians. The striking dedicatory miniature, which represents Wauquelin offering the work to Duke Philip, has been said to have influenced later Netherlandish manuscript painting. The position and purpose of the new work within the range of historical literature produced at the Burgundian court, however, have attracted relatively little attention.

The literary patronage of the Valois dukes of Burgundy, especially their patronage of history writing, was extensive. Richard Vaughan tells us that "most of the leading French-speaking and some other chroniclers" of Philip's era were subsidized by the Burgundian court.³ The *Chroniques de Hainault*, however, differ radically in style and subject matter from the majority of historical productions of that place and time. Most can be described as *livres des faits* in the new style exemplified by Froissart, contemporary memoirs of the campaigns of the dukes and the feats of arms of their courtiers. Chastellain, La Marche, Molinet, Wavrin and the lesser Burgundian historiographers perpetuated the custom of recording the chivalrous adventures of the court. Only Jean Mansel, who worked for some years revising the early fourteenth-century *Fleur des Histoires*, a compendium of universal history from the Creation, seems to have practiced historiography in the traditional, medieval pattern at the court of Burgundy.⁴ The translation of the *Annales Hannoniae* at the midpoint of Philip's reign thus seems to represent a break with the norms of Burgundian historiography in the direction of literary traditionalism.⁵

Jacques de Guise, born only three years before Froissart, adhered closely to the traditions of medieval chronicle. The topics of his narrative included not only the histories of the ruling houses of Hainault and neighboring regions, but

page 34

that of their towns, saints, churches and especially the religious orders which flourished there. His principal source for periods before the twelfth century, at least the most important of his sources whose existence can be confirmed, was the *Chronicon* of Sigebert of Gembloux, one of the most influential of the early chronicles.⁶

The most noticeable difference between Guise on the one hand, and Froissart and his followers on the other, lies in the chronological scope of their works. Guise attempted to trace the origins of Hainault and its neighbors back to the earliest periods of history as it was understood in the later Middle Ages. He furnished Hainault with a Trojan origin.

Trojan and to a somewhat lesser extent Arthurian erudition occupy a large portion of the *Chroniques de Hainault*. Of its twenty-one books, the first eight treat the period of imaginary history covered by Geoffrey of Monmouth's twelfth-century *History of the Kings of Britain*, from the fall of Troy to Arthur's campaigns in Gaul. The first three books cover the establishment of Bavais in Hainault by refugee Trojans, while the fourth through seventh describe its war against Rome and defeat by Caesar. The narrative emphasizes Hainault's historical separateness from both Celtic Gaul and Germania, and thus its later position as a distinct entity located between France and the Holy Roman Empire.

Guise did not merely appropriate Geoffrey's histories for his own use, or glean materials from the British history

which might be applied to his own land. He created a Belgic past which is consonant with Geoffrey's history, but largely novel in content. He would sometimes offer "corrected" versions of events--for example, his versions of the Gallic raids of the British kings Ebraucus and Brutus Vertescu, which were more flattering to a French-speaking audience than were Geoffrey's. Still other events were wholly of his own creation.⁷

The founder of Hainault, according to Guise, was the Phrygian prince Bavo, a nephew of Laomedon and a cousin of Priam. Bavo was a scholar and an astronomer who learned through "signs and comets" of the coming destruction of Troy. Jupiter prophesied to Bavo that, after the city's fall, he would be led to the banks of the Rhine, to the land of the Treveri, where a sign would direct him to found a city. This prophesy, one should add, occurred well before Geoffrey's Brutus was granted his own vision of the future by the goddess Diana. Bavo served his cousin Priam loyally until Troy fell, whereupon he led a band of Trojans by sea through the Pillars of Hercules, past Albion, to the Low Countries.⁸

It is at this point in his narrative, about midway through the first book, that Guise begins to demonstrate the political interests which distinguish him from Geoffrey and many of the universal chroniclers. He describes how, once Bavo and his followers had humbled the Treveri, they set about building a city they named Beclis, or Belges, and instituted civil and ecclesiastical laws.

Guise cited as his authorities for this early history Lucius of Tongres, Hugh of Toul, and Nicolas Ruclery, authors who appear to have no existence outside his pages. The governance of Belges and its development appear to be entirely his own construct. The earliest Belgic regime was a priestly monarchy.

page 35

At its head stood a Prince of Druids, advised by a council of seven archpriests. The secular authorities of Belges, seventy dukes and seventy counts, reported to this council, as did the nine druids who officiated at the city's nine temples. The druidic council suggests some knowledge, probably mediated through another source, of Caesar's description of the government of Gaul, a comparatively unusual reference for the late fourteenth century. Lower magistrates, governors, knights, diviners and magicians, were appointed by the community of counts, while *questeurs*, or messengers, and *ciliarques*, or censors, were elected by the inhabitants of the city.⁹

Guise's narrative described at length the successive revolutions in the governance of Belges and provided explanation for its eventual decadence. First, the usurper Drysus uprooted priestly government, virtually destroying the the state in the process. After five generations of self-declared dukes and kings, the citizens of Belges instituted an annual election of sovereign officials (rendered as *ducs* by Wauquelin). Elective monarchy, which engendered overweening pride among the people of Belges and thus precipitated its own downfall, was in turn succeeded by hereditary monarchy.¹⁰ Belges continued to expand territorially, until at its height, Guise's Belgic realm encompassed "Belges la France," or Beauvais, as well as the entirety of the Low Countries and the eastern part of Gaul as far as Saxony, all connected by the *chausées de Brunehaut*, seven great roads constructed by that king to connect the most distant parts of his realm. During the generation which preceded Caesar's arrival in Gaul, Belges again fell victim to the pride of its inhabitants. Internal strife, neglect of religious duty, and a return to the uncertainties of elective monarchy fatally weakened Belges at the moment it most needed unity in the face of Roman invasion.¹¹

In seeking to understand why Philip the Good commanded that the *Annales Hannoniae* be translated, we should bear in mind the pronounced political component of the literary patronage of the Valois dukes. Paul Archambault, in his study of late medieval French chronicle, has claimed that their patronage had as its purpose, not the subsidy of "literary merit for its own sake," but the furtherance of "the political interests of Burgundy."¹² When so unstylish a work as Guise's was caused to pass through Wauquelin's workshop, it is reasonable to look for the role it might play in Burgundian policy.

Wauquelin's literary project appears to have had two sponsors within the duke's entourage, Nockart and Jean de Croy, both of whom had served as ducal functionaries in Hainault, which along with Holland and Zeeland had fallen to Philip the Bold fifteen years before. Both appear in the dedicatory miniature. In his preface to the *Chroniques de Hainault*, Wauquelin ascribed a guiding role in its production to Nockart, who had served as *clerc de baillage* in Hainault even before its incorporation into the duchy, and for whom he had earlier prepared an "imperfect" translation of the work. It is not surprising that both would be eager to sponsor a work which linked the place of their service to

the duke with the cult of Troy already established at the Burgundian court.¹³

The official reason for the translation of Guise's history is set forth in Wauquelin's preface. The *Chroniques de Hainault*, he stated, demonstrate not

page 36

only the antiquity of the county but "how my most redoubtable and puissant lord is descended from the highly noble and excellent blood of the Trojans."¹⁴ The statement both places the work within a recognizable tradition of Northern European historiography and prompts questions about the relationship between the antiquities of Hainault and the pedigree of the Valois dukes of Burgundy who, after all, inherited their Trojan blood from their relationship to the kings of France.

The notion of the Trojan origins of the European nations, that they had first been settled in the remote past by refugees from that city's destruction, was widespread by the mid-fifteenth century. The earliest such claim had been made for the Franks in the mid-seventh century. Similar claims had been made for the Venetians, the Normans, and the British. Geoffrey of Monmouth's history brought to the continent shortly after it was completed in 1136, introduced the descendants of Brutus into the general matter of history. The Norman monk Robert de Torigni, for example, incorporated portions of Geoffrey's history into his redaction of Sigebert's *Chronicon* during the 1140s.¹⁵

It was, however, the story of the origins of the Franks which remained the most prestigious of Trojan histories until well into the sixteenth century. This prestige derived both from the great age of the Francus story itself, and from its incorporation into the chronicles maintained at the Abby of Saint Denis. The Chronicles of Saint Denis and their French-language derivative, the *Grandes Chroniques de France*, so it seemed, formed a historical compilation of virtually indisputable authority. Recent scholars have described them as quasi-official in nature, and as possessing an almost juridical significance in matters of historical fact. Towns and other corporate bodies were known to cite their later chapters in defence of their civic privileges. The Chronicles demonstrated the great antiquity of the French monarchy and encouraged all subjects to believe in the propriety of the ties between the people and the kings. The belief that the Chronicles had been maintained by a succession of official historiographers appointed by the King from among the monks of Saint Denis, could only add to their lustre.¹⁶

The sixteenth-century researcher Nicholas Vignier noted that several provincial historians of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries had attempted to subvert the prestige of the French national chronicles by demonstrating an origin for their own lands and princely houses even more ancient than that of the French. By establishing the cultural and political anteriority of their own lands, they asserted their own independence in the face of the newly expansionist, centralizing monarchy created by Louis XI and his successors.¹⁷ This was not the case here: at the time Guise's work was translated, France had only begun to recover from its worst reverses in the Hundred Years War. The *Chi-oniques de Hainault*, sometimes referred to in documents of the period as the *Croniques de Belges* or the *Croniques de Bavo*, while useful as a counterweight to French political pretensions, were not needed as a defense against them.¹⁸ Rather, they served as an assertion of the dignity and authority of the Dukes of Burgundy.

page 37

Archambault, echoing the judgment of Francois Marchal, has asserted that Philip the Good believed national annals should instruct the subject on the origins of his country's laws, customs and religion, even about social and economic matters.¹⁹ The *Chroniques de Hainault* fulfill this standard far more closely than do the works of the court historians of his reign. In their lists of donations to religious foundations and of the privileges of towns, which form a large part of the later portions of his work, they resemble the Chronicles of Saint Denis as a source of public instruction. Their most important function may have been to instruct the subjects of the dukes of Burgundy as to the form of government under which they should live.

The precise nature of the political entity which the Valois dukes of Burgundy sought to establish on the borders of France and the Empire has been debated by several generations of scholars.²⁰ However, Henri Pirenne, Johan Huizinga, and others after them have concurred that Philip the Good pursued the systematic expansion of his dominions in the Low Countries and sought to impose upon them a single, unified administration. Despite their linguistic and cultural heterogeneity, Pirenne asserted, the peoples of the Low Countries saw themselves as politically

and economically distinct from France and the Empire. Pirenne argued that the political interests of the Flemish and Walloon territories which Philip inherited and acquired, especially the interests of their commercial towns, were in large part congruent with those of the new Burgundian state.

To be recognized as monarchs of an independent state, their ultimate goal in Pirenne's evaluation, the Valois dukes needed first to sever the feudal ties which bound them to the King of France and the Emperor. Philip the Good achieved this through the Peace of Arras of 1435, which released him from his vassalage to the French crown, and by refusing to pay homage to the Emperor for his eastern lands. They needed as well to establish themselves as sovereign within their own lands, not through law-making and the exercise of political power alone, but by cultivating the beliefs, traditions and ritual which, in the medieval polity, tied the monarch to his people and gave his authority its quasi-sacerdotal character.[21](#)

The Valois dukes of Burgundy were assiduous collectors of the "marks of sovereignty," not only of the political and judicial powers which Jean Bodin would catalogue in the sixteenth century, but of the ceremonial, artistic and literary symbols which were seen in their time to accompany temporal lordship.[22](#) The Carthusian monastery at Champmol, which Philip the Bold established as a Valois mausoleum in emulation of the burial place of the kings of France, has justly been called a Burgundian Saint Denis.[23](#)

If Burgundian artistic patronage could create a Burgundian Saint-Denis, could not its literary patronage also summon up a Burgundian Chronicles of Saint Denis? At first glance, the project would seem to face formidable obstacles. The Burgundian state was far from ancient, the histories of its peoples far from unified, and their bonds to their ruler far from secure. However, the history of an ancient Belgic kingdom occupying much of the area of the new Burgundian state, and sharing with its lord a common Trojan heritage, would assert the

page 38

rightfulness and dignity of his title. The *Chroniques de Hainault* had obvious potential as Political Propaganda.

Within the confines of the Burgundian literary establishment, the *Chroniques de Hainault* had an immediate influence, attributable both to the enthusiasm of their translator and to their political utility. When, around 1447, Wauquelin prepared a prose version of the romance *Girart de Roussillon*, which set forth the life of the legendary first duke of Burgundy, he added material from the eleventh book of the *Chroniques*. When Jean Mansel prepared a new redaction of his *Fleur des Histoires* in about 1464, the first prepared at the duke's order, he inserted seventy chapters from the *Chroniques*, taken primarily from the first book.[24](#) Thus, within two decades of the translation of the *Chroniques*, there existed a small constellation of quasi-historical works which advanced the notion of the extreme antiquity of the Low Countries and their early and continued governance by dukes.

The Burgundian state which Nockart and Wauquelin intended the *Chroniques de Hainault* to celebrate collapsed suddenly in January of 1477. However, Guise's history did not entirely vanish. By the end of the 1400s, Maurice Gauchez tells us, erudite inhabitants of the Low Countries had taken to referring to Bavais as "Belgis" or "Belges."[25](#) A native of the town, Jean Lemaire de Belges, one of the last exponents of Burgundian literary culture, discovered the work either in its Latin or French version, in the library at Valenciennes near the beginning of the sixteenth century. Intrigued by the history of Bavo and his successors, he grafted their line onto the genealogies of ancient European kings he had taken from the writings of the Italian historical forger Annius of Viterbo. Thus incorporated into Lemaire's *Illustrations de Gaule et Singularitez de Troye*, a work printed repeatedly in the 1500s, the history of the line of the Bavos has been preserved.[26](#)

1. Jacques de Guise, *Illustrations de la Gaule belgique antiquitez du pays de Haynnaue et de la grand city de Belges: a present dicte Bavay*, 3 vols., (Paris, 1531-1532) is taken from Wauquelin's translation, with modernized orthography and some small excisions ostensibly made by Jacques de Leussach, who composed a geography of the Low Countries based on Guise's work. References (*Chroniques*) are to this edition.
2. Ernst Sackur, Introduction to *Annales historiae illustrium principum Hannoniae ab initio rerum usque ad annum Christi 1390*, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Scriptores*, vol. 30/1 (Hannover, 1896), 74-78, for Latin manuscripts; Ivor Arnold, "Notice sur un Manuscrit de la Traduction des Annales du Hainaut de Jacques de Guise par Jean Wauquelin (Brit. Mus. Lansdowne 214)," *Ronwnia*, 55 (1929), 382-400, on French-language manuscripts.
3. Richard Vaughan, *Philip the Good: The Apogee of Burgundy* (New York, 1970), 156-157.
4. G. de Poerck, *Introduction à la Fleur des Histoires de Jean Mansel-XVe Siècle* (Gand, 1936).
5. Georges Doutrepoint, *La Littérature Française à la Cour des Ducs de Bourgogne* (Paris, 1909), 509, states that there were two principle forms of Burgundian historiography, contemporary memoirs and *mémoires bourguignons*, which began at some early date, but continued up to the reign of Philip the Good. The *Chroniques de Hainault*, which terminate at 1253, do not quite fit this second category.
6. On Guise, see J. Stecher, "De Guyse, 11 in *Biographie Nationale de Belgique* (Brussels, 1884-1885), VIII, 548-552.

7. On the raids of Ebraucus and Brutus Vertescu (Geoffrey, II, 7-9), *Chroniques*, vol. 1, fol. 20v.
 8. *Chroniques*, vol. 1, fol. 9r-11v.
 9. *Chroniques*, vol. 1, fol. 14r.
 10. *Chroniques*, vol. 1, fol. 40v.
 11. *Chroniques*, vol. 1, fol. 22v, 80r-82r.
 12. Paul Archambault, *Seven French Chroniclers: Witnesses to History* (Syracuse, 1974), 21.
 13. *Chroniques*, vol. 1, fol. Ir, "De laquelle translation ou exposition a este mouvement & cause/honorable & sage homme Simon Nokart en son temps clerc du bailliage de Haynnau/ & conseilier de mondit tresredoubte seigneur. Pour & au commandement du quel devant cestuy commadement de mondit tresredoubte seigneur jen avoye fait aucune chose imparfaitement." See also Anne H. Van Buren, "New Evidence for Jean Wauquelin's Activity in the *Chroniques* de Hainault and fo? the Date of the Miniatures," *Scriptorium*, 26 (1972), 249-268.
- page 40**
14. *Chroniques*, vol. 1, fol. Ir. "Par laquelle exposition & translation au plaisir de dieu pourra a tous oyanset lisans pleinement apparoir ladite noble procreation & lignee. Et comment est descendu mondit tresredoubte & trespuissant seigneur du hault noble & excellent sang des Troyens."
 15. Antonia Gransden, *Historical Writing in England c. 550 to c. 1307* (London, 1974), 199-202, 261-263, on the transmission of Geoffrey's history to the continent.
 16. Gabrielle Spiegel, *The Chronicle Tradition of Saint-Denis: A Survey* (Brookline, MA and Leyden, 1978), on "the political utility of Dionysian historiography," 131ff.
 17. Nicholas Vignier, *Traité de l'ancien estat de la petite Bretagne* (Paris, 1619), 4.
 18. Doutrepoint, 416-417, on alternate titles.
 19. Archambault, 21-22; Frangois Marchal, *Catalogue des Manuscrits de la Bibliothèque;que Royale des Ducs de Bourgogne* (Brussels and Leipzig, 1842), vol. 1, xiv, quoted in Doutrepoint, 509. Doutrepoint regarded this view as overly generous to Philip.
 20. Henri Pirenne, "The Formation and Constitution of the Burgundian State (Fifteenth Century)," *American Historical Review*, 14 (1908-1909), 477-502; Pirenne, "Les Pays-Bas de 1280 a 1477," in Ernest Lavisse and Alfred Rambaud, *Formation des Grands Etats (1270-1492)* (Paris, 1931), 416-460; Johan Huizinga, "L'Etat Bourguignon, ses rapports avec la France et les origines d'une nationalité néerlandaise," *Le Moyen Age*, 41 (1931), 171-193.
 21. Jean Seznec, *The Survival of the Ancient Gods: The Mythological Tradition and its Place in Renaissance Humanism and Art*, tr. Barbara F. Sessions (New York, 1953), 25, on the *Chroniques* and the cult of Troy at the court of Burgundy.
 22. Jean Bodin, *Les Six Livres de la Republique* (Paris, 1576), c. 10.
 23. Vaughan, 241, on the construction of Champmol.
 24. Paul Meyer, Introduction to *Girart de Roussillon* (Paris, 1884), cxii-cxv; Poerck, 51-52, 80-81.
 25. Maurice Gauchez, *Histoire des Lettres Francaises de Belgique des origines à nos jours* (Brussels, 1922), 127 on the name "Belgis" or "Belges."
 26. Jean Lemaire de Belges, *Les Illustrations de Gaule et Singularitez de Troye*, in *Oeuvres Completes*, ed. J. Stecher (Louvain, 1882), vol. 1, 284-296 on the line of Bavo. Twenty-four printings of its three books appeared between 1511 and 1524. On Lemaire's borrowings from Guise, see Georges Doutrepoint, *Jean Lemaire de Belges et la Renaissance* (Brussels, 1934), 34-40.