

# Concise History of South Limburg

## Part 1

The history of South Limburg starts some 250.000 years ago, when the first people lived in the Belvédère-quarry near Mestreech. Mestreech (called 'Maastricht' by the Hollanders) is the capital of Limburg, and in this town the most important historical events have taken place.

Around 4000 BC the first farmers settled on the fertile soil called Löss, near Zitterd, Aelsloo, Gäöl and Mestreech. In 51 BC, after the Celtic natives had been 'tamed' by Julius Caesar, South Limburg became a part of the Roman Empire, situated in the province of Germania Inferior, where also Köln (Cologne) and Trier can be found.

The Romans brought a peaceful period in which trade flourished, especially as a result of the roads the Romans had built. Trajectum ad Mosam (Mestreech) and Coriovallum (Haerle) were junctions of such Roman 'heir' (army) tracks. In both locations the Romans built a castellum (fort) and a bathhouse (thermae). In the Terme-museum in Haerle the original bathhouse is exhibited.



*The Roman bathhouse (thermae) in Haerle*

In South Limburg the population was dense. There were farms and country-houses (villas) everywhere, the remains of which were found during excavations. Christianity came to South Limburg at the end of the 2nd century AD. A diocese was active in this land of the River Meuse during the 4th century, the seat of which was first in Tóngere, but because of the continuing attacks of the Franks, bishop Servatius moved the episcopal seat to Mestreech.

From the 3rd century onwards the Roman Empire weakened and the Germanic Franks invaded the country. Mestreech and most of the villas were destroyed. After the fall of Cologne in the 5th century, South Limburg became a territory of the Franks, and a dark period began. It is not sure if towns like Haerle or Zitterd remained inhabited, but Mestreech remained a populated town.

South Limburg was situated at the heart of the Frankish empire. The Frankish monarchs had several farmsteads in the surroundings, and Aix-la-Chapelle (Aachen) in what is now Germany was the residence of Charlemagne.

In 843 the empire of Charlemagne was divided, and South Limburg was split until the invasion of the French general Napoleon in 1794. In 1500 about ten kings, dukes, bishops, lords and an emperor governed this territory. South Limburg was in a permanent state of war. Mestreech was half under rule of Brabant, and in 1244 Haerle was under rule of Brabant.

During the Middle Ages there was a lot of trade between Limburg and neighbouring as well as far-away nations. Scottish merchants were engaged in trade with Limburg since 1068, when the first recorded instance occurred: a small trading ship carried a load of linen cloth, bales of wool and salted fish up the River Meuse to Mestreech (the River Meuse passes through Rotterdam and finally flows into the North Sea at Hook of Holland). The Scottish merchants purchased roofing slates and in later centuries, pantiles, materials for making glass (the raw material, silicon, was, and still is, won in Western Limburg, in a region called De Kempe, a sand plateau. This trade continued right up till the late Middle Ages when shipping became too large to navigate the river. King Robert the Bruce's great house was apparently roofed with slates from the low countries, quite possibly from Limburg.

## Part 2

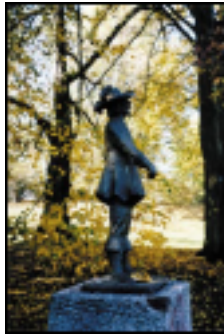
In 1568 the 'bilderstörn' (iconoclasm) came to this southern region. Protests against the Spanish inquisition brought the population in revolt. The beginning of the 'Tachtigjörige Kreeg' (Eighty Years' war) was a fact, and again a disaster for the region. The Hollanders under William of Orange plundered South Limburg for the first time in 1568, and non-cooperators were executed. The abbey of Rolduc in Kirkraoj was burned down twice. Twelve years later the Spanish fury raged in Mestreech, and 1500 inhabitants were murdered. Even the monks of the Sint Servaos cathedral were sabred.



*A Holy-Mary statue, in many places of Limburg*

After 1673 Valkebörg and Mestreech were conquered and destroyed by the French, who occupied Mestreech between 1673 and 1679. This occupation had taken place after a siege that was personally led by the French king Louis XIV (the Sun King).

On the 25th of June 1673, soldiers of Louis surrounded Mestreech (the strongest bastion of Limburg, at that time occupied by the Hollanders), and under command of the Capitaine Lieutenant, the First Company of the 'Mousquetaires du Roi' prepared the storming of a bastion outside one of the city gates, the 'Tóngerse Poort'. This would become the last heroic act of that captain, who was Charles de Batz de Castelmore, better known as d'Artagnan. Mortally wounded by a musket bullet he breathed his last breath on the battlefield.



*D'Artagnan's statue in the city park of Mestreech*

After 1794 the French invaded the Low Countries again, and they brought more unity to South Limburg by putting the nation under the rule of a 'departement', known as Basse Meusse (Low-Meuse). From now on, the same taxes and rights were applied to the whole Limburg nation.

The French policy however led to resistance, for the region was treated as conquered territory. Churches were robbed, art-treasures were shipped to Paris, young men had to serve in the French army and the French language was imposed!

Resistance came not only from the Catholic Limburgers. Also a gang of thieves and robbers, known as the 'Bokkerieijers' (Goat-riders), made life for the authorities far from easy. In the 18th century they murdered and robbed on a big scale. Only in 1729, 14 years after the first robberies, justice could get a grip on the gang, which did not only consist of poor criminals: people in higher positions were also active in the well-organised gang. They swore a sacred oath to the honour of the gang, and (so it was said) to the devil as well. Farmers even told the myth that they saw them riding in the sky sitting on their goats (hence the name: Goat-riders).

Between 1743 and 1744, 140 'Bokkerieijers' were hanged, quartered or murdered. After 1850 a second wave of terror by the 'Bokkerieijers' took place. The authorities reacted promptly and hanged 300 gang members. In court, the names of 800 members were mentioned.

In 1814 the French retreated after defeats in Russia and Leipzig. Limburg was annexed by the Hollanders and the territory was expanded with pieces of other French 'departements'.

When in 1830 in the Brussels Munt Theatre the opera 'De Stomme van Portici' (The Mute of Portici) was performed, the revolt against the Hollanders began. Limburg chose the Flemish side, for Limburg experienced Holland as protestant, Dutch and haughty. So the Limburgers full-heartedly followed the other southern nations in their resistance against the Hollanders.

### **Part 3**

On the 22nd of September 1830, Sint Truje was conquered by the Flemish. Remunj, Tóngere and Maoseik also fell, and in Haerle protestants were threatened with hanging. Maerse and Baek saw an end to the shared use of the churches by Catholics and Protestants.

Only Mestreech remained under control of the Hollanders. One general Dibbets, with a strong garrison at his disposal, held sway, and he was, and still is, very much hated for this by the

Mestreech population. The general's house at the Vriethoof reminds of his nine years of resistance, during which time the town was isolated. Flemish efforts to conquer the town failed, but Dibbets' troops attacked villages like Maerse, Hier and Sjaan.



*General Dibbets-house at the Vriethoof in Mestreech*

In 1831, in London, it was decided that Limburg should become Dutch. Representatives of Limburg felt this as a shame for the posterity, and one member of the delegation even died of a heart-attack when he heard that East Limburg would be handed over to the terror of the Hollanders.

On the 21th of July 1839 the Flemish (now known as the Belgians) withdrew their troops. At 4 o'clock in the morning the Belgian soldiers left the town of Vénlo very silently, observed by thousands of spectators.

From 1830 until 1839 Limburg was a part of Belgium. In 1839 Limburg was divided by Holland (the Eastern part) and Belgium (the Western part) and did not succeed in becoming independent and united again, despite several efforts of the Limburgers to separate. The fact that other provinces of Holland have nowadays a provincial 'Commissaris' (Commissioner) of the Queen, but that Limburg still has a 'Goevernäör' (governor), dates back to this period.

In 1914 only the Western part of Limburg suffered from the terror spread in Belgium by the Germans. This terror passed the Eastern part due to the neutrality-policy of Holland during the first World War.

The invasion of Germany in 1940 went by without much resistance. Had it not been the wrong Germans who invaded Limburg, the nation might again have become independent and united. In 1944 the Germans bombed residential quarters in Mestreech and Gelaen by mistake, causing hundreds of victims. In the same year South Limburg was liberated from the Nazis by the Americans. In Kirkraoj the liberation was quite dramatic because of the evacuation of 30.000 inhabitants, as their town was situated at the front-line. Only one month later they were allowed to return to their homes.

At the end of 19th century coal mining began to evolve into an important branch of the Limburg industry. The mines however were owned by the Hollanders, who also claimed the coal. All higher functions were reserved for the Hollanders only, and the Limburgers had to satisfy themselves with a job underground. Other industrial activities were created next to the mining-industry.



*Oranje Nassau I coal mine in 1903*

Club life developed widely in Limburg. Brassbands, gun clubs and pigeon racing were, and still are, the favourites. Until well into the 1960s the Catholic church played a prominent role in the Limburg society.

## Part 4

During the 1970's all mines were closed by order of the Hollanders, because of the (so-called) competition of the cheaper American, South African and Australian coal mines. With the closing of the mines, unemployment rose to a record high. Some 50.000 jobs vanished. The government came with subsidies, and a spreading of governmental offices took place in an attempt to create new jobs. The ABP (pension-fund for civil servants) and the CBS (central statistics bureau) settled in Haerle.

The mining-industry has brought forth a company, which today is very active on the international market: DSM (Dutch State Mines). DSM is one of the most important developers of chemical products (mainly based on oil resources) on the world-market. In Gelaen the highway runs through the immense complex of this polluting and unsave giant.

In Born the Nedcar company too is a prominent employer in South Limburg. At first the DAF cars were made here, but Volvo and Mitsubishi share the highly sophisticated car-plant now.

The Maastricht-Aachen airport also contributes to the Limburg economy. Many companies, especially airfreight-companies, have established themselves here.



*Typical landscape of Limburg*

The tourist branche is an important factor in South Limburg. The country side is characterized by rolling hills, which become higher towards the South, where they slowly turn into the Ardennes. Limburg is known as the land of 'Brónsgreun Eikehout' (Bronze-green Oakwood) because of the many oak trees that can be found in the country.

## Part 5

Today, Limburg is still a split nation, the Western part being occupied by the Belgians and the Eastern part by the Hollanders. Limburg is not only occupied by these foreign nations, the Limburgers are also being oppressed by them in a vile manner.

The own Limburg language (one of the oldest in Europe, and not much different from the Doric in Scotland) and culture are not recognized, and may not be taught at schools: they are considered vulgar, and must therefore yield for the decadent Dutch or Flemish language and culture. Limburgers who don't speak Dutch (properly) are considered a lesser species, not eligible for higher jobs; instead they are called names and ridiculed. It won't be a surprise that Limburg is denied an own history!

The Limburgers also have no say about what happens to their own country, about what happens with their tax money. The Hollanders and Flemish still rob Limburg of her resources, in the same way they robbed her of the pit coal in the last century, without paying for it. They come to our nation uninvited and take our best houses, forcing the Limburgers into cheap venues and form their own ghettos. Even the unwelcome foreigners from all over the globe, with which they infest our country, are granted a better life. The Limburgers are being discriminated in their own country, and under the Dutch and Flemish rule, crime in Limburg has risen to an all-time high (the majority of the crimes are committed by Hollanders, Flemish and other foreigners; Limburgers are a quite peaceful people).

The Hollanders and Flemish dictate, in the literal sense of the word. And if that weren't enough, the Limburgers are now also expected to dance to the tune of the E(vil) U(nion) in Brussels!

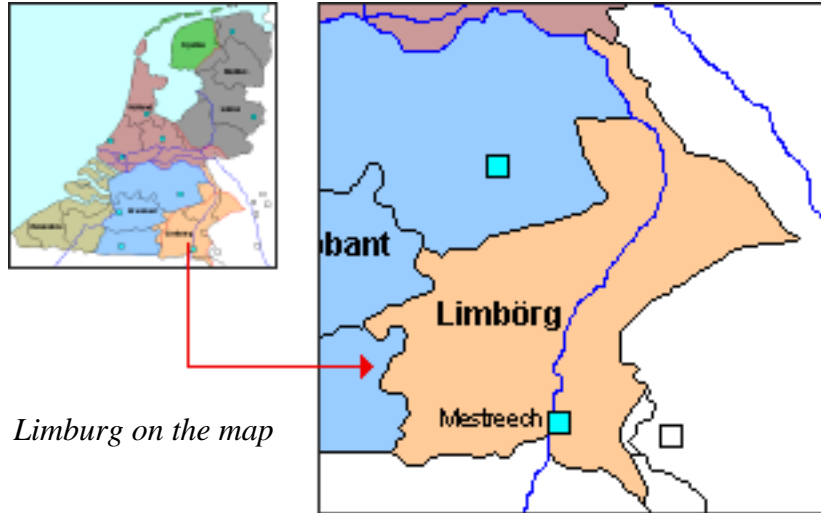
Limburg can exist as an independent, united nation, and again become as rich as she once was. Her favourable geographical position in Europe, between Flanders, Wallonia and the German countries as neighbours, and France, Luxembourg and Scotland (!) at a larger distance, will without any doubt bring prosperity to Limburg. Under the condition that she first liberates herself, if necessary and possible with the help of others, from the yoke of the Hollanders and Flemish!

Our slogan is still: *Limbörg toezjoer, en den Hollender euver de moer!* (Limburg forever, and the Hollander over the wall!)

*(The "wall" is the wall along the River Meuse: if one throws a Hollander over that wall, the Meuse, flowing north, automatically takes him to Holland, where he belongs.)*

**Limbörg vrie! (Limburg free!)**

## Appendix



*Limburg on the map*



*The Flag of Limburg*

----- *The End of a Sad Story* -----

*This Concise Story of South Limburg was compiled from various sources by Bert Post Uiterweer (Rabhairt a Limbroch)*