

## UNSHAKEABLE FOUNDATIONS

*An Iconological Study of the Belgian Constitutional Cult following the 1848 Revolution<sup>1</sup>*

*- Stefan Huygebaert -*

The Belgian parliamentary records of mid-June 1853 feature quite an unusual debate<sup>2</sup>. The majority and opposition jointly expressed their desire to erect a statue for King Leopold on top of the Congress Column, despite the monarch's desire not to have his effigy up there. At the same time, the Catholic opposition attacked Charles Rogier's similar initiatives, which were meant to reaffirm the Belgian Constitution but were read as liberal self-glorification. By that time, as one MP noted, that liberal Constitution had become the oldest one in Europe, following the pan-European Revolution of 1848, which had passed Belgium by without much incident<sup>3</sup>. The Congress Column in Brussels would become the pivotal point of Belgian post-1848 constitutional culture, which the Rogier government intensified into a popular semi-religious constitutional cult. Imagery was employed as a means of popular political communication, and featured iconographic changes, novelties and emphases such as placing the monarch above the constitution, for which the parliament asked.

*“Liberty, in order to make its world tour, no longer needs to pass through Belgium. In Belgium, we possess the great principles of liberty and equality; they are inscribed in our Constitution, as they are engraved in our hearts”<sup>4</sup>.*

MP Noël J. A. Delfosse (1801-1858) in the Belgian Chamber of Representatives, 1 March 1848.

Although not particularly known for his eloquence, Auguste Delfosse (1801-1858), a liberal member of parliament (MP) from Liège, earned his place in history first and foremost because of this opening quote<sup>5</sup>. Delfosse’s

sharp comment closed the parliamentary session of 1 March 1848 on an emotional note. His words responded to the speech of ‘bourgeois socialist’ MP Adelson Castiau (1804-1879), who had just warned the Belgian representatives that the revolutionary wave passing through France would travel through the world, Belgium included<sup>6</sup>. Delfosse’s quote quickly reached a certain iconic status, being immortalised in a print, a medal, a painting and – reportedly – a song<sup>7</sup>. During the same debate in 1848, Minister of the

**1.** This article was realised with the support of the IAP ‘Justice & Populations’ (PVII/22), Interuniversity Attraction Poles Programme – Belgian Science Policy, the Minerva Research Group *The Nomos of Images. Manifestations and iconology of the law* (Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut) and the Research Foundation - Flanders (FWO). My sincere thanks to the JBH reviewers for their valuable comments and corrections. I also thank my supervisors, Dirk Heirbaut, Georges Martyn and Bruno De Wever, as well as my colleagues at the Ghent Legal History Institute and the History Department of Ghent University for their comments, in particular Gita Deneckere, Toon Moonen, Sebastiaan Vandenbogaerde, and Kenan Van de Mieroop. Likewise, I thank Liesbeth Huygebaert, Henry Kaap, Stephanie Luther, Nathalie Tousignant, Oliver Watts and Jana Wijnsouw for their comments and corrections, although remaining errors are my responsibility alone. **2.** *Annales parlementaires 1853, Chambre des Représentants*, Bruxelles, 1853, p. 1669-1673 (11 June 1853). *L’Indépendance belge*, 13, 15 and 16 June 1853. **3.** GEORGES-HENRI DUMONT, *Le miracle belge de 1848*, Bruxelles, 2005 (1948). ALAIN WIJFFELS, “The French-Dutch Heritage of the Belgian Constitution of 1830”, in *Storia Costituzionale*, 2010, p. 125-140. STEFAAN MARTEEL, “Van ‘oude consitutie’ tot liberale grondwet : het Belgische politieke natiebeseef tussen 1815 en 1830”, in PETER RIETBERGEN & TOM VERSCHAFFEL (eds.), *De erfenis van 1830*, Leuven, 2006, p. 35-51. ANNELIEN DE DIJN, “In overeenstemming met onze zeden en gewoonten’ : De intellectuele context van de eerste Belgische constitutie (1815-1830)”, in *Bijdragen en mededelingen betreffende de geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, 117 (1), 2002, p. 25-45. JOHN GILISSEN, “La Constitution belge de 1830 : ses sources, son influence”, in *Res Publica*, no. 10, 1968, p.107-141. **4.** “La liberté pour faire le tour du monde ne doit plus passer par la Belgique. Nous avons en Belgique les grands principes de liberté et d’égalité : ils sont inscrits dans notre Constitution, comme ils sont gravés dans tous nos cœurs” [AUGUSTE DELFOSSE, in *Annales parlementaires 1848, Chambre des Représentants*, Bruxelles, 1848, p. 950 (1 March 1848)]. **5.** AUGUSTE ALVIN, “Delfosse Noël-Joseph-Auguste”, in *Biographie nationale*, vol. 5, Bruxelles, 1876, p. 413-420. **6.** SOLANGE PHILIPPART, “Adelson Castiau, un bourgeois socialiste au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle (1804-1879)”, in *In Memoriam André et Elisabeth Voormezele. Publications extraordinaires de la Société royale d’Histoire et d’Archéologie de Tournai*, vol. 1, Tournai, 1984, p. 157-176. **7.** The phrase made it into a commemorative medal by Constant Jehotte (1809-1883) detailing Delfosse’s career, cf. specimen conserved at UGent, BRKZ.NUM.013235; for the description, see RENIER CHALON, CHARLES PIOT, *Revue de la numismatique belge*, 3<sup>e</sup> série tome II 1858, p. 312-313. It was reported that Delfosse’s words were even put into songs at that time. ULYSSE CAPITAIN, *Nécrologe liégeois pour l’année 1858*, Liège, 1861, p. 8-27. In 1880, Franz Vinck turned the parliamentary scene into a four meter wide history painting : *Séance de la Chambre du premier mars 1848*, Chamber of Representatives. Because of this iconic status and the wittiness of the response, Delfosse’s answer may be seen as a Belgian counterpart to the comte de Mirabeau’s (1749-1791) response to the marquis de Dreux-Brézé (1762-1829) in the French

Interior Charles Rogier (1800-1885) similarly reacted to Castiau's warning, and brought to mind how the young Belgian nation already had its freedoms safely inscribed in the Constitution<sup>8</sup>. While the Belgian state and the recently fallen French July Monarchy were born of the same 1830 revolutionary wave, history would confirm the confidence of Rogier and Delfosse, as the Belgian nation and its institutions survived the troubles of 1848. This survival was due to swift government action and – perhaps more importantly – the country's liberal Constitution.

This article demonstrates how the Belgian liberal government under Rogier used visual means to emphasize the popular respect for the Constitution as part of the government's reaction to the French February Revolution in 1848. It does so on the one hand by pinpointing those measures and by suggesting a characterization as a semi-religious popularizing cult of the Constitution. On the other hand, it scrutinizes what these measures meant on an iconological level<sup>9</sup>. This qualitative iconological interpretation analyses and contextualises the imagery's iconography within a culture – in this case a constitutional culture or *Verfassungskultur*. With Murray Edelman, this article specifically intends to prove that, since “for most men most of the time, politics is a series of pictures in the mind”, the Rogier government actively used these visual means in order to constitute

the people's conception of Belgium's Constitution and institutions, as well as the positive reflection of these two on the Rogier government itself<sup>10</sup>. This top-down analysis also demonstrates how most of the imagery of the popularising constitutional cult are textbook examples of both Hobsbawmian “invented traditions” as well as Nora's “sites of memory”, in that they respectively were newly invented but relied deeply on both local, traditional and international examples, and that they show the clear intention to slip into the collective – in this case visual – memory of the broad public.

The first part provides a brief history and overview of the key events in Belgium before, during and following the 1848 Revolution. Part two characterises the constitutional cult and its components. Thirdly, from among the imagery under scrutiny here, one specific image is selected for every key element of the Belgian post-1848 constitutional iconography, representing the 1848 political debate, the Constitution itself, its monarch, and its content. As such, the focus lays on six images, representing (1) Delfosse's iconic opening quote; (2) the Constitution as a personification, (3) something to be defended and (4) a stable foundation; (5) the constitutional monarch; and (6) the four fundamental constitutional freedoms.

Despite their origin and use in the exceptional context of a young European nation whose

National Constituent Assembly on 23 June 1789. By the time of Mirabeau's death in 1791, his famous words were likewise put into a print (cf. *infra*) and in 1830 the July Monarchy regime organised a competition for a history painting illustrating the famous revolutionary scene. MICHAEL MARRINAN, “Resistance, revolution and the July monarchy : Images to inspire the Chamber of Deputies”, in *The Oxford Art Journal*, no. 2, 1980 (3), p. 29-30. **8.** *Annales parlementaires 1848, Chambre des Représentants*, Bruxelles, 1848, p. 948-950 (1 March 1848). **9.** ERWIN PANOKSY, *Studies in Iconology. Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance*, New York, 1972 (1939). ROELOF VAN STRATEN, *An Introduction to Iconography*, Amsterdam, 1994.

**10.** MURRAY EDELMAN, *The Symbolic Uses of Politics, 1985 (1964)*, Chicago, p. 5.

government and monarchy survived the pan-European revolutionary wave, political images in Belgium following 1848 have not yet been studied. The important differences between the French case of constitutional iconography and the Belgian experience make this gap all the more unacceptable. After all, Jonathan Ribner notices a fatigue in the use of constitutional iconography after the numerous French constitutions symbolised since the 1789 Revolution, a point both Rolf Reichardt and Thomas W. Gaehtgens seem to follow. Maurice Agulhon, however, notes a renewed interest for political imagery among the French after 1848<sup>11</sup>. This article thus demonstrates that the Rogier government in Belgium clearly and actively used the visual power of political imagery and iconography within its counterrevolutionary efforts as well as its self-glorification, triggering iconographical changes and novelties.

## I. Constitution and king and the 1848 Revolution in Belgium

The liberal Belgian Constitution that would serve as the foundation of the country's regime

and monarchy was debated and written by the *Congrès national* or National Congress (1830-1831), Belgium's Constitutional Assembly. This assembly was preceded by a provisional government which had proclaimed Belgium's independence on 4 October 1830, shortly after a revolution against the regime of William I had split the territory off from the United Kingdom of the Netherlands (1815-1830). Leopold of Saxe-Coburg (1790-1865), who would become Louis-Philippe's son-in-law after marrying his daughter Louise of Orléans (1812-1850), was eventually elected Belgian monarch<sup>12</sup>.

Notwithstanding Leopold's preference for a unionist government (which in Belgium meant a combination of liberals and conservatives, the latter commonly referred to as "Catholics"), from 1847 onwards the country was led by an all-liberal government, headed by Charles Rogier<sup>13</sup>. During the 1846 economic crisis, which caused multiple protests, Belgium's liberals united in the *Association Libérale*, the country's first political party. After the outbreak of the 1848 February Revolution in France, Leopold asked Minister of the Interior Charles

11. JONATHAN RIBNER, *Broken Tablets : The Cult of the Law in French Art from David To Delacroix*, Berkeley, 1993, p. 157-158. ROLF REICHARDT, "L'imaginaire de la Constitution de 1789 à 1830 : symbolique d'union ou de division politique?", in NATALIE SCHOLZ, CHRISTINA SCHROER & HANS-ULRICH THAMER (eds.), *Le combat autour de la Représentation : politique symbolique en France, 1789-1830*, Rennes, 2007, p. 101-117. THOMAS W. GAEHTGENS, "Die Revolution von 1848 in der europäischen Kunst", in *Historische Zeitschrift. Beihefte*, no. 29, 2000, p. 105. MAURICE AGULHON, *Marianne au combat. L'imagerie et la symbolisme républicaines de 1789 à 1880*, Paris, 1979, p. 119. For the constitutional iconography of the Netherlands see : FRANSISCUS GRIJZENHOUT, "De Grondwet in Beeld", in NICOLAAS CORNELIUS FERDINAND VAN SAS, HENDRIK TE VELDE AND MARJAN VAN HETEREN, *De eeuw van de grondwet. Grondwet en politiek in Nederland, 1798-1917*, Deventer, 1998, p. 46-79. For the US, see ALAN IRA GORDON, "The myth of the Constitution. 19<sup>th</sup> century constitutional iconography", in RAY B. BROWNE & GLENN J. BROWN (eds.), *Laws of our Fathers. Popular Culture and the U.S. Constitution*, Bowling Green, OH, 1986, p. 88-109. 12. Leopold was in fact only second best, as the National Congress first elected the Duc de Nemours (1814-1896), son of the French king, who refused this offer. 13. GITA DENECKERE, *Leopold I. De eerste koning van Europa*, Antwerpen, 2011, p. 370-381. For the terminology of conservatives and the Belgian Catholic party, see VINCENT VIAENE, *Belgium and the Holy See from Gregory XVI to Pius IX (1831-1859) Catholic Revival, Society and Politics in 19th-Century Europe*, Leuven, 2001, p. 25-26.

Rogier to reinforce the border near Lille, the closest major French town. The Ministry of Justice was asked to keep track of possible agitators, and as a result Karl Marx (1818-1883), who was living as a refugee in Brussels since 1845, was asked to leave the country on 3 March 1848<sup>14</sup>. After a warm welcome for the Belgian representative Eugène de Ligne (1804-1880) in Paris, relations between Belgium and the new provisional French regime of Alphonse de Lamartine (1790-1869) were good<sup>15</sup>. Belgium quickly recognised the new republic, which had affirmed Belgium's neutrality and had not threatened it with invasion<sup>16</sup>. On 29 March, near the French border, in an obscure place interestingly called Risquons-Tout, a limited confrontation occurred between the Belgian army and a Belgian-French republican mob trying to invade Belgium, overthrow its monarchy and annex the country to the French republic. Never forming a real threat, the invasion was easily stopped<sup>17</sup>.

The political measures taken by Rogier and his government corresponded more or less to the demands his liberal party made in 1846<sup>18</sup>. The government's strategy, as described by Els Witte and Gita Deneckere, consisted of certain political concessions to the left-wing agenda, as well as extra spending on public works in order to lower the amount of potentially risky unemployed labourers. Additionally, there was an electoral reform lowering the threshold (tax payment being the primary criterion for suffrage) to the constitutional minimum, a parliamentary reform, and the abolishment of the existing 40 % tax on printed publications<sup>19</sup>. Eventually, the overall political reaction to the French revolution of 1848 in Belgium correlated with the thoughts expressed by Delfosse, linking the nation's strength to its Constitution, in a sphere of short-lived political consensus and patriotism, reminding the country of the pre-1839 days of the so called "monstrous alliance" between Catholics and liberals<sup>20</sup>. Consequently, a stable

14. GEORGES-HENRI DUMONT, *Le miracle belge...*, p. 25, 67-73. Later, in 1869, Marx was one of the signatories of a pamphlet by the General Council of the International Working Men's Association on the Belgian massacres in Seraing and Le Borinage. In this pamphlet, Delfosse's words were only quoted partly, omitting the part about the Constitution, to make them look like a reactionary message. *The Belgian Massacres*, pamphlet by International Workingmen's Association, 1869 (4 May 1869). 15. For the diplomatic history, see BRISON D. GOOCH, *Belgium and the February Revolution*, The Hague, 1963. 16. GEORGES-HENRI DUMONT, *Le miracle belge...*, p. 32-42. 17. *Idem*, p. 92-95. ÉLIANE GUBIN & JEAN-PIERRE NANDRIN, "Het liberale en burgerlijke België : 1846-1878", in ELS WITTE, ÉLIANE GUBIN, JEAN-PIERRE NANDRIN & GITA DENECKERE, *Nieuwe geschiedenis van België. 1830-1905*, Tielt, 2005, p. 259. 18. These demands were part of the liberal party program approved in Brussels' city hall on 14 June 1846. 19. ELS WITTE, "Het Belgische ambtenarenparlement", in *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Filologie en Geschiedenis*, vol. 59, no. 4, 1981, p. 865-866. GITA DENECKERE, *Sire, het volk mort. Sociaal protest in België, 1831-1918*, Antwerpen, 1997, p. 149. GEORGES-HENRI DUMONT, *Le miracle belge...*, p. 49-50. ÉLIANE GUBIN & JEAN-PIERRE NANDRIN, *Het liberale en burgerlijke België...*, p. 252-254. BRAM DELBECKE, *De lange schaduw van de grondwetgever. Perswetgeving en persmisdrijven in België (1831-1914)*, Gent, 2012, p. 206-211. THEO LUYCKX, "Een halve eeuw zegelbelasting op de Belgische pers (sept. 1797-mei 1848)", in *Mededelingen van de Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie voor Wetenschappen, Letteren en Schone kunsten van België, Klasse der Letteren*, 1956 (18), p. 3-29. The fact that Jouvenel designed and struck a medal in 1848 to commemorate these specific government measures illustrates the importance of political imagery. See note 106. 20. JEAN STENGERS & ÉLIANE GUBIN, *Le grand siècle de la nationalité belge*, (Histoire du sentiment national en Belgique des origines à 1918 2), Bruxelles, 2002, p. 35-41.

column would serve as the quintessential visual form to represent the fundamental laws within post-1848 constitutional culture.

## II. Early Belgium's "Verfassungskultur": from constitutional culture to constitutional cult

Peter Häberle defines *Verfassungskultur* as a communication of public order between ruler and subject with legitimation as a goal, by means of discourse, symbolism and mentality<sup>21</sup>. Daum, in his synthesis on the concept of *Verfassungskultur*, and Knauer and Kümmel, in their introduction to the visualisation of constitutional order, emphasize the openness or public character (*Öffentlichkeit*) of constitutional monarchies, leading to the necessity for governments to generate such *Verfassungskultur*, often combined with the nation's narrative<sup>22</sup>. In combination with Edelman's political theory on the symbolic uses of politics, this concept allows us to interpret the Belgian post-1848 constitutional culture as something active, an effort by which the government actively generates and commissions symbolic imagery, highlighting the nation's basic law as its life

preserver in times of serious political trouble as well as the very core of Belgium<sup>23</sup>. Arising in the wake of a preventive counterrevolutionary campaign, these efforts soon turned out to be part of a fruitful patriotic narrative and imagery, reflecting on Rogier's own government. This shift within the general *Verfassungskultur* has already been noted by Jeroen Janssens, who showed that the national celebrations in Brussels' streets every September shifted their focus from 1848 onwards, from the patriotic 1830 revolution to the king and Constitution<sup>24</sup>.

One could bring together all such festivities, art works and initiatives under the banner of this popular constitutional cult. The term "cult" not only serves as a proverbial "superlative degree" of culture, indicating an intensification of interest, but also it describes the semi-religious worship to which the Constitution was subjected. The analogy with the French post-revolutionary constitutional veneration as described by Reichardt is striking, as is the case for what Alan Ira Gordon coins as the American 'myth' of the Constitution during the nineteenth century<sup>25</sup>. In Belgium, the Constitution became the focal point of monuments, prints and booklets as devotional objects, and was referred to in semi-religious

21. PETER BRANDT, MARTIN KIRSCH, ARTHUR SCHLEGELMICH & WERNER DAUM, "Einleitung", in WERNER DAUM (ed.), *Handbuch der europäischen Verfassungsgeschichte im 19. Jahrhundert. Institutionen und Rechtspraxis im gesellschaftlichen Wandel. Band 1 : Um 1800*, Bonn, 2006, p. 88-89. 22. WERNER DAUM, "Verfassungskultur", in WERNER DAUM, *Handbuch der europäischen Verfassungsgeschichte im 19. Jahrhundert. Institutionen und Rechtspraxis im gesellschaftlichen Wandel, Band 2 : 1815-1847*, Hagen, 2012, p. 134-138. MARTIN KNAUER & VERENA KÜMMELE, "Einleitung", in MARTIN KNAUER & VERENA KÜMMELE (eds.), *Visualisierung konstitutioneller Ordnung 1815-1852*, Rhema, 2011, p. 8-9. 23. For example : "la seule ancre de salut au milieu des tempêtes qui grondent autour de nous". François de Bonne, in *Annales parlementaires 1848. Chambre des Représentants*, Bruxelles, p. 1711 (18 May 1848). Abbé de Haerne, in *Annales parlementaire 1853. Chambre des Représentants*, Bruxelles, p. 1671 (11 June 1853). MURRAY EDELMAN, *The Symbolic Uses of Politics...*, p. 1-21. 24. JEROEN JANSSENS, *De Belgische natie viert. De Belgische nationale feesten, 1830-1914*, Leuven, 2001, p. 47-56. 25. ROLF REICHARDT, "L'imaginaire de la Constitution..."; ALAN IRA GORDON, "The myth of the Constitution".

terminology<sup>26</sup>. Liberal MP François de Bonne (1789-1879) called for a “sacramental formula : the Constitution, the entire Constitution, and nothing but the Constitution”, almost equating the fundamental law with the truth in a witness’s oath – “so help me God”<sup>27</sup>. In 1859 Rogier referred to “the common cult of great memories, ... the religious respect for its institutions that constitute its force, its security and its glory” during the inauguration of the Congress Column (1850-1859), notably a monument dedicated to Belgium’s Constitutional Assembly<sup>28</sup>.

The monument, a collaboration between architect Joseph Poelaert (1817-1879) and a multitude of sculptors, is the most visible remains and the quintessential outcome of Belgium’s post 1848 constitutional cult. The design won the competition (Royal Decree of 24 September 1849) in which all competitors had to hand in their designs anonymously, would be judged by a (fairly liberal) jury

and exhibited publicly<sup>29</sup>. This public and popularising aspect of the constitutional cult, in which the whole nation shared in celebrating the Constitution, can likewise be found in the proposal to erect small-scale zinc Congress Columns in cities all over the country, and the crowdfunding idea of having the Belgian people contribute to the monument by means of a subscription list<sup>30</sup>. Despite the many contributions of local governments, this subscription list was a failure, bringing in a little over 150,000 of the eventual total cost of 900,000 francs, but the intention behind it shows how Rogier aimed for a broad audience<sup>31</sup>.

Shortly after the initiative for a monument, in 1852, Rogier decided that an illustrated version of the Constitution had to be designed in both French and Dutch, in part as a token of appreciation for all those citizens who had financially contributed to the construction of

**26.** Jean Stengers and Éliane Gubin wrote about the religious character of the constitutional culture, as did Henri Pirenne who called it “*presque superstitieuse*”. JEAN STENGERS & ÉLIANE GUBIN, *Le grand siècle...*, p. 8-14, 35-41. **27.** “...*formule sacramentelle : la Constitution, toute la Constitution, rien que la Constitution*” [François de Bonne in *Annales parlementaires 1848, Chambre des Représentants, Bruxelles*, p. 1711 (18 May 1848)]. **28.** “...*le culte commun des grands souvenirs, (...) le respect religieux pour ses institutions qui font sa force, sa sécurité et sa gloire*” (FÉLIX STAPPAERTS, *La Colonne du Congrès à Bruxelles. Notice historique et descriptive du monument*, Bruxelles, 1860, p. 60). For the Congress Column, see : PIERRE LOZE et al., “Poelaert, zijn leermeesters, zijn tijdgenoten en zijn mededingers”, in RICHARD VANDENDAELE (ed.), *Poelaert en zijn tijd*, Brussel, 1980, 172-174; CLAUDINE HOUBART, “De kolom op het congresplein”, in *Monumenten, landschappen & archeologie*, no. 6, 2005 (24), p. 21-40; THOMAS COOMANS, “Brussel, Congreskolom. Symbolen van nationale identiteit”, in *De beeldentaal van symbolen*, Brussel, 2002, p. 140-143; PATRICK DEROM, *De beelden van Brussel*, Antwerpen, 2000, p. 41-48. **29.** This *modus operandi* is analogous to the 1848 national design competition for a symbol for the new French Republic, but had been used for earlier Belgian and French monuments, such as Geefs’s Belliard statue. ALBERT BOIME, “The Second Republic’s Contest for the Figure of the Republic”, in *The Art Bulletin*, 1971 (53), p. 68-83. **30.** The proposal or rumor concerning the small-scale columns can be read in the Flemish journal *De Eendragt*, where it was also written that the constitutional articles would be inscribed in Flemish in Flanders, so that no-one would be unable to know the country’s Constitution. *De Eendragt*, 8 May 1859, p. 99. **31.** Report of the Section centrale, published in *L’Indépendance belge*, 12 June 1853, p. 5. For the total cost see *Dépenses* (SAB [State Archives in Belgium]), Charles Rogier, I 124 – 451 : Rapports et notes sur la Colonne du Congrès à Bruxelles (1853-1870).

the Congress Column<sup>32</sup>. Additionally, Rogier appointed the *Musée populaire* as supervisors for the enterprise. This organisation, rather than an actual museum, was established on his initiative in 1849 as a publisher specialising in patriotic prints of national heritage and history, aimed at children and the lower classes<sup>33</sup>. This decision clearly confirms how the illustrated Constitution was intended as part of a popular culture. The liberal pro-Rogier newspaper *L'Indépendance belge* defended the illustrated Constitution by stating that a specimen of “the book which is the country’s gospel” would thus be available “in the rich man’s mansion as well as in the worker’s room and the farmer’s cottage”<sup>34</sup>. Apart from the illustrated Constitution, Rogier also issued a history of the Congress, written by Théodore Juste (1818-1888). The book presented the history of the Belgian Constitution as a logical outcome of a centuries-long history of freedom fighting<sup>35</sup>. Likewise, this kind of invented tradition-thinking can be found in the fact that Pierre Dens was asked by the jury to rework his original design for the Congress Column by including the ancient

Constitutions in its base<sup>36</sup>. The iconography of the Constitution became all the more ubiquitous on the occasion of the annual national celebrations and parades during the month of September, especially during the quarter-century celebration of Belgium’s constitutional monarchy in 1856.

Most of the popularizing cult of the Constitution focused on Brussels. The choice for the capital as the site for the Congress Column was one of the government measures to centralize Belgium around Brussels, a decision not all took for granted<sup>37</sup>. The Antwerp Catholic newspapers *Journal d’Anvers* and *Het Handelsblad* looked upon the decision with envy and disapproval, specifically because of the use of money from all over the country. In parliament, liberal MP Auguste Orts (1814-1880) had to defend the efforts to build Brussels into a real capital against provincial reproaches<sup>38</sup>. Both the proposal to erect small-scale zinc Congress Columns in cities all over the country and Rogier’s subscription list for communal governments to each buy their own 400 fr. bronze miniature Congress Column

32. *Fêtes de septembre 1850*, Bruxelles, 1850, p. 14; *Annales parlementaires 1853*, *Chambre des Représentants*, Bruxelles, 1853, p. 1670 (11 June 1853). *Constitution de la Belgique. Édition illustrée*, Bruxelles, 1852; *Grondwet van België. Uitgave versierd met platen*, Brussel, 1852. In a country where French was the *de facto* official language in government, a semi-official Dutch translation of the Constitution for the Flemish majority is conspicuous, certainly given the fact that an official Dutch translation of the Constitution was only realised in 1967. 33. *Annales parlementaires 1854*, *Chambre des Représentants*, Bruxelles, 1854, p. 668 (9 February 1854).

34. “du livre qui est l’Évangile politique du pays” (...) “dans l’hôtel du riche comme dans la chambre de l’ouvrier et la chaumière du paysan” (*L’Indépendance belge*, 16 June 1853). 35. THÉODORE JUSTE, *Histoire du Congrès national de Belgique ou de la fondation de la monarchie belge*, Bruxelles, 1850. 36. The competition for the Congress Column initially ended in a draw for two architects, Dens and Poelaert, who were asked to alter their initial projects. Eventually, Poelaert won the second round. *Projet pour la Colonne du Congrès à Bruxelles présenté au concours de 1850*, KBR, print room, S.II 13865. For the invented tradition in Belgian national culture, see JOHANNES KOLL, “Belgien”, in WERNER DAUM (ed.), *Handbuch der europäischen Verfassungsgeschichte...*, p. 520-521. 37. Likewise, the many local initiatives for commemorative monuments dedicated to the recently deceased queen Louise-Marie were centralized in the church project for Laeken, another edifice by Poelaert. *L’Indépendance belge*, 12 June 1853, p. 6. 38. *Het Handelsblad*, 7 December 1850, p. 1; *L’Indépendance belge*, 2 October 1850, p. 1.

still made sense, but the liberal newspaper *L'Indépendance belge* wittily underlined the foolishness of erecting a national monument worthy of that name in provincial places such as Steenokkerzeel or Neder-Over-Heembeek. Naturally, according to the liberals, the Column had to be placed in Brussels<sup>39</sup>.

These provincial reproaches were far from the only element of critique to which Rogier's initiatives were subject, and Catholic criticism of Rogier's constitutional cult was especially multifaceted. First, Rogier had taken the decision without Parliament in what some Catholic MPs and newspapers called an unconstitutional and illegal way. Second, he had misused the money from the collected subscriptions for the publication of 'his' illustrated Constitution, which was not what people signed up for. On this point, Rogier in his turn blamed the Catholic press and their boycott for the failure of the subscription list – a reproach to which the Catholic newspaper *Le Courrier de l'Escaut* openly admitted, since they did not care much for the Congress Column<sup>40</sup>. Juste's history of Congress, which Rogier had commissioned, did little to convince the Catholic press, who read it as an adulation of Rogier's career<sup>41</sup>. Finally, the choice of Victor Lagye (1825-1896) as the artist to illustrate the Constitution was interpreted as liberal nepotism<sup>42</sup>.

This criticism did not stop Rogier from building his constitutional cult, which indeed focused

on the capital, but at the same time aimed for a broad audience and their 'respect for the Constitution'. A lithograph carrying that phrase as a title would precede his efforts.

### III. Six iconological features of the post-1848 constitutional cult

#### From parliament to print : the 1848 moment of consensus

In light of the previously mentioned criticism, one would almost forget the tear-jerking moment of patriotism and consensus in Parliament on 1 May 1848 – Delfosse was reported to have cried after his speech. Two days later, his quote was already illustrated by means of an intriguing allegory entitled *Respect to the Constitution*<sup>43</sup>. This drawing by Jozef Meganck (1807-1891) was made into a lithograph by François Stroobant (1819-1916) and was published in Brussels on 3 May 1848. In the allegory, the personification of Justice aims her piercing gaze (in the absence of her blindfold) towards the personification opposite her, interpreted as the Belgian Nation, a personification whose ambiguity is scrutinized under figure 2. This personification didactically points her finger at the table of the law she is holding, which reads "1830 [sic] Constitution"<sup>44</sup>. On the left of the allegory, behind the personification of Liberty and the revolutionaries accompanying her, Meganck drew a burning city, and in the lower left corner he added a dead tree, hinting at a pejorative

39. *L'Indépendance belge*, 8 May 1861, p. 1. 40. *Le Courrier de l'Escaut*, 20 February 1853, p. 1. 41. *Idem*, 24 June 1853, p. 1. 42. *L'Indépendance belge*, 16 June 1853, p. 1. 43. *Respect à la Constitution*, Royal Library of Belgium (KBR), print room, S.III 106186. An advertisement for the print was published in *L'Indépendance belge*, 7 May 1848, p. 4. 44. The Belgian Constitution was approved on 7 February 1831 after the National Congress (beginning 10 November 1830) debated for three months. The lion as a symbol for the Belgian – and the entire Low Countries' – territories existed long before 1831 as the *Leo Belgicus*. As a heraldic



Fig. 1. F. Stroobant (lith.) after J. Meganck (inv.), *Respect to the Constitution*, 1848.  
© KBR, photo Nancy Demartin

connotation. Liberty is recognisable because of her revolutionary liberty cap and the broken chains under her feet. However, in crushing these symbols of oppression, the same Liberty also damages a subtly drawn crown and sceptre, a reference to the fate of the fallen French king Louis-Philippe. Thus, this maiden of virtue does not so much embody virtuous Liberty as the kind of “the liberty of disorder, liberty of revolt” Rogier had warned against in his parliamentary response to Castiau<sup>45</sup>. Because of the interplay of looks between Justice and Belgium holding her Constitution, and the juxtaposition of two kinds of political liberty the allegory quite literally visually represents the government-driven “respect for the Constitution” that was at the heart of the aforementioned constitutional cult.

Although the specific iconography of the constitutional monarch is analysed further in this article (see figure 5), one important element should already be noted here. After all, in 1848, dynastic continuity was at risk all over Europe. Thus, the left side of Meganck’s lithograph presents an image of discontinuity, illustrating what Belgium would look like if a king no longer ruled. The broken crown and sceptre at the feet of liberty are easily overlooked, though their significance can

hardly be overrated. The key iconographic element here is the lightning striking out of the rock. As Christian Fuhmeister demonstrated, during the late eighteenth century, the lightning motif was not only generally linked with liberation, progress and opposition to the status quo, but also and more particular with the “uncontrollable force of political movements” as it “supports and even legitimizes the attack on monarchy and absolutism”<sup>46</sup>.

Proof that the electrifying motif kept this connotation half a century after the 1789 revolution is provided by the French print *Triomphe de la liberté* (1848) showing Louis-Philippe, the recently overthrown King of the French, falling through the sky with a falling crown and lightning in the back. Contrarily, Meganck’s lithograph seems to advocate for *Coronam ne vellito* (“Tear not the crown to pieces”). In the similarly titled chapter of his *The book of symbols* dating a year prior to both prints, Edinburgh journalist Robert Musset explained the broken crown motif from a British point of view, advocating for loyalty and obedience to the laws: “The crown of a kingdom is the symbol of its constitutional power, as a balance is the type of justice, and a sword of the military power; and to tear the crown in pieces is to use violence

monarchs for this reason. HUBERT FRANÇOIS GRAVELOT & CHARLES NICOLAS COCHIN, *Iconologie par images ou traité complet des allégories, emblèmes etc. à l’usage des artistes*, vol. II, Paris, [1791], p. 75. <sup>45</sup>. “liberté du désordre, la liberté de l’émeute” [*Annales parlementaires, 1848, Chambre des Représentants*, Bruxelles, 1848, p. 950 (1 March 1848)]. In France, during the *Fêtes républicaines* of 21 May 1848, one of the temporary colossal statues represented Liberty with a giant club often seen in the hands of Hercules or representations of Fortitude. Outsiders, such as monarchist Belgians, might have interpreted this as the French visualisation of Rogier’s pejorative “liberty of disorder”. *Journées illustrées de la révolution de 1848*, Paris, s.d., p. 154. <sup>46</sup>. CHRISTIAN FUHRMEISTER, “Eripuit Caelo Fulmen Sceptrumque Tyrannis’ the Political Iconography of Lightning in Europe and North America, 1750-1800”, in *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, no. 5, 2009 (99), p. 145, 149-153. In his parliamentary speech, Castiau likewise referred to the French February revolution as “these events of which the news has fallen like lightning in our midst” “ces événements dont la nouvelle est tombée comme la foudre au milieu de nous” [*Annales parlementaires, Bruxelles, 1848, 949 (1 March 1848)*].

to the supreme power of a state or to subvert the basic law on which all governments are founded”<sup>47</sup>. Mushet’s interpretation of the motif proves the royalist nature of the 1848 print, included in the small detail underneath Liberty’s feet.

#### **A meaningful composite : personifying Belgium and the constitution after 1848**

As a central element of the constitutional cult, Rogier’s illustrated Constitution of 1852 deserves our primary attention in an analysis of the visual representation of the fundamental law itself. Victor Lagye’s frontispiece, in which several classes of society support a personification seated on a shield, features one of the novelties in post-1848 Belgian constitutional iconography. The key element here is the personification seated on the shield. Both the Belgian nation and its Constitution had been put into imagery before 1848. The post-1848 novelty lies therefore not as much in the very act of visually representing these notions – as was the case with the four constitutional freedoms, only visually represented since 1848, cf. figure 6 – but in the contemporary interpretation. After all, Lagye’s personification is most ambiguous, and at the time confusion existed as to whether it represented the Belgian Nation as a whole, or only its Constitution.

On the one hand, *L’Indépendance belge* read the personification as Belgium holding the

Constitution and seated on the lion’s back<sup>48</sup>. Likewise, inside the illustrated Constitution the same personification returns in two more prints about the Belgian Nation drawn by Lagye (“All powers emanate from the Nation”, then Article 25, and “The Belgian Nation adopts de colours red, yellow and black”, then Article 125). In each of the three prints, a woman wearing a combination of a turreted head or city crown (a crown consisting of city walls, referring to a certain geographic entity) and a laurel or victory crown was accompanied by a lion. The only difference lies in the form of the Constitution, which in the illustration for Article 25 is represented as a book, and in the frontispiece as tables of the law<sup>49</sup>. Meganck used the same personification in his composition (figure 1), and in this light, his *Respect à la Constitution* should be read as the Belgian Nation pointing out the Constitution to French Liberty.

On the other hand, however, several comparable or identical personifications were read as representing the Constitution, and personifications meant to symbolise the Constitution were read as representing Belgium. For example, at the time when the plan was to have the Congress Column surmounted with a personification of the Constitution, archaeologist Antonin Schayes called it “the statue of Belgium, holding the book of the Constitution”<sup>50</sup>. Likewise, several entries in the Congress Column competition featured a

47. ROBERT MUSHET, *The Book of Symbols*, London, 1847, p. 370; SAMUEL HALKETT & JOHN LAING, *Dictionary of Anonymous and Pseudonymous English Literature*, vol. 2, 1971 (1926-34), p. 220. 48. For the tables of the law, Rolf Reichardt showed how for the French case the Old Testament symbol of double tables of the law was desacralized by the French revolutionaries, only to be re-sacralized within a semi-religious revolutionary constitutional cult. ROLF REICHARDT, “L’imaginaire de la Constitution...”. 49. The book in the illustration of article 25 supports a crown, and in between the two objects are ribbons indicating the country’s bicameral parliament. 50. “la statue de la Belgique, tenant le livre de la Constitution” (ANTONIN SCHAYES, *Histoire de l’architecture en Belgique : depuis les temps les plus reculés jusqu’à l’époque actuelle*, Bruxelles, 1853, p. 578).



Fig. 2. Victor Lagye, *Frontispiece of Constitution de la Belgique*.  
*Édition illustrée, Bruxelles, 1852.*

personification of the Constitution on top of the Column, with the exact same iconography, minus the lion. One of them is explicitly annotated as “*La Constitution*”, wears a city crown, and carries the tables of the law and a palm, and entry no. 41 included the lion next to the personification on top of the Column<sup>51</sup>. The winning entries of Poelaert and Pierre Dens (1819-1901) used a personification of the Constitution holding a garland instead of a palm, and this is how sculptor Guillaume (or Willem in Dutch) Geefs (1805-1883) designed the first model for the surmounting sculpture of the Column<sup>52</sup>.

It is highly likely that Lagye’s frontispiece was misread as personifying the Constitution, mostly because it is, after all, the opening print of an illustrated Constitution. Lagye’s print as a whole is an allegory, as multiple personifications interact<sup>53</sup>. This “interaction”

should be read as different strata and actors of society uniting shoulder by shoulder and jointly hauling the shield upon which the aforementioned personification rests<sup>54</sup>. It thus advocates for a union of all Belgians under their Constitution. This is at least how playwright Jacob Kats (1804-1886) seems to have read the image. His play *The Belgian Nation* (1856) ended with a scene in which a farmer, a jurist, a blacksmith, a military standard bearer, a painter, a sailor, an engineer, and a standard-bearer of the *garde civique* carried the shield with the Constitution<sup>55</sup>. Kats, a radical democrat who earlier on experienced close encounters with Belgium’s repressive press laws, had the farmer – played by himself – say, “...It is in the unanimity, and not in discord, that the happiness of the Nation, yes even that of all peoples, lays. Justly the motto of our Constitution reads : *Union is strength*”<sup>56</sup>. Kats respected a clear separation

51. *La Constitution* (SAB, *Kaarten en Plannen, inventaris in handschrift*, 762). 52. In 1859, Dens published a picture of his original entry. “De kolom van M. Dens”, in *Het Handelsblad*, 12 October 1859, p. 1. *Projet pour la Colonne du Congrès à Bruxelles présenté au concours de 1850*, KBR, print room, S.II 13865. Poelaert’s A-project (one out of a total of four) is conserved as *L’Union fait la Force* (SAB, *Kaarten en Plannen, inventaris in handschrift*, 762); “La sculpture en Belgique”, in *L’Artiste*, 1853, p. 156-157. 53. Roelof Van Straten’s definition of personifications versus allegories sees the latter as a meaningful interaction of two or more of the first, e.g. Father time, the personification of time, clipping the wings of Cupid, the personification of love, thus reaching a higher level of meaning, i.e. time makes love fade away. ROELOF VAN STRATEN, *Inleiding in de iconografie. Enige theoretische en praktische kennis*, Bussum, 2002. 54. This act of carrying or supporting also points to early Belgian history – or what nineteenth century history books made of it – as early Frankish kings were shown being carried on similar shields. *L’Indépendance belge* called the shield “ce sol primitif de la vieille royauté franque” (*L’Indépendance belge*, 20 October 1852, p. 1). See also Hendrickx and Vermorcken’s print *Élection d’un roi franc* in T. JUSTE, *Histoire de la Belgique*, Bruxelles, 1850, as commented on by TOM VERSCHAFFEL, *Beeld en geschiedenis. Het Belgische en Vlaamse verleden in de romantische boekillustraties*, Turnhout, 1987, p. 134-135. 55. JAKOB KATS, *De Belgische natie. Dramatische feesttaferelen in twee bedryven en vier toneelveranderingen*, Brussel, 1856, p. 63. 56. “het is in de eensgezindheid, en niet in de verdeeldheid, dat het geluk der Natie, ja zelfs dat van alle volken ligt opgesloten. Te regt zegt de kenspreuk onzer Grondwet : Eendragt maekt magt” (JAKOB KATS, *De Belgische natie...*, p. 40). For Kats see : BRAM DELBECKE, *De lange schaduw...* STIJN BUSSELS & ND BRAM VAN OOSTVELDT, “Wij zijn geen Crapuul ! Jacob Kats’ strijd als vroegsocialistisch theatermaker, reddenaar en journalist”, in *Brood & rozen : tijdschrift voor de geschiedenis van sociale bewegingen*, no. 4, 2012, p. 28-47. One of the entries for the Congress Column competition features a similar image of different professions and layers of society uniting at the base of the column. “Parvi Crescunt” (SAB, *Kaarten en Plannen, inventaris in handschrift*, 762).

between personifications of Belgium and the Constitution, given that the “Goddess of the Nation” is featured as a separate character in his play. His final scene, which most likely was inspired by Lagye’s print, interprets the personification in its upper part as the Constitution.

Indicating one of the two possibilities would contradict what is the central issue here. Rather, this confusing indistinctness gets to the heart of what this constitutional cult was all about. In the cases of the *Verfassungskultur* of Sweden, Norway, Sardinia, the Kingdom of the two Sicilies and many other nations, national culture was conflated with constitutional culture, just as the *Konstitutionssäule* in Bavaria is both a national and a Constitution monument (cf. *infra*) or the coat of arms of France between 1830 and 1848 featured the tables of the *Charte* of 1830<sup>57</sup>. In Belgium after 1848 a synthesis of nation, Constitution and liberty can be noted on both a discursive and an iconographic level, as part of one cult. Much like how Frédéric August Bartholdi’s (1834-1904) famous *Liberty Enlightening the World*

(1886) in New York shows both the republic and liberty, which had become synonymous personifications, the same is true for Belgium’s nation and Constitution after 1848<sup>58</sup>. Likewise, it is striking to note how at first, the Congress Column was read by some as the “Column of National Gathering” or “September Column”, referring to the patriotic revolution, whilst they were in fact writing about a monument for the Constitution<sup>59</sup>.

For the case of the personifications of Belgium and the Constitution, there was a notable Belgian precedent on the *Place des Martyrs*, where a monument was inaugurated on 24 September 1838, surmounted with a sculpture by Guillaume Geefs<sup>60</sup>. This central personification with turreted head writing the dates of the revolution on a table was read as representing both Belgium and Liberty. Adolphe Guérard put the two notions together and described her as “Liberty, representing liberated Belgium”<sup>61</sup>. As late as 1880, a medal commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Belgium used the personification of the Martyrs’ monument and named it “*Constitution belge 1830*”<sup>62</sup>.

57. OTFRIED CZAICA, “Schweden”, in WERNER DAUM (ed.), *Handbuch der europäischen Verfassungsgeschichte...*, p. 1132-1136. PETER BRANDT, “Norwegen”, in WERNER DAUM (ed.), *Handbuch der europäischen Verfassungsgeschichte...*, p. 1204-1209. WERNER DAUM, “Die Königreiche Sardinien und beider Sizilien”, in WERNER DAUM (ed.), *Handbuch der europäischen Verfassungsgeschichte...*, p. 378. ADRIAN VON BUTTLAR, *Leo Von Klenze. Leben, werk, vision*, München, 1999, p. 86. 58. ALBERT BOIME, “The second republic’s contest for the figure of the republic”, in *The Art Bulletin*, no. 1, 1971 (53), p. 77, note 55. 59. “*Zuile der Vaderlandsche Samenkomst*” or “*Septemberzuile*” as noted in *De Eendragt*, 22 September 1850, p. 35-36. 60. EDGAR GOEDLEVEN, *Het Martelaarsplein te Brussel*, Tiel, 1996, p. 123, 125, 131. 61. “*la Liberté, représentant la Belgique affranchie*” (ADOLPHE GUÉRARD, *La Belgique ancienne et moderne. Le Brabant*, Bruxelles, 1865, p. 109). Geefs’s statue for the *Monument des Martyrs* was read as a personification of Belgium by, *inter alia*, the French books *Le Plutarque de 1847 : biographie des hommes du jour*, Paris, 1847, p. 161 and AUGUST JOSEPH DU PAYS, *Itinéraire descriptif, historique, artistique et industriel de la Belgique*, Paris, 1863, p. 55. On the other hand, authors reading it as “Liberty” include THÉODORE JUSTE, *Histoire du congrès national*, Bruxelles, 1862, p. 138-139, and *Revue de la Belgique : littérature et beaux-arts*, 1848 (2), p. 44. 62. Royal Library, coin collection, inventory number L226/12.

Within the analytical scheme of constitutional iconology, these cases of iconographic polysemy or ambivalence and post-1848 cases of confusion between Belgium and Constitution are best interpreted as meaningful. A welcome comparison here is the late medieval and early modern image of Venezia/Iustitia, in which the representation of the Venetian Republic, Venezia, was fused with the image of the virtue of Iustitia. As David Rosand puts it, “Inscriptions and attributions may distinguish these regal women as Iustitia or Venetia, but the public statement unambiguously depends upon their ambivalent resemblance: Venice is Justice”<sup>63</sup>. Likewise, within the post-1848 cult, Belgium was the Constitution and, to paraphrase Rosand, the image of Belgium and the Constitution “remained most usefully ambivalent; it functioned quite deliberately and fluently as a composite”<sup>64</sup>.

#### Protecting the relic

Apart from the ambivalent personification, Lagye’s print, Meganck’s lithograph and Kats’s theatrical scene also share the presence of men in uniform. In the cases of Lagye and Meganck, the uniformed man at the right is a member of the *garde civique*, a civilian police force that originated during the 1830 Revolution. Their function was redefined by the Constituent Assembly as peacekeepers and guardians of the territory’s integrity, but

most of all as a symbol for the nation’s unity. This is also how they were inscribed in the Constitution under the old Articles 121-122. As part of the anti-revolutionary measures taken in 1848, Rogier’s government reorganised the *garde civique* more clearly into an instrument of social defence and law enforcement<sup>65</sup>. In Meganck’s *Repect à la Constitution*, the arrangement of the three men – a clergyman, a soldier and a member of the *garde civique* – united under the tricolor flag recalls the composition of a more famous example of constitutional imagery: David’s *Tennis Court Oath*. There, the triangular composition with three clerics refers to the compromise between Dom Gerle (1736-1801) and Rabaut de Saint-Étienne (1743-1793) after the debate on religion and the State<sup>66</sup>. As Meganck’s allegory referred to a parliamentary debate, his triangle bears echoes of Rogier’s arguments. After all, as Rogier had it, civic disturbance rooted in non-national sentiment (that is, following the French “Liberty of disorder”) would justifiably, in accordance with the Constitution and with the blessing of the church if you will, be suppressed by the *garde civique*<sup>67</sup>.

Not coincidentally, Leopold I honoured this police force on 9 April 1848, while in return the *garde civique* ensured the king that the Belgians did not harbour the discontent that troubled France. For the reverse side of the medal commemorating this occasion (figure

63. DAVID ROSAND, *Myths of Venice: The Figuration of a State*, Chapel Hill/London, 2001, p. 33. My thanks to Henry Kaap (KHI) for his suggestions on this point. 64. *Idem*, p. 32. 65. LUC KEUNINGS, *Les forces de l’ordre à Bruxelles au XIXe siècle*, Bruxelles, 2007, p. 101. GEORGES-HENRI DUMONT, *Le miracle belge...*, p. 51. 66. SIMON SCHAMA & STANLEY HOFFMANN, “The French revolution and its commemoration in retrospect”, in *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, no. 3, 1990 (44), p. 17. PHILIPPE BORDES, “Jacques-Louis David’s ‘Serment du Jeu de Paume’: propaganda without a cause?”, in *Oxford Art Journal*, no. 2, 1980 (3), p. 21. 67. *Annales parlementaire 1848, Chambre des Représentants*, Bruxelles, 1848, p. 950 (1 March 1848).



Fig. 3.1 L. Hart, commemorative medal for Leopold taking the constitutional oath, 1847.  
© UGent, adore.



Fig. 3.2 L. Hart, medal for the garde civique ceremony, 1848. © UGent, adore.

3.2), Laurent J. Hart (1810-1860) designed an allegory with the tables of the law as a symbol for the Constitution. The front of the medal features the same personification that adorned a medal created in 1847 commemorating Leopold's inauguration, except the personification on the 1848 medal wields a – rather unfortunate – sword by means of which she guards the Constitution<sup>68</sup>. As the proverbial “flip side of the coin”, this imagery puts the *garde civique* in the role of defenders of the Constitution. Analogously, an image by Henri Hendrickx (1817-1894), published in 1856 for the twenty-fifth anniversary of Leopold's inauguration, shows both a member of the *garde civique* and an army soldier flanking the constitutional tables<sup>69</sup>. In a publication for the same occasion, Henri Conscience (1812-1883), Belgium's leading romantic writer, described a painting entitled *The King's Loyalty* on one of the temporary triumphal arches that were put in the streets of Brussels. He describes a

woman who is said to defend the Constitution – “palladium of the country's freedom” – by means of a sword<sup>70</sup>.

The enemy against whom the Constitution had to be defended was the bad kind of liberty juxtaposed in Meganck's lithograph or, on a more general level, the notion of discord. Moreover, one of the competition entries for the Congress Column was surmounted by a personification referred to as the Belgian spirit beating the hydra of discord, and a similar snake-like animal is seen crawling away for the sword-wielding personification in the opening illustration of *Inauguration de la Colonne du Congrès et de la Constitution* (1859)<sup>71</sup>. Despite the presence of armed lions on earlier, pre-1848 imagery, it is striking how since 1848 the Constitution was visually not only to be honoured as a relic, but protected as a maiden, even by police or military force – however negligible the events at Risquons-Tout<sup>72</sup>.

68. LÉON GUIOTH, *Histoire numismatique de la Belgique, faisant suite à l'histoire numismatique de la Révolution Belge ou description raisonnée des médailles, des jetons et des monnaies qui ont été frappés depuis le commencement de cette Révolution jusqu'à ce jour*, Bruxelles, 1851, p. 225-227; LÉON GUIOTH, *Histoire numismatique de la révolution belge, ou, description raisonnée des médailles, des jetons et des monnaies, qui ont été frappés depuis le commencement de cette révolution jusqu'à ce jour*, Hasselt, 1844, p. 161 (pl. 30 nr. CXIII). In 1847 Hart made four more sketches for a similar medal that was never executed. In none of these four does the female personification hold a sword or any other weapon. Instead, she carries a similar sceptre as the one in the 1831 design. Sketches preserved at KBR, print room, II 4439-4442. Ribner notes a grisaille by Francois-Edouard Picot, *July 1830 : France Defends the Charter* from 1835 (Paris, Louvre) in which Orleanist France, as the *Juste milieu*, defends the Charter of 1830 with a comparable sword against both extremes of the political spectrum: the masked republic and the blind absolute monarch. OLIVER WATTS, “Daumier and replacing the king's body”, in ANNE WAGNER & RICHARD K. SHERWIN (eds.), *Law, culture and visual studies*, London, 2013, p. 436. 69. HENDRIK CONSCIENCE, *Beschryving der Nationale Jubelfeesten te Brussel gevierd op 21, 22 en 23 July 1856, ter gelegenheid van de 25e verjaardag der inhuldiging van Z.M. Léopold I als Koning der Belgen*, Brussel, 1856, p. 63. 70. “palladium van 's lands vryheid” (HENDRIK CONSCIENCE, *Beschryving der Nationale Jubelfeesten...*, p. 20). 71. “La colonne de la constitution” (*Journal de l'architecture et des arts relatives à la Construction*, 1849, p. 36); *Inauguration de la Colonne du Congrès et de la Constitution*, Bruxelles, 1859, p. 5. 72. Trisia Cusack notes how this female allegory for the nation was often strongly gendered: “The nation is frequently allegorised as female, a [virginal] motherland needing to be defended by its masculine warriors and represented (...) by maidenly or motherly figures like ‘Mother Russia’ of the

### The Congress Column



Fig. 4. GUSTAVE GERLIER, *The Congress Column*, illustration for FELIX STAPPAERTS, *La Colonne du Congrès à Bruxelles. Notice historique et descriptive du monument, Bruxelles, 1860*.

A full decade after Rogier's decision to have a Congress Column erected, the purpose being "to dedicate by means of a public monument the memory of the Congress and

to pay solemnly tribute to the Constitution", the monument was finally inaugurated on 26 September 1859<sup>73</sup>. In a booklet about the monument, written by art critic Felix Stappaerts in 1860, Gustave Gerlier's print shows the Column in all its splendour, towering above the Brussels skyline on the *Place du Congrès*, formerly known as *Place du Panorama*. Two human figures are added to scale the 47 meter high Column, and the two lions in front are the contested plaster ones, only replaced by unaltered versions in bronze in 1864<sup>74</sup>.

Why did Rogier choose a column as the form of Belgium's first and quintessential monument for the Constitution? Indeed, it was Rogier himself who stipulated in his Ministerial Decree of 13 October 1849 that all entries to the monument competition had to be in the form of a column<sup>75</sup>. There are several possible reasons that might explain his and his entourage's choice. First of all, it was not unprecedented. A column had already been used as the form of a constitutional monument in 1793. On 10 August of that revolutionary year of violence and rivalry, France celebrated the Festival of the Unity and Indivisibility of the Republic, the main purpose of which was to honour the Constitution and the overthrow of the monarchy. During the festival's fifth stage or station, an oath was sworn to the Constitution at The Altar of the Fatherland

'Maid of Finland". TRISIA CUSACK, "Introduction", in TRISIA CUSACK & SIGLE BHREATHNACH-LYNCH (eds.), *Art, Nation and Gender. Ethnic landscapes, myths and mother-figures*, Farnham, Surrey, 2003, p. 6. **73**. "voulant consacrer par un monument public le souvenir du Congrès et rendre hommage solennel à la Constitution" (Royal Decree of September 24th, 1849). **74**. The lions were the object of quite some debate, as the position of their legs was seen as unnatural. Despite this criticism, Simonis did not alter his designs, which were cast into bronze. *Bulletin des Commissions Royales d'Arts et d'Archéologie*, Bruxelles, 1865, p. 26. *Le Bien Public*, 13 December 1864, p. 2. *Le Journal de Bruxelles*, 14 December 1864, p. 2. **75**. Art. 2 of the Ministerial Decree of 13 October 1849: "Ce monument aura la forme d'une Colonne".

(*L'Autel de la Patrie*), which featured a sober Doric column with liberty caps<sup>76</sup>.

In 1821 a similar column was erected in Gaibach, Bavaria. This *Konstitutionssäule* had been designed by Leo Von Klenze (1784-1864) as a Doric column in his typical classicist style, lacking all ornament except for an inscription thanking the founder of the Bavarian Constitution, king Maximilian Joseph (1756-1825), and the guardian upholding it, contemporary Bavarian crown prince Ludwig I (1786-1868)<sup>77</sup>. Apparently, this “pure” column was symbolic enough to refer to a Constitution. Furthermore, Henri Hendrickx’ design *hors competition* for the Belgian Congress Column was fairly close to Von Klenze’s column. To the Bavarian monument, Hendrickx added four lions and a crown, as well as six extra stairs to Von Klenze’s three, symbolizing Belgium’s nine provinces<sup>78</sup>.

Gravelot and Cochin, in their influential artist’s handbook for iconography, linked the symbol of a column to magnificence, constancy, strength, tranquility and security<sup>79</sup>. For centuries columns were included as symbols for fortitude, both in personifications of the virtue by that name and in the background of state portraits. This connotation of force was criticized by the *Journal belge d’Architecture*

when reviewing the competition entries, as Belgium’s Constitutional Assembly did not exactly ride into war, nor did it win a battle, as opposed to previous recipients of columns such as Napoleon<sup>80</sup>. Then again, columns had the visual or iconographic flexibility of being able to break. An example is given by Hendrickx and his print *1830*, an illustration for Théodore Juste’s *Histoire de la Belgique*. The old United Kingdom of the Netherlands is represented by a broken column, whereas Belgium shines as a shrine with the crown-on-Constitution verticality (cf. *infra*). This funerary connotation was equally noted by an art critic reviewing the competitor’s entries in the 1848 Congress Columns competition: “In fact, on most of the columns we would be inclined to write, as did one of the competitors, ‘In memory of the Congress’”<sup>81</sup>.

One of these funerary monuments was the French July Monarchy’s July Column, often considered as a direct architectural example for the Congress Column<sup>82</sup>. After the inauguration of the Belgian monument however, its form was associated with centuries-old freedom monuments that adorned the cities and territories that after 1830 formed one nation. On the one hand, an inauguration poem compared the column to the country’s historical *belfrois* or *belfries*

**76.** DIANE KELDER, *Aspects of “official” painting and philosophic art 1789-1799*, New York, 1976, p. 93-95. **77.** ADRIAN VON BUTTLAR, *Leo Von Klenze*, p. 86. WINFRIED NERDINGER, *Leo Von Klenze. Architect zwischen Kunst und Hof 1784-1864*, München, p. 336-337. **78.** RCMS (Royal Commission for Monuments and Sites) B1343/M; *La Renaissance illustrée*, 1848 (10), p. 93-94. Originally, Belgium had 9 provinces, with the province of Brabant being split in 1995 into Flemish Brabant, Walloon Brabant and the Brussels Capital Region. **79.** ESTER LELS, *Personifications & Symbols. An index to H.F. Gravelot and C.N. Cochin’s Iconologie par Figures*, Leiden, 2011. **80.** “La colonne de la constitution”, in *Journal de l’architecture*, no. 11, 2(1849), p. 172. **81.** “Enfin, sur la plupart de ces colonnes, nous serions tentés d’écrire comme l’a fait un des concurrents : À la mémoire du Congrès” (*idem*, p. 173). **82.** *Idem*, p. 173 and 175; FÉLIX STAPPAERTS, *La Colonne du Congrès à Bruxelles...*, p. 46.

as symbols of civic liberty<sup>83</sup>. This link can be seen in Gerlier's print (figure 4). His specific viewpoint and perspective places the Congress Column in between the medieval symbols of religious and civic power : Brussels' Cathedral and the spire of the town hall. On the other hand, in Liège, Rogier's hometown, the central monument featuring on the city's and province's coat of arms (and therefore also on the Congress Column) is Belgium's most famous example of a medieval *perron*, a column or pillar which "constituted the symbol of communal liberties in several cities of eastern Belgium"<sup>84</sup>. The Liège *perron*, featuring four lions at its base, saw its most important restoration in 1848-1849<sup>85</sup>. Here again, it is clear the official dominant discourse linked the Belgian Constitution to historical roots, and thus the historical monuments of formerly separate territories (the County of Flanders' belfries, the Bishopric of Liège's *perron*) were melted into the invented tradition of Belgium.

Apart from these roots, the column's key symbolic connotation was its aforementioned stability. Both from an artistic and a political perspective, the Congress Column's form was linked with the necessary immobility of the Constitution during the 1848 tempest. This connotation can likewise be detected within the nineteenth century iconography of the American Constitution, where images such as a rock of stability and strength or immovable pillars served the same purpose<sup>86</sup>. For Belgium, in a parliamentary debate on 11 June 1853, MP Abbé De Haerne (1804-1890) verbalized this association, "The constitutional regime is threatened in multiple countries; for Belgium, this regime is its reason to be, its life preserver. Let us show Europe that we hold it more than ever, and that the Constitution, as an immobile column, has unshakeable foundations in the soil of our fatherland"<sup>87</sup>.

**83.** Poem by Louis Hymans quoted in : FÉLIX STAPPAERTS, *La Colonne du Congrès à Bruxelles...*, p. 52. **84.** EUGÈNE GOLBET D'ALMIELLA, *The Migration of Symbols*, London, 1894, p. 103. ALBERT DANDROY, *Le Perron de Liège*, Liège, 1954, p. 12. Some of the suggested designs for the Congress Column competition put lions in a very similar way at the bottom of the column. The three virgins which support the top of the perron in Liège have their reminiscence in the city virgins supporting the crown in design no. 21 (SAB, *Kaarten en Plannen, inventaris in handschrift*, 762). **85.** ALBERT DANDROY, *Le Perron de Liège...*, p. 12. **86.** ALAN IRA GORDON, "The myth of the Constitution...", p. 101. **87.** "Le régime constitutionnel est menacé dans plusieurs pays; pour la Belgique, ce régime est sa raison d'être, son ancre de salut. Faisons voir à l'Europe que nous y tenons plus que jamais et que la Constitution, comme une colonne immobile, a des fondements inébranlables dans le sol de la patrie" [Abbé de Haerne in *Annales parlementaires 1853, Chambre des Représentants*, Bruxelles, 1853, p. 1671 (11 June 1853)]. Hendrickx, as an artist and critic, had a similar vision, stating "il faut qu'en même temps il [the Congress Column, S.H.] soit en quelques sorte l'image de la solidité de notre Charte qui a fourni une preuve si éclatante de sa force au milieu des tempêtes dans lesquelles tant d'institutions se sont écroulées autour de nous" [Henri Hendrickx in *La Renaissance illustrée*, 1848(10), p. 93].

## The verticality of the constitutional monarchy

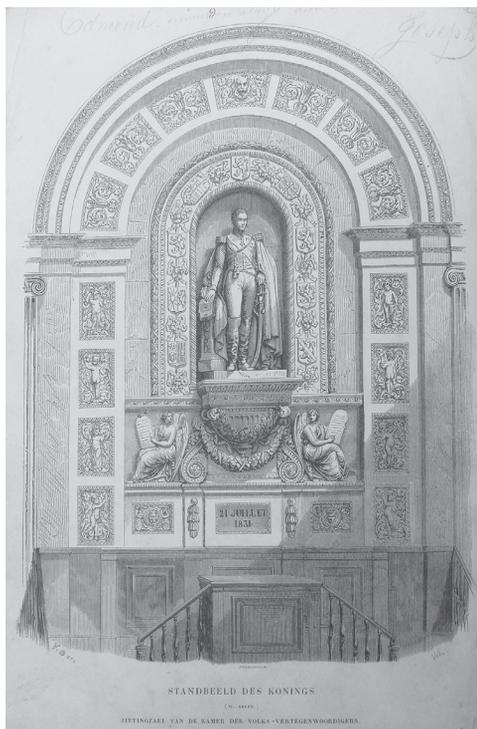


Fig. 5. A. F. Pannemaker after H. Hendrickx, *Standbeeld des konings* (W. Geefs) *Zittingzael van de Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers* (Statue of the king (W. Geefs) Plenary chamber of the Chamber of Representatives), print from: HENDRIK CONSCIENCE, *Beschrijving der Nationale Jubelfeesten...*, Brussels, 1856.

To a certain extent, figure 5 shows the background against which this parliamentary debate of 11 June 1853 took place. Although the statue for Leopold was not yet placed behind the president's seat, at the time of the debate, it was already in Guillaume Geefs's studio<sup>88</sup>. There, it stood next to his model of the Constitution sculpture that would surmount the Congress Column<sup>89</sup>. However, during that very same debate in Parliament, when the Chamber of Representatives agreed on a budget of over 500,000 francs for the construction of the "immobile column", the same politicians took an important iconographic decision, not without consequences for Guillaume Geefs. They decided that it was not a sculpture of the Constitution, but a statue of king Leopold himself that should be put on the Congress Column<sup>90</sup>. An amendment by both a liberal and a Catholic MP was adopted after a unique iconographic debate in parliament and despite Leopold's own wish not to have his effigy up there<sup>91</sup>. The main argument, as uttered by MP Félix de Mérode (1791-1857), pointed to the monarchy as a consolidation of the work of the Congress, the latter founding the monarchy and choosing the monarch<sup>92</sup>. The core reason for which Leopold's image was allowed up there, on a spot no French king had ever stood upon, was – according to

**88.** Today, the statue in the Chamber is a freely interpreted copy by Fraikin, after a fire in 1883 destroyed the original. However, in 1886-87 the original was restored and is now to be seen in the central hall of the Royal Museum in Brussels. LINDA VAN SANTVOORT & CHRISTIAN DE BORCHGRAEVE, *Kunst en architectuur bij de Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers*, Brussel, 2008, p. 76-80. **89.** L.H., "La sculpture en Belgique", in *L'Artiste, Journal de la littérature et des beaux-arts*, Paris, 1853, no. 5, 1853(10), p. 154-157. L.H., "Le monument de la Reine et la statue de la Constitution", in *L'Indépendance belge*, 4 June 1853, p. 1. **90.** *Annales parlementaires 1853, Chambre des Représentants*, Bruxelles, 1853, p. 1669-1673 (11 June 1853). **91.** More exactly, the amendment wasn't as much adopted as it was expressed as 'the will of the chamber' that the statue of the king should top de Congress Column. **92.** *Annales parlementaires 1853, Chambre des Représentants*, Bruxelles, 1853, p. 1670 (11 June 1853).

MP Abbé de Haerne – that Leopold did not excel as a warrior on battlefields, but as a true defender of the constitutional liberties<sup>93</sup>.

This argument shows how the young concept of a constitutional king allowed for a subtle yet meaningfully new iconography. It also makes us interpret the statue of Leopold as a symbol of Belgium's constitutional system, rather than just a portrait of a great man, or in other words : as a celebration of royalty more than of a certain royal<sup>94</sup>. Likewise, several of the competition entries in 1849 drew a more impersonal crown on top of the column, often blending the royal crown with the oaken people's crown, as a visual counterpart of (then) Article 25 : "All powers emanate from the Nation"<sup>95</sup>. What was clear, however, is that an iconographic verticality, in which the king crowned the Constitution, became a consensus, and in his illustration of the 25<sup>th</sup> Article, Lagye included the same verticality of a crown on a book, representing the Constitution<sup>96</sup>.

Interestingly, public statues for Leopold, such as the one that would surmount the Congress Column, were only commissioned after the

1848 events, and would also feature the Constitution<sup>97</sup>. The first of many was erected in Ixelles in 1852, and was made by Aimable Dutrieux (1816-1889). By the time of its inauguration on 19 December, Dutrieux's statue already had a wide popularity in the form of a preceding statuette, a small scale sculpture destined for both private collections and as a diplomatic gift designed in 1849<sup>98</sup>. Despite this success, Dutrieux would fail to get the commission for the statue on top of the Congress Column and in the Chamber of Representatives, which, as already noted, were granted to Guillaume Geefs instead. Both Dutrieux, as the pioneer, and Geefs, as a follower, added the Constitution to the statue of Leopold for Ixelles and the Chamber respectively. Both also put the crown, symbolising monarchy, on the constitutional book situated on a small table or column on the right hand side of the king, thereby repeating the earlier mentioned verticality. According to *L'Indépendance belge*, Geefs's statue shows the monarch during his constitutional oath, the date of which is written underneath its pedestal<sup>99</sup>. To emphasize this specific constitutional moment, Geefs shows the king putting his hand on the open book

93. *Annales parlementaires, 1853, Chambre des Représentants, Bruxelles, 1853*, p. 1671 (11 June 1853). 94. FÉLIX STAPPAERTS, *La Colonne du Congrès à Bruxelles...*, p. 92. With their decision, the parliament knew it was acting against the will of the monarch, Leopold himself having expressed his feelings against his statue on top of the column. The nature of his refusal is best interpreted as a dramatic, theatrical gesture of modesty. It resulted in his absence at the inauguration ceremony in 1859, where his son and heir to the throne Leopold (1835-1909) took his place. 95. For example, Hendrickx' design for a Congress Column showed this blend of crowns, (RCMS archives, B1343/M). 96. See note 53. 97. In 1846, the army was thinking of erecting a statue for the king, but it is unclear what resulted from this initiative. Certainly, no public statue for Leopold was actually erected before December 1852. "La statue du Roi", in *L'Indépendance belge*, 11 October 1846, p. 1. 98. Similarly, a miniature version of the Congress Column was sold by the company Spanoghe in Brussels, and also Geefs's statue for the Chamber of Representatives would be reproduced in small scale biscuit versions. *La Renaissance illustrée*, 1848 (10), p. 103. PATRICK DEROM, *De beelden van Brussel*, p. 42, 48. *Het Handelsblad*, 23 June 1860, p. 1. 99. *L'Indépendance belge*, 14 December 1853, p. 1.

of the Constitution. This visual link between monarch and Constitution and the verticality of book and crown became such an obligatory cliché for royal statues that even a gifted and experienced sculptor as Simonis struggled to integrate both objects into one sculpture for the town of Mons in 1877, resulting in a rather clumsy looking pile of a crown and a book, balanced by the king's left hand. However, the iconographic cliché, already present on pre-1848 medals, demanded that the Belgian crown was supported by, or rested on, the Constitution.

The print by Hendrickx (figure 5) was included in Hendrik Conscience's book about the National Feasts of 1856, celebrating the Silver Jubilee of the constitutional monarchy. Reading Conscience's words about the marriage between king and Constitution, and seeing these petrified or casted versions of Leopold next to the fundamental law would almost make us forget the king's own ambiguous relationship with the Belgian liberal Constitution<sup>100</sup>. In fact, this ambiguity emerged only after 1848, as before the revolutionary wave Leopold's feelings for the Belgian Constitution were purely negative. He called it "absurd" in its restriction of his powers and even out of character with the Belgian people's far more monarchist mind<sup>101</sup>. However, as is noted by Leopold's most recent biographer, the experiences of 1848 reconciled him to the Constitution, using it

as a weapon against a socialist or republican take-over<sup>102</sup>.

A real threat for Leopold to follow the fate of his father-in-law might have been overstated, but republican critique could certainly be heard around 1848, in various levels of intensity. These even led to rumours about abdication – even before February 1848<sup>103</sup>. A visual counterpart to these rumours was the lithograph by H. Borremans after A. Spol, showing Leopold surrounded by his family, Rogier and representatives of the military and judiciary. In reality, a possible suggestion of abdication would have been made in private. On the lithograph, however, crown and sceptre lay in front of the king, the latter making a gesture of gift or surrender<sup>104</sup>.

By the time of the 1856 celebrations, the 1848 moment of crisis was still remembered. From the printing office of Verbruggen came a decorated drinking song toasting to the king. The heading quoted the king twice : in 1831 accepting the throne, and in 1848, with what could be read as a subtext to the fictional abdication lithograph, "If I am an obstacle to your Happiness, I am willing to offer you the sacrifice of my Crown"<sup>105</sup>. In the immediate aftermath of the 1848 turmoil, the first of these two heading quotes – Leopold's constitutional oath of 1831 – got a new meaning, both for the king himself as for the narrative and imagery surrounding his

100. HENDRIK CONSCIENCE, *Beschryving der Nationale Jubelfeesten...*, p. 6. 101. GITA DENECKERE, *Leopold I...*, p. 367-369. 102. *Idem*, p. 399. 103. BRISON GOUGH, *Belgium and the February Revolution...*, p. 2. 104. KBR, print room, S.II 12.680; GEORGES-HENRI DUMONT, *Le miracle...*, s.p. [4th illustration]; GITA DENECKERE, *Leopold I...*, p. 407. 105. "Si je suis un obstacle à votre Bonheur, je suis prêt à vous faire le sacrifice de ma Couronne" Leopold I as quoted in : à *Léopold I, roi des belges, la nation reconnaissante. 21 juillet 1856, 1856.* (KBR, print room, S.III.100836).

reign. Whilst describing a medal Adolphe C. Jouvanel (1798-1867) struck in June 1848, historian and numismatist J.L. Guioth (1793-1877) wrote about the French troubles and stated, "It [Jouvanel's medal] was in particular destined to perpetuate the memory of the emotions that animated the Belgian people towards their king"<sup>106</sup>. For the medal, Jouvanel chose the sober but meaningful image of tables of the law surrounded by the catchphrase, "The king will hold his oaths, the nation will hold its own" and again the oaken crown as symbol of the people's power was present<sup>107</sup>.

In a series of letters published in one volume as *Letters on the Congress Column and the Fine Arts Administration* an anonymous author complained about the overspill of royalist symbols on the monument, "They have confused, in fact, and as if willingly, the Congress and its work with Royalty"<sup>108</sup>. The author noticed that, apart from the acceptable surmounting statue of the king, the column featured Leopold's double L monograms with a crown on top, as well as what he called "*the Spirit of Royalty*"<sup>109</sup>. The author referred to the central winged personification of Eugène

Simonis's (1810-1882) high relief with the nine Belgian provinces. The androgynous figure featured a multitude of royalist symbols, including a sceptre in the left hand, a crown sculpted on the arm of his throne and the insignia of the Order of Leopold hanging above him. However, naming this personification the Spirit of Royalty was the author's choice, as he was generally referred to as Spirit of Belgium, the Spirit of Union and Nationality or Spirit of the Nation<sup>110</sup>. The author himself expressed his preference for a Spirit of Liberty, the true inspiration of the National Congress.

This critique of the royalist nature of the Congress Column forms a deviation from the official narratives within the constitutional cult. Théodore Juste's 1850 history of the National Congress received the title *History of the National Congress of Belgium or the Foundation of the Belgian Monarchy*, closely linking the Assembly and the form of government it chose. Moreover, during the 1856 festivities, a temporary monument entitled and inscribed *Constitution and royalty* showed personifications of both notions shoulder to shoulder, the former crowning the latter<sup>111</sup>.

**106.** "elle [Jouvanel's medal] était particulièrement destinée à perpétuer le souvenir des sentiments qui animaient le peuple belge envers son roi" (LÉON GUIOTH, *Histoire numismatique de la Belgique...*, p. 236). **107.** "Le roi garde ses serments, la nation gardera les siens" [*La Renaissance illustrée*, 1848 (10), p. 48] : "la couronne de chêne et la couronne royales réunies, pour exprimer l'accord parfait qui règne entre les deux grands principes sur lesquels repose notre organisation sociale, c'est-à-dire le pouvoir royal et le pouvoir populaire". **108.** "On a confondu, en effet, et comme à plaisir, le Congrès et son œuvre avec la Royauté" (*Lettres sur la Colonne du Congrès National et l'Administration des Beaux-Arts*, Bruxelles, 1859, p. 6). **109.** "le Génie de la royauté". **110.** "Génie de la Belgique, le génie de l'union et la nationalité", mentioned in *Inauguration de la colonne de la Constitution et du congrès*, Bruxelles, 1859, p. 27. "génie de la nation" mentioned in FÉLIX STAPPAERTS, *La Colonne du Congrès à Bruxelles...*, p. 32. *Colonne du Congrès* (SAB, Fonds Charles Rogier, 9 October 1852 and 22 January 1859). **111.** "Constitution et royauté" (*L'illustration belge de 1856. 25 années de règne*, 1856, p. 2).

**Inside the constitution : the four 'cardinal' freedoms<sup>112</sup>**

Leopold Wiener was asked to design a commemorative medal for the occasion of the inauguration of the Congress Column. Figure 6 shows the reverse side of his 86 millimetre bronze medal, the front side of which features Leopold's profile. On the reverse side, Wiener put four allegorical women, each representing one of four individual constitutional freedoms, namely – from left to right – the freedoms of

education, religion, press and association. With the actual monument featured only at the back, the four almost seemed to have walked away from its base. It is there, on the four corners of the Congress Column's stylobate, that four seated bronze statues embody the freedoms, up to the present day<sup>113</sup>. Of the two winning architects for the 1850 competition, it was Dens who had included the four constitutional freedoms in his original design.



Fig. 6. Léopold Wiener, commemorative medal for the Congress Column, 1859. © UGent, adore.

**112.** This part of the article is a translated, revised and shortened version of an earlier article in Dutch : STEFAN HUYGEBART, "Les quatre libertés cardinales. De iconologie van de vrijheid van pers, onderwijs, vereniging en geloof in België, als uitdrukking van een populariserende grondwetscultus vanaf 1848", in *Pro Memorie Bijdragen tot de rechtsgeschiedenis der Nederlanden*, no. 1, 2013 (15), p. 154-180. **113.** Today still, they are known to some Belgians at least because of these four sculptures. This makes them comparable to F.D. Roosevelt's Four Freedoms Speech (1941) and their resonance in newspaper illustrations and monuments such as the four columns in Evansville, Indiana.

According to the Antwerp-born architect, his competitor from Brussels, Poelaert, had stolen his idea after both laureates were asked to rework their plans<sup>114</sup>. Poelaert, however, claimed that he had left the exact significance of the four allegorical statues on his own plan (originally National independence, Union, Order and Liberty) to the jury<sup>115</sup>. This would lay the iconographic responsibility for the four corner statues, which eventually made it to the final design, with the liberal jury.

Politically, the leading contemporary discourse on Belgium's Constitution emphasized the individual freedoms that had been inscribed in it, not least in reaction to the French revolutionary demands of 1848. The earlier-mentioned quartet of freedoms had a separate meaning. This was the case not only in speeches but most of all in constitutional iconography, where the four freedoms served as *pars pro toto* for all that was good about the Constitution. As Belgian revolutionary Louis de Potter (1786-1859) said in his opening speech for the National Congress back in 1830, the provisional government had already outlined these four freedoms and stressed their importance<sup>116</sup>.

The four freedom iconography became an essential part of the constitutional cult. First and foremost, it is striking that, as far as could be determined within the scope of this article, the four freedoms were only visually

represented after 1848, with the first recorded representation in 1848. At the occasion of the September feasts that year, Hendrickx is recorded to have put them on the corners of his temporary Constitution obelisk<sup>117</sup>. In the following years, the four freedoms were put in the entrance of the *Palais de la Nation*, home to the both of the country's chambers of parliament, as plaster statues later replaced by stone specimens<sup>118</sup>. Prints show them surrounding Leopold's image. Lagye drew four individual illustrations in the illustrated Constitution, which baker Désiré Van Spillbeeck used in turn for the base of his ceremonial cake entitled *Belgium's blossoming under the reign of King Leopold I* (1856)<sup>119</sup>.

Much of the iconography of the four freedoms likely disappeared, but by 1860 Felix Stappaerts noted in his publication on the Congress Column how they had become omnipresent and overused as iconographic features<sup>120</sup>. Thus, in little over a decade following 1848, the four freedom iconography had gone from inexistent to omnipresent in official imagery. Apart from this vastly growing presence after 1848 and their role as *pars pro toto* for the Constitution, the four freedoms became nineteenth-century Belgian analogies of the historical quartet of the cardinal virtues of Temperance, Fortitude, Prudence and Justice. The analogy can be noted on three levels and emphasizes once more the religious-like character of the constitutional cult.

**114.** *Het Handelsblad*, 19 November 1851, p. 1-2. *L'Indépendance belge*, 28 September 1851, p. 2. **115.** *L'Indépendance belge*, 2 October 1851, p. 1. **116.** LOUIS DE POTTER, "Discours d'ouverture du congrès national", in *Bulletin des arrêtés et actes du Gouvernement Provisoire de la Belgique*, no. 29, 1830(1.), p. 11. **117.** *Fêtes de Septembre 1848*, Bruxelles, 1848. **118.** WILLY VAN DEN STEENE, *Het Paleis der Natie*, Brussel, 1981, p. 154. **119.** *De Vlaemsche school*, 1856(2), p. 127-128. KBR, print room, S.II 19334. JEROEN JANSSENS, *De Belgische natie viert...*, p. 138 (note). **120.** FÉLIX STAPPAERTS, *La Colonne du Congrès à Bruxelles...*, p. 62. .

The first and most basic level of analogy concerns their iconographic appearance as four women with attributes. Putting four theoretical notions such as constitutional freedoms into an image was quite the task for the romantic artists involved, but a quartet of women was the logical outcome<sup>121</sup>. Visually, the four cardinal virtues had been moulded through a millennia-long process into four easily recognisable embodiments : women holding objects such as a water jug or bit (Temperance); a column or bat (Fortitude); a mirror and snake (Prudence); and scales, sword and – sometimes – blindfold (Justice)<sup>122</sup>. A real iconography for the four freedoms was first designed by Lagye for the illustrated Constitution, strongly influencing the sculptors for the Congress Column. The result was a half-hearted attempt, as the iconography proved fertile yet barely recognisable, resulting in mix-ups and the need for written additions. The sculpted freedoms of education and religion were particularly easy to confuse.

Eugène Simonis's *Freedom of religion* was only readable from the side, where he had sculpted crosses and other religious symbols. Frontally, the woman with one hand on the heart and the other with a finger pointing to the sky was mistaken as making an educating gesture, whereas the scroll on the lap of *Freedom of education* was taken for a religious book, and her torch as the flame of religion<sup>123</sup>. Its sculptor was Guillaume's brother Joseph Geefs (1808-1885), who was responsible for two of the freedom statues. He explained in a letter how the torch was meant to symbolise the light brought to the world by education<sup>124</sup>.

Freedom of the press turned out to be the most easily recognisable freedom and was given – quite literally – a printing press, on which Joseph Geefs sculpted a garland. Charles Fraikin used a bundle of arrows as an attribute for his freedom of association. As a symbol for unity and the strength resulting from it,

121. For women as personifications, see : MARINA WARNER, *Monuments and maidens. The allegory of the female form*, New York, 1985. STEFAN HUYGEBART, "Monumentale maagd, man of moeder ? Vrouwelijkheid als onderdeel van gerechtigheidsiconografie in fin de siècle beeldhouwkunst", in *Historica*, no. 1, 2015, p. 3-9. 122. WOLFGANG PLEISTER & WOLFGANG SCHILD, *Recht und Gerechtigkeit im Spiegel der europäischen Kunst*, Köln, 1988, p. 101-141. This is also how the four cardinal virtues featured on another set of French revolutionary playing cards, this one by Lachapelle, in which kings, queens and Jacks were replaced by wise men, virtues and brave men. Strikingly, Temperance was changed to Union, a woman holding the Constitution and fasces. 123. POL MEIRSSCHAUT, *Les sculptures de plein-air à Bruxelles. Guide explicatif*, Bruxelles, 1900, p. 85-87. As is concluded by Alan Ira Gordon for the US myth of the Constitution, "completely disjunctive novelty in the sphere of belief is out of the question", and as such, a new phenomenon such as the freedom of education was a hard iconographic nut to crack. ALAN IRA GORDON, *The myth of the Constitution...*, p. 108. 124. *Colonne du Congrès BYL*, 2.427, 1.b, file n°1, letter no. 3). In regard to the pose, Geefs was most likely influenced by *La loi*, a public statue by Jean-Jacques Feuchère (1807-1852). In January 1849 Rogier's French colleague commissioned a sculpture dedicated to the new Constitution of the French second Republic with Feuchère. Finished in 1852, it was posthumously erected only in 1854 under the new regime, Napoleon III's Second Empire, and was renamed *La loi*, due to the changed political views and the *de facto* fall of a constitutional regime. STANISLAS LAMI, *Dictionnaire des sculpteurs de l'École Française : au dix-neuvième siècle*, vol. 2, Paris, 1914, p. 368.

it was part of the textbook examples such as Gravelot and Cochin's 1791 *Iconologie par figures*<sup>125</sup>.

On a second politico-philosophical level, the four constitutional freedoms were ascribed the same importance in nineteenth-century – especially post-1848 – Belgium as that which Aristotle, Ambrosius and Thomas of Aquino ascribed to the four cardinal virtues<sup>126</sup>. Politicians as well as art critics wrote and talked about them as “fundamental” freedoms (*les libertés fondamentales*) and visually, they were given a spot at the foundations of the Congress Column (both in several competition entries as in the final design) or Van Spillbeeck's cake. In both instances, the entire artwork was surmounted by the King's statue<sup>127</sup>.

The third level of the analogy concerns the position of the freedom of the press. Justice was *primus inter pares* of the four cardinal virtues, up to the point where she stood all by herself on fountains and court houses of Early Modern Europe<sup>128</sup>. In Belgium, freedom of the press seems to have followed a similar path. Bram Delbecke shows how, in legal and political theory, this freedom was so

vital for Belgian politicians and jurists to the extent that they saw all other constitutional freedoms as dependent on her<sup>129</sup>. This idea got a visual extension in Wiener's commemorative medal (figure 6). Freedom of the press pushes her “sisters” upstage and on a lower level, two of them (education and association) are seated. According to Stappaerts, who described the medal in 1860, Wiener lent her a quill to symbolise discussion, free investigation and the publicity of parliamentary and legal debates. All this should remind us that she was the principle freedom<sup>130</sup>. Originally, Freedom of the press was also given one of the two spots of honour on the Congress Column, but a discontented Eugène Simonis had apparently argued that his Freedom of religion deserved that spot for artistic more than philosophical reasons<sup>131</sup>.

#### IV. Conclusion

In 1848, while new constitutions were written and/or signed in Rome, Vienna, Paris, The Hague, Berlin and Copenhagen, often based on the Belgian example, Brussels instead witnessed the celebration of its 1831

**125.** HUBERT FRANÇOIS GRAVELOT & CHARLES NICOLAS COCHIN, *Iconologie par figures...*, p. 73 and 77. **126.** KRIJN PANSTERS, *De vier kardinale deugden in de lage landen, 1200-1500*, Hilversum, 2007, p. 11-14. **127.** For the royal visit to Leuven in 1852, an ephemeral monument by Charles Geerts (1807-1855) featured a woman representing the Constitution, and the four freedoms at its base. “Fêtes de Louvain”, in *Le Messager de Gand*, 15 September 1852, p. 2. **128.** CHRISTIAN NILS ROBERT, *Une allégorie parfaite : la Justice : vertu, courtisane et bourreau*, Genève, 1993. **129.** BRAM DELBECKE, *De lange schaduw...*, p. 56. **130.** FÉLIX STAPPAERTS, *La Colonne du Congrès à Bruxelles...*, p. 61. **131.** The analogy between the four cardinal virtues and the Belgian four freedoms was in a way confirmed by Belgian legal heavyweight François Laurent (1810-1887), a notorious – though Catholic – anticlerical. Laurent saw the constitutional freedoms as weapons easily abused by the church to reinforce her power, driving him as far as to entitle them “*les libertés cardinales*”. FRANÇOIS LAURENT, “L'église et l'État en Belgique”, in *Revue des deux mondes*, 1864, p. 638-639. VINCENT VIAENE, *Belgium and the Holy See...*

Constitution. As a surviving constitutional regime, the Belgian government led by Rogier theoretically and visually juxtaposed itself after 1848 to the threatening French revolutionary chaos, and used its own Constitution as a showpiece. Delfosse's words in parliament, explaining how Belgium already had what French republicans demanded, were what Meganck's lithograph made visual explicitly, and what the Congress Column, the illustrated Constitution and the bulk of prints, temporary architecture, erected statues and medals reaffirmed implicitly. The newly boosted *Verfassungskultur* blended with the national culture and a semi-religious respect, resulting in the superlative : a government-driven constitutional cult. However, the political consensus that lay at the Constitution's origins in 1831 and that revived at the time of mild panic in 1848, soon evaporated into thin air and political dispute. Rogier's cult thus met with resistance on three fronts : the Catholic opposition, the provincial voices, and the republican minority. In their eyes, Rogier's cult was nothing more than – respectively – liberal vainglory, a centralizing effort to develop the capital with national funds; and an overly monarchist celebration<sup>132</sup>.

The qualitative iconological interpretation of the imagery resulting from Rogier's constitutional cult (be it government commissions or artists' initiatives influenced by new trends), shows that it produced several changes in Belgian constitutional iconography, some emphases of pre-1848 elements, but also novelties that only came about after the 1848 non-revolution. As such, formerly distinct personifications of Belgium on the one hand and its 1831 Constitution on the other merged into a single identity after 1848 – paraphrasing Rosand, Belgium was the Constitution. From 1848 onwards, the Constitution also had to be defended, iconographically, by means of arms. The first public statues for the constitutional monarch only came about after the events of 1848. Leopold's entourage understood more clearly that closely connecting his image with that of the Constitution gave him neutrality, which in revolutionary times meant power<sup>133</sup>. Thus, the public statues for the king were accessorised with a Constitution, and constitutional monuments – be it in stone, cardboard or sugar – were surmounted by the king. The crown as a symbol got its enigmatic foundations in the form of the constitutional book or tablets, a verticality which – by parliamentary vote – was repeated in the

<sup>132</sup>. To this threefold criticism could be added the early Flemish movement and its complaints about the use of Flemish on the Congress Column, as well as Rogier's general cold-shouldering of the Flemish language and demands. In this light, his semi-official illustrated Dutch translation of the Constitution is conspicuous. <sup>133</sup>. GITA DENECKERE, *Leopold I...*, p. 350.

Congress Column, quite literally crowned with Leopold's image. Only after 1848, the four fundamental constitutional freedoms were visually represented, often surrounding the portrait of the king. These freedoms, acting as *pars pro toto* for the entire content of the Constitution, became replacements for, or updates of, the traditional cardinal virtues, and were granted the same respect and fundamental meaning, with freedom of the press leading the quartet.

Lastly, Rogier chose a sturdy column as the form for the key constitutional monument: the Congress Column. His choice is illustrative on three levels. First, he took it singlehandedly and outside Parliament, a thorn in the Catholic opposition's side and one of the reasons for their lacking enthusiasm. Second and iconographically, it was both linked with historic *beffrois* and *perrons* from different parts of the territory that since 1830 formed Belgium, as well as with contemporary columns in other nations. Methodologically, a qualitative iconological interpretation of images rooted in contemporaneous events easily leaps from comparative history to connected history, just as the unparalleled "pan-European

simultaneity" of the 1848 revolution proved interconnected<sup>134</sup>. Likewise, iconographic choices can be perceived as both influencing and influenced by each other internationally, making symbols such as the column, tablets or the lightning "migrate"<sup>135</sup>. Thirdly, Rogier's choice is linked with the Belgian political discourse on the 1848 Revolution, as well as the criticism judging the artistic outcome of the constitutional cult, which constitutes the textual culture in which these analysed images are imbedded. These words emphasized the Constitution as an unshakeable foundation.

When, in the wake of a counter-revolutionary campaign, a government reaffirms the Constitution, interpreted as *constitutio* or order, it does the exact opposite of a revolutionary action, which breaks the old order, literally and symbolically<sup>136</sup>. The column of Belgium's Constitution was presented as unbreakable, and the country's Constitution itself, both its fundamental law and the monarchy that crowned it, was saved. For the average bourgeois paying three francs for one of Meganck's lithographs at Tessaro's shop in the Galerie de la Reine in Brussels, the image of Liberty was indeed – as *La Renaissance's*

**134.** ISSER WOŁOCH, "Introduction: the ambiguities of revolution in the nineteenth century", in ISSER WOŁOCH (ed.), *Revolution and the meaning of freedom in the nineteenth century*, Stanford, 1996. **135.** In 1891, Belgian senator Count Eugène Goblet d'Alviella's (1846-1925) published his book *La migration des symboles*, translated as *The Migration of Symbols* (London, 1894), in which this migrating feature within religious symbolism is treated in a more diachronic and cross-cultural way. The influence of the Congress Column on the Column for Pedro IV in Lisbon and on the monument for the defeat of Napoleon on the 1813 Square in The Hague remain to be scrutinized. **136.** GITA DENECKERE, "Het revolutionaire alternatief. De symboliek van feesten en vrijheidsbomen", in HENK DE SMAELE & JO TOLLEBEEK (eds.), *Politieke representatie*, Leuven, 2002, p. 292-293.

art critic named it – “French liberty, escaped from the barricades”, whereas the Belgian equivalent was safely inscribed in the shatterproof Constitution<sup>137</sup>.

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137. “la liberté française sortie des barricades” (*La Renaissance*, 1848, p. 7). *L’Indépendance belge*, 7 May 1848, p. 4.