

PHD RESEARCH

A short overview of recent PhD research on Belgian modern and contemporary history

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Crossing Belgium? From national independence to the Schlieffen Plan (1839-1905) - [Original Title : *Traverser la Belgique ? De l'Indépendance au Plan Schlieffen (1839-1905)*]

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The rivalry between Prussia/Germany and France throughout the nineteenth century and on the eve of the First World War has led historians to assume a continuity of assumptions within military circles about the strategic role of Belgian territory in the event of war, particularly in Paris, Berlin, and London. In return, these foreign reflections are assumed to have influenced the strategic thinking of Belgian officers. In this thesis, the question of Belgian lines of communication in relation to national defence policy and the war plans of neighbouring powers has been studied in a systematic way, from the Treaty of London in 1839 to the Schlieffen Plan (1905/1906). Following Marie-Thérèse Bitsch's thesis – *La Belgique entre la France et l'Allemagne (1905-1914)* – the concept of 'crossing Belgium' between France and Germany has been chosen as the main axis of analysis, based on the examination of numerous military and diplomatic documents. Using this method enables a number of permanent geopolitical and geostrategic features to emerge. This thesis contributes to a better definition of Belgian military geography before the Great War, focusing on railways, roads, rivers, and fortifications.