The introduction of cremation in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg:
a long struggle in a small state

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Overview

A – The historical context of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg

B – The secularization of funeral practices: a low-density “Kulturkampf”

C – The introduction of cremation to Luxembourg in two steps
A

Continuity and Change of Territories, Rulers, Laws ...

Austrian Netherlands 1714-1797

Département des Forêts 1795-1814/15

United Kingdom of the Netherlands 1815-1830/39

German Confederation 1815-1866/67

Grand Duchy (neutral) 1866/67-present
Continuity and Change of Sepulchral Culture

- **Département des Forêts** 1795-1814/15
  - civil registration (births, death, marriages) from parishes to commune (officer)
  - “Kirchenfabriken” (*Décret du 30 décembre 1809 concernant les fabriques des églises*)
  - « 23 prairial, an XII » (*Décret impérial sur les sépultures, 12 juin 1804*)

- **United Kingdom of the Netherlands** 1815-1830/39

- **German Confederation** 1815-1866/67

- **Grand Duchy (neutral)** 1866/67-present
  - minor amendments (Arrêté grand-ducal, i.e. ministerial/administrative decree, e.g. 1937)
  - *Loi du 1er août 1972* (“Cremation Law”)
**Kulturkampf** (“culture struggle/fight”)

1830s Switzerland (Ultramontanes vs. Liberals)
1871-79 under Bismarck in the German Empire
1879-84 Belgium (“First School War”)

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**Grand Duchy – a Catholic country**

**Which diocese?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Diocese</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1801-1823</td>
<td>Diocese of Metz (F)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1823-1833/40</td>
<td>Diocese of Namur (B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1840</td>
<td>Apostolic Vicariate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>Independent Diocese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Archdiocese</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Rural population** and one ‘big’ city: (garrison town) of Luxembourg

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1850</td>
<td>195,000 (Luxembourg-City 22,000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>295,000 (Luxembourg-City 63,000)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Village schools** and one *Athenée Royal* (only institute for higher education)

**Pulpit** and **Catholic Press**
“Kulturkampf” over dead bodies?

- “Cohabitation” of commune & parish (“Friedhofszwang”)
- No real challenge and alternative to a “Catholic-style funeral”
- Civil burial: imitation & religious surrogate of Catholic rituals
“Kulturkampf” over dead bodies?

... an illustrative example

New Cemetery

Section separated by a quickset hedge

Grave of the Protestant

Graves of unbaptized infants

Grave of a suicidal

Forgery / Misrepresentation of the mayor (in red lines)
- no separation
- no separate entrance for Protestants etc.

Separation or not?
The case of Lamadelaine (Rollingen)/Commune Pétange 1885-1886
ANLux (Archives Nationales de Luxembourg) Friedhofsangelegenheiten, H7-2B - Eglise Protestante

_Pfarrer Martin Blum in: Ons Hémecht 1 (1916), S. 25_

First Cremation of a Luxembourger: 1910
First Cremation in Luxembourg: 1995

Krematorium Mainz, establ. 1903

Krematorium Luxemburg-Hamm, opened in 1995
The Introduction of Cremation

Crematory Hamm/Luxembourg-City

Crematory Hamm/Luxembourg-City ("Streuwiese")
- Foundation of **Flamma** (*Société pour la Propagation de l’Incinération*) in 1906

- **Immigration** and new **social group** due to industrialization

- **Provocation** of Christian faith & political “proxy war”

Modern cremation has involved the greatest practical and ritual change experienced by Christianity. The debate triggered a low-density “Kulturkampf” between Catholic-conservative protagonists and liberal/socialist/freethinker elites.
The Introduction of Cremation

Cremation: Percentage proportion/burials in selected countries

Opening of the national crematory 1995

“Cremation Law” 1972
Second Vatican Council 1962-65

Netherlands
Belgium
Germany
France
Luxembourg

63 %
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Gender aspect of cremation

- Female
- Male
- Total

Gender gap
The most important crematories for Luxembourgers

- Mayence (G)
- Straßburg/Strasbourg (G/F)
- Liège (B)
- Hamm (L)
The Introduction of Cremation

spatial/regional distribution of cremation

N to S: 100 km – 1h20min/car drive
The Introduction of Cremation

“Waldfriedhof”

Woodlands

Cremation Infrastructure

own cartography
The Introduction of Cremation

... where is the struggle/conflict?

- **Debate in Belgium** about the introduction of cremation (1920s-30s)

- **Disrespect of last wills**

- **Intimidation** by the pulpit (face-to-face-society)

- 1972 – 1994/95: **SICEC** (“intercommunal operating society”)

  *Syndicat de communes ayant pour objet la construction, l'entretien et l'exploitation d'un crématoire sur base intercommunale (S.I.C.E.C.)*
The Introduction of Cremation

... the “Konkordanzdemokratie” of Luxembourg

The golden rule of a “concordance system”:

The government must reach a compromise, even though it is composed of antagonistic parties.
Contemporary funeral culture in Luxembourg: an atavistic practice of a small state of and with a progressive narrative of modernization

“premodern” & Enlightenment the modern graveyard in Luxembourg

Décret du 23 prairial an XII (12 June 1804)

town and urban centres countryside and villages

late 19th century “hygienic discourse and infrastructural campaign”

1972/78 cremation law

1995 crematory “Waldfriedhöfe”

1990s – 2010s
Thank you!

Darn!
Now we have run over it again!

Attack!!
Down with Luxembourg!

Welcome to Luxembourg

Thank you!
Come back soon!
A – the Grand Duchy

Area: 2,586.40 km²
Population: 576,000
Languages: Luxembourgish, French, German, Portuguese, English
Foreign population: 46.7% (2016)

Area of interregional cooperation between France, Germany, Belgium and Luxembourg
**A – the project**

**Material Culture and Spaces of Remembrance.**  
A Study of Cemeteries in Luxembourg in the Context of the Greater Region

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**Co-funded:**

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**Project duration:** 36 months (start 1st of August 2015 – 31st of July 2018)

**The team (University of Luxembourg)**

- Dr Elisabeth Boesen
- Assoc. Prof. Geoffrey Caruso
- Assoc. Prof. Sonja Kmec (PI)
- Dr Thomas Kolnberger (coordinator)
- Dr / PhD cand. Christoph Streb
- PhD cand. NN

**Areas of expertise**

- Ethnology and Social Anthropology
- Quantitative Geography
- Cultural Studies and Luxembourg Studies
- History and Historical Geography
- Business Administration and Historical Archaeology
- Sociology / Ethnography

**The scientific board**

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- Prof. Jean-Paul Lehners  
  Université du Luxembourg
- Dr David Petts  
  University of Durham, GB
- Dr Julie Rugg  
  University of York, GB

**Sociology of the Cemetery**

- *Histoire du corps vivant et mort à l’époque contemporaine*
- Law History
- History of Luxembourg and Demography
- Archaeology
- Cemetery Research