ABSTRACT

Signs Carved in Stone - Armenia's Brutalist cultural heritage: a key to Armenian identity?

In this essay, a short overview is given of the historical background of Armenia and the impact of religion, language and alphabet in the Armenian strive for identity and survival as a nation. These factors are crucial to understand the notion of "Stone Thinking', typical of Armenian brutalism. As one of the authors tries to look for a common ground and values expressed in both Armenian and Belgian brutalism, she interviews her Armenian co-writer to finetune what is written in stone and concrete of Armenian heritage. The essay shows how the use of signs has Armenian brutalism differ from other brutalist structures and has made it stand out as a specific 'national architecture', even in the Soviet era.

ABSTRACT

Amalia Deekman

A threefold connection
A Dutch Black Gospel choir as a religious, social and heritage practice

This article examines how members of the Hopeful Choir, a Black Gospel choir in the Netherlands, give meaning to their participation. Based on open interviews, it explores how choir members relate to religion, social practice, and the Black cultural context of gospel music.

While some participants consider religion central, others adopt a more secular or broadly spiritual perspective. Non-religious members may experience tension when religious themes predominate, yet still find personal meaning in the lyrics and performance. All members, including White singers, demonstrate awareness of the Black roots and historical legacy of gospel, recognising its cultural significance.

Participation in the choir constitutes both an emotional and a social experience. Collective singing and shared rituals foster a sense of connection among members, with the conductor, the audience, and, for some, with God. At the same time, the musical practice raises questions of authenticity and representation, for instance in the careful allocation of solo parts to honour the tradition's origins.

The choir functions as a temporary, place-bound community in which diverse backgrounds, identities, and beliefs converge. Performing Black Gospel in a predominantly White group encourages ongoing reflection on race, heritage, and respectful engagement with the tradition.

Singing in the Hopeful Choir thus exceeds mere artistic expression: it becomes a site of connection and meaning-making on spiritual, social, and cultural levels. Black Gospel emerges as a dynamic tradition that invites reflection on identity and belonging. This study contributes to our understanding of music as a social and cultural practice, demonstrating how Black Gospel in the Dutch context fosters shared meaning across lines of religion and ethnicity.

Keywords: Black Gospel, cultural participation, religion, spirituality, social practice, identity, intersectionality, community, choir studies, intangible heritage, Netherlands.

ABSTRACT

Hans Geybels

Thirteen unknown 17th-century pilgrimage pennants

Despite more than a century of scholarly research into pilgrimage pennants and pilgrimage prints in Belgium, and the publication of several reference works and catalogues on the subject, new discoveries continue to emerge. For nearly four hundred years, Wolfegg Castle in Upper Swabia (Bavaria) has housed one of the most extensive collections of fifteenth- to seventeenth-century copper engravings, comprising tens of thousands of prints. The foundations of this remarkable collection were laid by Count Truchsess Max Willibald (1604–1667), who collected prints with particular intensity from around 1650 until his death. In his will, he stipulated that the collection should remain intact and undivided; partly because of this provision, it has remained largely untouched for centuries.

The collection includes works by major masters such as Dürer, Holbein, Schongauer, Altdorfer, Rembrandt and Van Dyck, as well as engravings after compositions by Bruegel and Rubens, alongside countless others. In addition to these canonical works, the collection also preserves a substantial body of more popular prints, among which are several previously unknown pilgrimage pennants originating from what is now Belgium. The long-standing 'pilgrimage banner dispute' of Duffel, for instance, is now finally illustrated by the survival of a pennant. It is likely that further examples connected with the cult of Our Lady of Good Will will come to light in due course; until now, however, this episode had been documented only in archival sources. Scherpenheuvel, too, is now represented by a pennant. The example from Villers-Perwin reveals a hitherto unknown devotion, while the pennant from Jezus-Eik clarifies the iconographic representation of the former sanctuary, among other insights.

The discovery at Wolfegg Castle strongly suggests that many more unknown pilgrimage pennants may yet surface in the future.

ABSTRACT

Michael Gijbels

The Priest's Hold on Folklore – The Evolution of the priest from a Flemish-nationalist and anti-liberal folktale researcher to an occasional informant and storyteller in Belgian Limburg (1885-1996)

The priest is not only one of the most recurring characters in the folktales of the Belgian province of Limburg alongside witches, gnomes and werewolves, but has also been a highly influential voice in folklore research throughout the late 19th and 20th century. This article examines how priests were involved in folklore research and whether or not they were able to retain their power in the discipline during the examined period. Specifically, the article will examine two major sources, both collections of folktales. Firstly, there's *'t Daghet in den Oosten*, a magazine dedicated to language, history and folklore, which was both founded and staffed almost exclusively by priests. The second collection is composed of 19 theses written by students of philology hailing from Limburg, in which the priest plays a remarkable role as well. Based on these sources, the article will attempt to uncover why folklore became such an important discipline for Limburg's priesthood, rooted in the social and political strife between Christian and liberal groups in 19th century Belgium, as well as what tactics the priests used to try and defend their religion against the oncoming waves of secularisation. The period from the middle of the 20th century onward, represented by the theses, will then be examined to understand the gradual disappearance of the priests' influence on folklore and folkloric study, which came about due to a complex mixture of shifting attitudes from both priest and public, church reform and a generally waning social position of the priest in Limburg's steadily blossoming communities.

ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the rediscovery and analysis of a largely overlooked painted wooden reliquary shrine from the Church of Saint Stephen in Hoeselt (Limburg, Belgium). The object, which had not previously been inventoried or studied by national heritage institutions, resurfaced in 2024 following a public appeal launched within the framework of the *PaReS – Painted Relic Shrines in Situ* project. This ongoing research initiative investigates painted wooden reliquaries dating from before 1566 that survived the iconoclastic outbreaks in Belgium and remain in their original ecclesiastical contexts.

Initially dismissed as a modern imitation due to its crude painted surface, the shrine was re-evaluated through in situ analysis, art-historical interpretation, and archival research, which suggest a production date in the sixteenth century. The structure consists of nine oak panels joined with wrought iron fittings. Multiple layers of polychromy were identified, including traces of an earlier and more refined decorative scheme.

The reliquary has been opened on several occasions since the 16th century, as documented in various historical sources. These records describe a diverse collection of relics, some accompanied by identifiable inscriptions (e.g., Saints John the Baptist, Benedict, and Ursula), while others lack provenance. During the same research campaign, a second, nearly identical shrine was discovered in the church attic. Its comparable dimensions and iconography suggest it was created as a deliberate replica, possibly for processional use.

This study demonstrates that the Hoeselt reliquary represents a significant yet understudied piece of religious heritage. Further technical analyses, such as dendrochronology and advanced imaging, are recommended to refine its dating and reveal earlier iconography beneath later overpainting. The case underscores the broader value of local religious artifacts for understanding regional devotional practices and material culture in the post-medieval Low Countries.