

Belgium



Description of Arms :

Sable, a lion rampant or.

These were the ancient arms of Burgundy and appear in variation in many of the duchies in the area.

Principal Title : H.M. King of the Belgians.

Creation : Kingdom, 1831.

Family Name : Wettin.

Family History : Belgium is a somewhat manufactured country, comprising two quite distinct people, who cannot - or will not - speak each other's language. These are the Flemings and the Walloons, Dutch and French speakers. At the Congress of Vienna, 1815, the provinces were attached to the new kingdom of the Netherlands ; much against their will. Fifteen years later, it was clear that this arrangement was not working out and it was decided to create a separate kingdom, that of Belgium.

And to reign over this new realm, a prince of the House of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha was chosen. Closely connected to the British royal family, he had already declined the Greek throne. The problem was, whom exactly were to be included as his subjects ? William II of Holland tried to preempt matters by invading. He did not succeed and the position was eventually resolved. Leopold I was established. A vain man, he was not averse to make-up and wore a black wig, complete with a kiss-curl over his forehead. He died in 1865, mourned and respected but not, perhaps, greatly loved.

Leopold II added the Congo (Zaire) to his personal possessions but he did not win much affection either. He had a sarcastic tongue and a compulsion to add to his wealth. He was also a notorious libertine

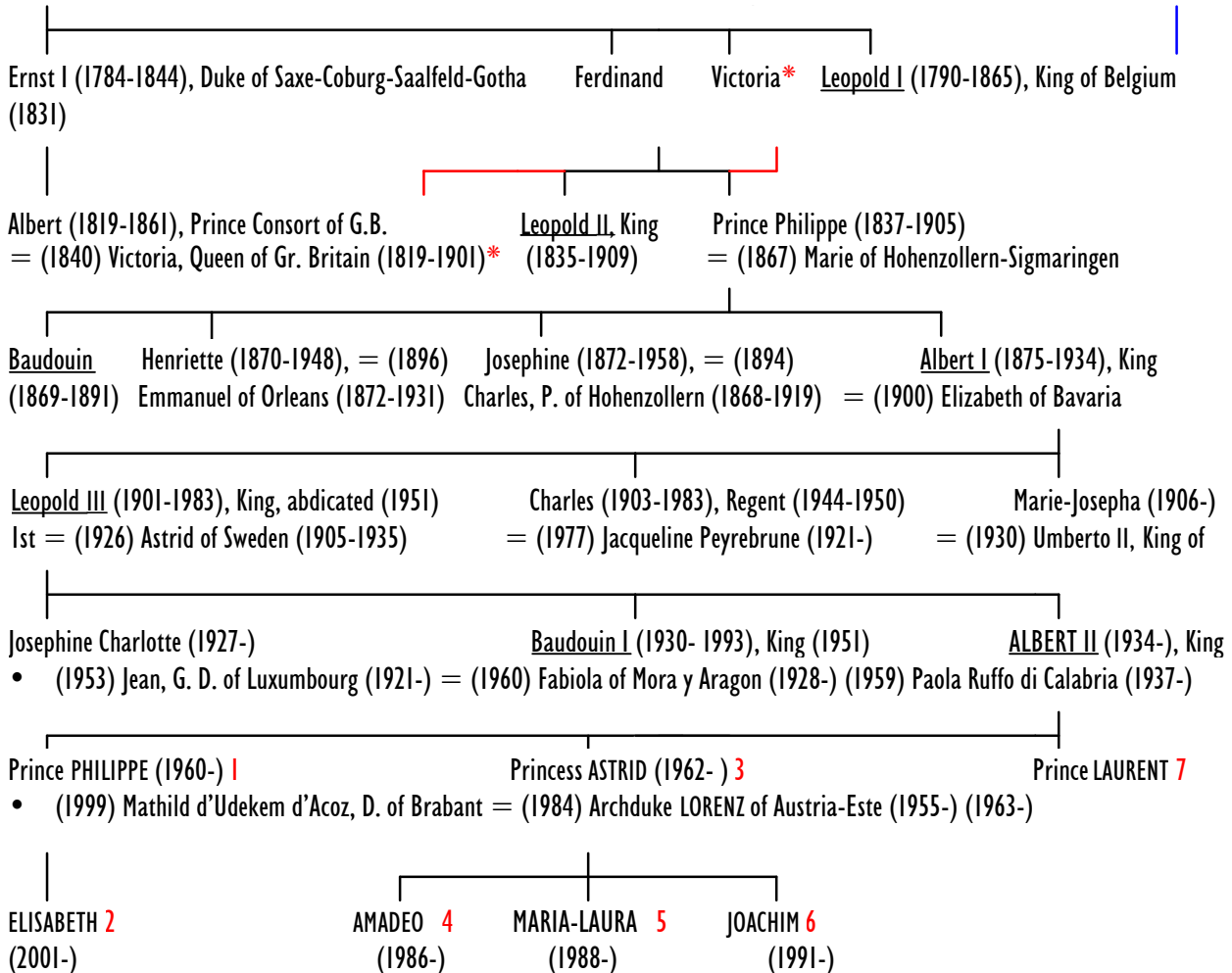
His son, Albert I, took the oath in both French and Flemish, considered to be a good start. During the Great War he fought relentlessly for his country, most of which was occupied by the Kaiser's troops. He ended his life, in a mountain fall, genuinely loved.

Leopold III lost his wife, Astrid of Sweden, in a car crash and his people's affection by his somewhat equivocal behaviour during the Second War. He was forced to abdicate in favour of his eldest son. Baudouin was shy and, for a long time, rather overlooked. But when he died prematurely and recently, it was clear that the Belgians had lost a hard-working and decent gentleman as their leader. And the main instrument in keeping his kingdom together.

Belgium

Francis I (1750-1806), Duke of Saxe-Coburg-Saalfeld
1850),

Louis-Philippe (1173-



Order of succession is marked in red

The Royal Family of Belgium:

The reunification of this territory started in the XV century, by the Dukes of Burgundy. Most of the Belgian principalities have had periods of independant rule, usually dominated by a greater power. These included the Archduke Philippe le Beau and, through Charles Quint, the kings of Spain.

There was a period of full sovereignty with the Archduke Albert and the Archduchess Isabella, 1598-1621. After them came the period of Habsbug rule, until annexion by the convention in 1795.

By 1815, it became clear that a more permanent solution needed to be found for these lands. The Austrian Low Countries were attached to the Kingdon of Holland but this was far from agreeable to the Belgian peoples of the south. Trouble simmered until 1830 and the celebrated Glorious Five Days of August of that year. After an opera about the liberation of Naples, the Dutch troops found it expedient to retire to Anvers. By the 4th October 1830, independance had been declared. The next month, the throne was offered to the Duke de Nemours, son of Louis-Philippe of France. England promptly vetoed this proposal.

The following year, Leopold of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha was elected king and was crowned in July of that year. While Germany was certainly the source of many lesser princes, the choce of Leopold is usually held to be owed to the fact that he was the brother of Prince Albert, the consort of Queen Victoria and British influence was strong.

Leopold badly needed other friends and chose, for his wife, Louis-Marie d'Orléans, the daughter of Louis-Philippe, King of the French. She, in turn, was the grand-daughter of the Empress Maria-Teresia. Thus the new Belgian king cemented ties with most of the powerful dynasties of Europe - and provided a suitable connection with the old ruling powers of the territory, the Habsburgs and the Burgundians.

To illustrate the degree to which Leopold stabilised what had always been an unsettled are and as a testimony to the general affection in which he was held, a curious event took place, shortly after his death. In 1866, the principalities of Moldovia and Valachia joined together to from a new country, Romania, and offered the crown to Philippe, the younger son of the late king. Philippe declined the gesture.

In 1917, King Albert turned down another offer of a throne. This time it was that of Greece and the offer had been made to his younger son.

The late monarch, Baudoin, was a quiet and often smewhat overlooked person. However, on his death there was no mistaking the widespread distress felt by his subjects not the real affection, with which he had been held. Part of this may have been due to the adoration felt for his mother, Astrid, killed in a car-crash. Unassuming as Baudoin may have seemed - like many of his family - he was also a man of very strong convictions. As king, it was his duty to sign all acts into law. He refused to do so when presented with one legalising abortion. Instead, he abdicated, for one day, and then resumed the monarchy.

Titles and Rules of Succession

The Head of State of Belgium holds the title of King of the Belgians, Prince of Belgium with the prefix His Majesty.

All children of male descendants of Leopold I are accorded the title of Princes or Princesses of Belgium, with the qualification of Royal Highness. The family dropped any pretensions to Saxe-Coburg styles and titles since the Great War.

The eldest son of the monarch (or by default, his eldest son) uses the title of Duke of Brabant. The eldest son on this duke is known as the Count of Hainault.

Under Article 75 of the Constitution, the king can confer other titles to members of his family, such as Prince of Liège or Count of Flanders.

The rule of succession is one of straight male primogeniture. In the absence of a male heir, the king can nominate a successor, with the agreement of the Legislative Chambers.

Miscellaneous

The motto of the country, perhaps hopefully, is 'L'Union fait la Force'.

The National Day is 21st July.

Royal Residences:

Royal Palace in Brussels.

Château de Laeken

Château de Ciergnon.

The royal family also possesses The Villa Astrid in Motril, Spain, as well as some other residences.

Most members of the royal family are buried in Notre Dame de Laeken. This dates back as far as 805 AD but was enlarged by Leopold I in 1854.

Orders of the Kingdom include:

Order of Leopold I. This is in five grades ranging from knight upwards.

Order of the Crown

Order of Leopold II etc.