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# LAMBIC: THE NEED FOR A NEW HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

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Lambic is one of the most unique beers in the world, along with its derived blends gueuze, kriek and faro. Not only is lambic known for its traditional production method and its wonderful taste, but also for its history. However, I this article I hope to demonstrate that much of the main-stream lambic historiography is flawed. Therefore, I will look at the actual historical evidence that is available, and I will propose an updated version of lambic history that may remove some of the myths associated with this very special beer.

## Introduction

The beers of Brussels and surroundings are rightly renowned around the world. Their secret lies in the spontaneous fermentation. By adding no yeast but simply exposing the wort to the brewery's microclimate, a unique flora of yeast and bacteria is allowed to have its impact on the final product. That product is lambic, a very complex beer that is aged in oak barrels for several years. From this base beer, that today is only sparsely sold as a standalone product, combined with either young lambic or a weaker beer called 'maarts bier' (March beer), the brewer or blender composes its derived products that are sold to a wider audience. Faro is usually a weaker version, coloured and sweetened with sugar. Kriek is made with cherries (or their pulp, or their juice), and there are also other fruit beers based on lambic in combination with peaches, raspberries, blackcurrant or even apples. Finally, the product considered the most noble is gueuze, a bottle-conditioned blend of old and young lambic, often likened to champagne.

Today, there are only a handful of companies were lambic and its derived blends are still made, most of them in the region around Brussels. Most of them are members of the Hoge Raad voor Ambachtelijke Lambikbieren (HORAL - the High Council for Artisanal Lambic Beers) which was founded in 1997. In recent years lambic has been going through quite a revival: after a few decades of dwindling sales figures and closing breweries, lambic beers today enjoy considerable reverence both in Belgium and internationally. Some of the breweries are genuine historical treasures, employing pre-War World II equipment and barrels well over a hundred years old. Also, a few new blending or brewing companies are starting up, the latest one being Den Herberg in Buizingen, which presented its lambic earlier this year.

Lambic beers are legally protected, the first Belgian royal decree to this effect dating from 1965. At a European level they are Traditional Specialities Guaranteed, which protects the production method, but is not confined to a specific region. One of the reasons for this is the fact that lambic is also produced by two breweries in Western Flanders: Van Honsebrouck and Omer Vander Ghinste.

## The conventional narrative

While the lambic beers are special enough by themselves, they are usually accompanied by a historical narrative. After all, the methods and utensils used seem to come from another era. This narrative can be found in tourist brochures, in popular beer literature, of course on the internet, but also in documentation supplied by the brewers and blenders themselves. In this article, I however hope to demonstrate that much of the associated narrative is not based on what the historical facts tell us. I will therefore present a new narrative that I think is much more in line with the actual historical record. This will, I hope, not diminish the special place that lambics hold in today's beer landscape, but instead lead to a better understanding of how lambic fits into beer history as a whole.

A complicating matter is that most of the historical material and literature is in French, while most of the contemporary literature is in Dutch, making it hard for English speakers, but also for French speakers, to do research themselves.

So what is the conventional version of lambic history that is usually presented, like for instance by authors like Jef Van den Steen, Verdonck and De Raedemaeker, and most notably the late Michael Jackson himself? In this 'official' version, which is also promoted by HORAL, lambic is a very old beer style: supposedly, it was brewed this way already before the 14th century, there is a recipe for it dating from 1559, and as such it features in the well-known paintings of drinking peasants by Brueghel. In this version, lambic has hardly changed since those times: it is a primordial beer that already existed before all the other beer styles, and it supposedly dates from the time no brewer in Europe added yeast to his wort. Additionally, it is often hinted at that lambic can only be brewed in Brussels and surroundings, because only there the air contains the right microflora to enable the right kind of spontaneous fermentation. Also, the fact that today in lambic production only aged hops are used, therefore giving almost no hop aroma to the beer, is presented as a clue that lambic predates the introduction of hops as a regular brewing ingredient in the 14th century.[1]

**Problems**

There are several problems with this version of lambic history. For one thing, in the historical sources, lambic doesn't seem to go this far back. The first member of the lambic family to be mentioned in a Brussels context, is faro in 1721. Lambic itself doesn't show up until 1794, under the name 'allambique'. Instead, the 1559 'recipe' that is so often mentioned, comes from a document describing regulations for the brewers of the city of Halle, near Brussels. As Belgian historian Raf Meert recently pointed out, it only describes a malt grist, and one that doesn't even closely resemble today's lambic production methods. The Halle grist has far more wheat in it, and it also contains oats, an ingredient never found in lambic.[2] Worse, the 1559 text explicitly states what sort of beers it describes: 'keutte' and 'houppe', in which we can recognise the well-documented beer styles kuit and hoppenbier, well-hopped beers that originated in Holland.[3]

In any case, it seems safe to assume that even Medieval brewers knew quite well what yeast did and were quite happy to actively add yeast to their wort instead of leaving everything to chance. Also, for all we know, Medieval beers were drunk relatively fresh, so even if there was some degree of spontaneous fermentation, the beer was not kept long enough to acquire lambic-like properties. Ageing beer only caught on in the 18th century, for instance in England where porter was one of the first aged beers on the market, and in Holland where around the same time texts start mentioning 'oud bruin' (old brown) beer.

Also, the typical lambic methods like spontaneous fermentation and overlong ageing in barrels are unattested before the 18th century. In fact, spontaneous fermentation very probably was an 18th century innovation of the Brussels brewers themselves. It's not that Brussels is the only place where spontaneous fermentation has survived - it's one of the very few places where it was introduced. The only other major spontaneously fermented beer that I know of, is the jopen beer of Danzig, which was quite different.

**'Living historical witness'**

So where does the current narrative come from? An important factor is Marcel Franssens, a tour guide in the city of Halle. In 1970, he wrote an article about 'geuzelambik', subsequently reproduced as a booklet.[4] In fact, it was Franssens who cobbled together lambic history as it would be known henceforth. It was he who misinterpreted the 1559 Halle text, and who presented lambic as originally a pre-hops and pre-yeast beer, a 'living historical witness'.

Franssens had noble motives for doing so: at that moment, lambic was going through a difficult time. Less and less people were drinking it, and it was only really known in the Pajottenland around Brussels. It looked like the last lambic brewer and the last drinker were soon going to be extinct. At the same time the contrast between lambic and the predominant beer of the day, lager, was bigger than ever. Franssens had every reason to present lambic as a very special historic beer. He was trying to promote, even save a beer style.

Perhaps stimulated by Franssens' promotion campaign or on their own accord, other people started to realise the beauty of this spontaneously fermented artisanal beer. Michael Jackson prominently featured it in his 1977 *World Guide To Beer*. The last lambic brewery in the Brussels agglomeration itself, Cantillon, restyled itself as a living museum in 1978. In the same year, a young man called Frank Boon bought a small, ailing lambic blending company and tried to make it successful again. These were all signs of a slow but evident lambic renaissance. Unfortunately, while lambic was regaining a bit of its former popularity, Franssens original narrative was largely retained.

**The evolutionary approach: proto-lambic ca.1720-1820**

If Franssens' version of lambic history isn't correct, how then *should* we look at lambic? In fact, the model that I would like to propose is in many ways the opposite of Franssens' approach: while he tried to ascertain that lambic had remained unchanged through the ages, I will look at it in a more evolutionary way. It is quite certain lambic has in fact evolved quite a lot since its beginnings, which do not lie as far back as Franssens claimed anyway. Inspired by Martyn Cornell's evolutionary look at porter, I will call these phases: proto-lambic, paleo-lambic, meso-lambic and neo-lambic.[5] Also, there is a side branch that I will call hollando-lambic.

In the beginning, there was no lambic. In the 18th century, Brussels was the capital of the Duchy of Brabant and the seat of government of the Austrian Netherlands, a predecessor of what would later become Belgium. At somewhere between 78,000 (1709) and 58,000 (1755) inhabitants, it was the largest city in the country, having outgrown Antwerp a century earlier. In 1764, there were 21 breweries in Brussels that supplied the city with its favourite drink: beer. Its consumption was estimated at 300 litres per person per year, most of which was produced locally.[6] What sort of beers were these?

From the 17th century onwards, the beers of Brussels were called dobbel or tweestuiver beer, braspenning or stuiver beer, halfbraspenning or halfstuiver, and kuit. Stuiver and braspenning were types of coins, thus the names indicated the beer's value. These beers were brewed according to a fixed ratio of wheat, barley and oats. From the many regulations issued by the city, it can be surmised that these beer were drunk fresh.[7] It is clear that these beers did not resemble lambic at all.

The first member of the lambic family to surface was faro, which was mentioned in 1721, in a list of beers drunk in Brussels.[8] After that, it wasn't mentioned again until 1775 and then 1782. According to Raf Meert, this faro was a new beer, stronger than the dobbel that had been the city's heaviest beer until that time. Then, in 1794 another beer called 'allambique' is mentioned, which was even heavier, as it was more expensive: the document mentions faro of 22 livres per barrel, while a barrel of allambique cost 32 livres.[9]

The name 'allambique' indicates that the name derives from 'alambic', the French word for 'distilling kettle', originally from Arabic. The most probable explanation is that drinkers likened it to the product of the alambic, genever: high in alcohol (for the time), yellow and clear.[10] In any case, other explanations for the name, such as derivations from the name of the town of Lembeek or the Latin verb 'lambere' (to lick) seem far less likely. The origin of the name 'faro' is shrouded in the mist of time, although a beer of that name was known in Holland as early as the 16th century.

How this 'proto-lambic' was made is still a mystery. Was it already spontaneously fermented? Historian, Raf Meert, claims he has seen a recipe from 1801, but he has yet to make it public. In any case, it is clear that lambic isn't by far as old as people have claimed: it simply didn't exist before the 18th century. Which also means the beer jugs seen in Brueghel's paintings didn't contain lambic: probably they were filled with a three-grain fresh white beer.

**Paleo-lambic ca.1820-1870**

In 1829, Leuven-based doctor of medicine, Jean-Baptiste Vrancken, published a treatise on Belgian beers. His main scope, that each city of Belgium had its


*Figure 1. Label for a faro beer made by the Sleutel brewery in Dordrecht, The Netherlands, c.1935. This was one of the last lambic-type beers produced in Holland.*
*Source: Regionaal Archief Dordrecht.*

own particular beer type because of urban and geographical reasons (he thought the shape of the city's streets, buildings and ramparts had a substantial impact on the beer's taste), is slightly undermined by his description of all the different brewing methods and recipes across the country, which varied greatly. And it is Vrancken who gave a first detailed account of the brewing of the beers of Brussels: faro and lambic.[11]

The way Vrancken describes it, faro could still be brewed as a separate beer, not a blend, although there were brewers who produced lambic, faro and 'petite bière' from one grist. At this point, faro was merely a weaker version of lambic, it was not yet sweetened. Usually, barley malt and unmalted wheat were used in equal quantities by volume, which means that by weight wheat was no less than 58% of the grist. Both faro and lambic had a few characteristics that resemble today's lambic: they were made by spontaneous fermentation, without adding yeast. Lambic could be kept for a few years; if it was kept for five years, it was called 'geuzebier' which was considered the real yellow beer of Brussels.[12] This is an early mention of gueuze, which however wouldn't be mainstream until the 1890s, as we will see.

Vrancken also describes the practice of blending lambic: pub owners and beer sellers would usually buy their beer at three or four breweries and mix them together, often adding brown beer as well. As Vrancken puts it, the more breweries the beers came from, the better the quality of the blend!

Faro and lambic are also described by David Booth (1834) and Georges Lacambre (1851).[13] Lacambre was a French brewing engineer that had set up the Brasserie Belge at Leuven, which started production in 1840. His brewing manual was considered indispensable for Belgian brewers up until the 20th century. According to Lacambre, these beers were only brewed in winter, as is the case today. Just like Vrancken, Lacambre describes lambic and faro as brewed the same way, differing only in strength, and often made from the same grist. By this time, faro had definitely become a blended beer: it was never brewed separately anymore, but always a mix of lambic and a weaker beer called bière de mars (March beer). In any case, lambic and faro were known nationwide as very agreeable for their finesse and vinosity, though there were many blenders who tried to make a quick bob by applying all sorts of cheats.

Interestingly, Lacambre specifies that for lambic 'young hops from Aalst' were used. This practice is confirmed by early lambic brewing logs in Haarlem, as we will see. So much for 'lambic is a descendant of Medieval prehops beers' story: in the 19th century, brewers did not use old hops for lambic as is customary today. Why? Probably, this has to do with the variety of hops used. In the 19th century this was Coigneau, a low alpha-acid Belgian variety that today has almost died out. In the first half of the 20th century, Belgian hop farmers replaced Coigneau and other Belgian hops by foreign varieties with more aroma and bitterness. Deprived of their favourite low-alpha, low-aroma hop variety, lambic brewers turned to old hops.

**Hollando-lambic ca.1810-1940**

To Belgians this may be blasphemy, but once there existed an 'Amsterdams lambiek' and lambic from many


*Figure 2. Newspaper advert (*Haagsche Courant *2 July 1883) for the Scheepje brewery in Haarlem, the Netherlands. This brewery made a few Belgian-style beers, including lambic and faro. Uitzet and Mechels bruin are Belgian beer types as well.*
*Source: Royal Library, The Hague*

other Dutch cities too. This 'hollando-lambic' has existed for over a hundred years, though its heyday was in the mid-19th century. The first mention of lambic in the Netherlands dates from 1811. That year, A. Oortmans and Co. in Amsterdam announced they would sell 'first class Brussels Faro and Lambicq'. The reason was probably the shortage of colonial products because of the Napoleonic wars, as was admitted by an innkeeper in Groningen, who announced that 'because of higher prices of Coffee and Tea, and the greater consumption of Beer' he now supplied 'Brussels Pharo' among other things.[14]

Soon, the Dutch started making it themselves. In 1812, a brewery in Utrecht announced that they sold their own faro, as did a brewer in Zierikzee in 1814.[15] In the preserved brewing logs of the Scheepje brewery in Haarlem, the first faro dates to November 1825 and the first lambic follows in January 1826. Interestingly, also here faro was brewed separately and wasn't a blend. For both beers, they used fresh hops, while for many of their other beer types, they used hops that were over a year old.[16] In 1830, Belgium declared its independence from the Netherlands, which is why the Scheepje brewery announced that they had applied themselves particularly to making faro and lambic, and they even supplied it to the Dutch royal court.[17]

All sorts of Dutch breweries started making their own version of faro and lambic, in towns like Leiden, Arnhem, Utrecht, Maastricht, Amsterdam, and so on. Though the lambics were only part of a larger range of Dutch beers, their heyday must have been around 1840-1880. However, by 1893 Van Renesse in Gorinchem was still making faro, and one of the last breweries known to so was De Sleutel in Dordrecht, until at least 1933.[18]


*Figure 3. At the 1897 World Fair quite a lot of gueuze was sold, but lambic and faro sold even better. Source: Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris*

Also in the Netherlands, lambic was made through spontaneous fermentation, if the 1866 brewing manual *De Praktische Bierbrouwer* (*The Practical Beer Brewer*) is anything to go by. This book still describes faro as brewed separately, as was still the case in Haarlem as late as 1875.[19] In fact, it would seem that while the original lambic in Brussels would go through several developments, as we will see, Dutch lambic and faro stayed more or less the same. The Dutch never produced late 19th-century types like gueuze or kriek.

The Dutch branch of lambic history now is almost completely forgotten. For one thing, it shows that it was possible to produce lambic outside the Brussels region, even if some contemporary Belgian authors thought otherwise.[20] Even in Belgium itself, lambic and faro were being copied as early as 1829, in the Walloon town of Ath.[21]

**Meso-lambic ca.1870-1918**

On the 21 July 1890, the celebration of Belgian National Day was the occasion for a nice treat for the people of Brussels: the famous statue of Manneken Pis was urinating gueuze, for everyone to drink! In fact, a barrel of it had been connected to the statue's urinary tract.[22] This would sound strange to any connoisseur of gueuze today: isn't gueuze supposed to be a typical bottle-conditioned beer? But back in those days, it wasn't.

Brussels had gone through drastic changes in the preceding decades: from an ancient Flemish city that in many ways resembled a picturesque but ramshackle version of today's Bruges, it morphed into a miniature version of Paris, with large boulevards, populous suburbs, and supremacy of the French language over Dutch. One major development was the covering of the Senne river, which ran through the heart of the old centre. In the process, many breweries located close to the river disappeared: they closed down or moved to the suburbs. The original birthplace of lambic was now largely destroyed.

At the same time, everywhere in Europe industrialisation and scientific research drastically changed the way beer was brewed. Belgium was however slow at adapting to these developments. The number of breweries was high, but most of them were rather small. Exports of Belgian beer were close to zero. A new beer law in 1885 made it easier for Belgian brewers to make foreign-style heavier and industrial beers using bottom fermentation. The first ones in the Brussels region to do so were the Brasserie de Koekelberg in 1887 and Wielemans-Ceuppens in 1888, who both started making beers like Munich, Bavière and Bock.

Around the same time, a version of lambic that thus far had led an existence far away from the spotlights, emerged: the gueuze lambic. Vrancken had already mentioned it in 1829, as a lambic aged for five years. As such, it could be sold either in barrels, as a 1831 document attests, or in bottles, like in 1844 when 200 bottles were shipped to Constantinople and 500 to Rio de Janeiro.[23] While brewing publicist Auguste Laurent simply wrote in 1883, ‘Gueuze is pure, unsweetened and unprepared lambic’, other writers emphasised its age: ‘Lambic sometimes only becomes mature after three, four or even five years. That gives a product in which a great sourness dominates, and that is usually called “gueuse lambic”’, wrote Van den Hulle and Van Laer of the Gent brewing school in 1891.[24]

A good example is given by the Paris-based magazine *Le Panthéon de l’industrie*, which in 1894 paid a visit to the La Couronne brewery in Brussels, owned by the Vander Borght brothers. La Couronne was no small enterprise: it had about 8,000 barrels with ageing lambic. The lambic was aged for two to three years, after which a mellow beer with an unmistakable bouquet had formed.[25]

*Figure 4. Lambic barrels at Timmermans brewery, Itterbeek. Photograph by Roel Mulder*


*Figure 5. Old lambic publicity signs at Timmermans brewery, Itterbeek. Photograph by Roel Mulder*

However: they also made an extra fine lambic, called 'lambic gueuze'. For this, they selected their best lambics. A very narrow selection: only about 5% was deemed good enough! In the end, the gueuze-lambic would age for two years in barrels and five years in the bottle. The French journalist was impressed. 'This marvellous brew ... to us was as tasty, as captivating and original as a Burgundy grand cru'.

By that time gueuze-lambic had more or less become a separate beer type, the most expensive one in Brussels. For instance, in 1892 a bottle of lambic cost 35 cents, but gueuse-lambic 40 cents. At the 1897 Brussels World Fair, quite a lot of gueuze-lambic was drunk at the brewery stands (4,405 litres, 3% of total consumption), although that was still peanuts compared to the consumption of ordinary lambic (12,417 litres, 9%) and faro (49,516 litres, 37%); total beer turnover was 134,241 litres including bock beer, Münchener and Bavarian beer.[26]

The figures at the World Fair may give an idea of the consumption in Brussels as a whole. Faro was the most common drink: by this time it was not only blended, but usually also sweetened by adding sugar or syrup, as still is the case today. This 'preparation' with sugar was already described as early as 1864, although by 1883 the same writer, Auguste Laurent, still saw this as a relatively new development.[27]

Another innovation was the appearance of kriek: an early mention is the 'Kriekenbier' presented at the 'Exposition d'alimentation' in Brussels in 1893. The idea of adding fruits to beer was of course not new, but kriek apparently only became a thing in Brussels around the year 1900 or so.[28]

Like faro and lambic, the name 'gueuze' has proven difficult for beer writers to explain. HORAL suggests its name may come from a street in Brussels called 'Rue des Gueux' (or 'Geuzenstraat' in Dutch). The problem: there is no such street, and the current 'Place des Gueux' only got that name in 1877.[29] In the 16th century, there used to be a 'Geusstraetken' opposite the church of Saint Nicholas, but by the 17th century it was already known by its 19th century name, 'Doodstraetken' or 'Rue des Morts' ('Death street'). Today, incidentally, it is the small dead-end street that leads into the famous Brussels café La Bécasse.[30] The other explanation given by HORAL, that 'gueuze' may be a reference to the 19th century name for liberal politicians, 'gueux' seems more likely. In any case, the word 'gueuze' seems to be of Flemish origin, if the first mention by Vrancken, 'geuze-bier' in an otherwise French text, is anything to go by.

**Neolambic**

The First World War had a devastating effect on Belgium as a whole, and it was no less devastating on the Belgian brewing sector. Many breweries saw their equipment requisitioned by the Germans or were destroyed altogether. Beer quality dropped because of a shortage of raw materials. After the war, many breweries never reopened.

A less well-known effect of the war was the phasing out of lambic as a mainstream beer type and the rise of gueuze as its higher quality replacement. Before 1914, the market share of gueuze was relatively small. Also, while it was often sold in bottles, it was also available in barrels. For instance, in 1909 one Edmond Mineur described an old man from Brussels who every morning invariably had a gueuze from cask, but in the evening closed his day with a few good pints of gueuze from bottle, smoking his pipe.[31]

So how did we end up with the current situation, where gueuze is almost exclusively bottled, and almost no ordinary lambic is on the market, let alone in bottles? Some clues are provided by a fascinating account given in 1954 by Albert Vossen (1897-1978), who for years owned the famous Brussels café A la Mort Subite. He also led the accompanying brewery in Rue des Capucins that was active until 1959, when production was outsourced to the De Keersmaeker brewery in the village of Kobbegem.

Vossen had experienced it all from close by, as a pub owner and as a brewer. 'Before the 1914 war, the beer blender was a happy man', he wrote. The blender could easily sell his blends in the form of faro, sweet lambic, gueuze in barrels and gueuze in bottles. Faro was, as mentioned above, a blend of lambic at 5.5 to 6% ABV and March beer of 3%, sweetened with sugar. Sweet lambic was also sweetened, while gueuze in barrels was dry and non-foaming.[32]

All these beers were sold in barrels. But Vossen relates what happened next: 'Unfortunately, these beers disappeared from the market after the 1914 war, because of a too small price difference between these cask beers and sparkling gueuze in bottles. Before 1914, a glass of cask lambic cost 20 cents and a gueuze cost 30 cents. Thus, a difference of 10 cents, almost as much as the price of a loaf of bread. After the 1914 war however, one would pay 1.50 francs for a glass of gueuze and 1.25 francs for a lambic. And after 1918, consumers preferred gueuze in bottles, or in other words lambics refermented in bottles like champagne.'

This may sound familiar to beer historians: just like in England and elsewhere, the First World War apparently had its influence on the beers available and their prices. But Vossen continues: 'Before 1914 the craftsman bottled only the best he had; while with the sale of faro and lambic [in barrels] he could, by adding sugar, correct lambics with certain defects, and in this way sell all the beer he had in stock. Unfortunately, because cask beer was abandoned, today [1954] the blender has to know his trade to perfection. To make good blends, it is absolutely necessary to determine the quality of the different lambics with certainty, using his palate, his sense of smell and his eyes. With his intuition, he has to make such judicious combinations to be able to sell all of his lambic in bottles, except those beers that have fallen victim to 'double face' [cloudiness], acidification and decay'.

If Vossen's account is representative of the lambic market as a whole, this is what happened: before World War I most lambics were sold in barrels, which offered much larger opportunities to tinker with them, for instance by adding sugar. This was especially the case with faro, where sweetening had already been the norm for quite some time. However, even then, blending faro was a tricky job, 'because the beers of Brussels, due to both their composition as well as their way of fermenting, can one time be bitter and sweet the next, or they can have such varying tastes, that a practiced palate and a lot of experience are required, blending in a certain proportion, to keep obtaining more or less the same taste and bouquet, while using both the bad beers and the good ones'.[33]

Thus, blending lambic already called for a lot of skill, but when its bottled variety gained in popularity, the required craftsmanship only increased. Before that, there was room for tinkering. Also, the bottles gave the additional problem that young beer needed to be added to get refermentation going. After all, lambic that had been aged for two or three years, had reached such a level of attenuation that 90% of the bottles would remain completely still if it wasn't cut with some fresh beer, according to Vossen.

And even then they had to be careful: too much young beer gave too much refermentation, which during warm summers would yield exploding bottles as a result. During the hot summer of 1949 two to three million bottles were said to have exploded in and around Brussels.[34]

## Capsulekens

Another side branch in the evolutionary tree of lambic is the so-called 'capsulekensgeuze' that was developed after the Second World War. Basically, it was an industrialised version of gueuze, made not by artisanal brewers and blenders, but by big companies. It still is a bit of a sensitive subject, because industrial gueuze clearly still exists, but there can be quite a debate about which gueuzes are industrial and which aren't. 'Capsuleken' is Flemish for 'crown cap', and refers to the way large breweries sold a gueuze that was a blend of lambic and top-fermented beer, filtered, pasteurized, sweetened and saturized, packaged in 25 centilitre bottles with crown caps.[35]

The most successful post-World War II gueuze was Belle-Vue in Sint-Jans-Molenbeek, led by Constant Vanden Stock, also known for being chairman and main sponsor of football club Anderlecht. Vanden Stock prided himself on making a softer and rounder gueuze, which was also popular with women. By the 1970s, Belle-Vue controlled 80% of the gueuze market.[36] At the same time, post-World War II concentration in the beer market and a decline in the consumption of lambic led to many lambic brewers and blenders either closing down or selling out to a bigger company.

In 1991, Belle-Vue itself was sold to Interbrew, today known as AB InBev. Under Interbrew, Belle-Vue concentrated mainly on the sale of kriek, though this year it was announced that Belle-Vue would also be selling a traditional-style bottle-conditioned gueuze again.

## Old lambic

In 1997, the same year HORAL was founded, the European Union granted protection to lambic, gueuze, faro and kriek. Lambic beers brewed according to the traditional methods were allowed to bear the denomination 'old'. In this case therefore, 'old' does not reference the age of the beer in question, but the way it is made. Not all traditional lambic makers agreed with this: Cantillon, for instance, does not use the name 'old' even though its brewing methods are traditional. To complicate matters, some breweries, like Mort Subite in Kobbegem, produce both 'gueuze' and 'old gueuze' and 'kriek' and 'old kriek'.

One of the factors contributing to the lambic renaissance is the attention lambic receives abroad today. Bar some exports of lambic in the 19$^{th}$ century, consumption of lambic remained largely domestic. This started to change in the 1980s, and today, a company like Lindemans exports half of its beer, and others even more. At De Troch no less than 92% is sent abroad.

## Conclusion

There still remains a lot of research to be done when it comes to lambic history. Local and company archives may yield much more information than what was available to me when writing this article. Especially the developments in the 20$^{th}$ century could need a more thorough looking into, although more research on the origins of lambic would not be unwelcome either.

For the moment, however, it seems clear to me that the conventional narrative on lambic can largely be abandoned, difficult as it may be to make many of the more popular stories phase out. The old narrative was compelling in many ways: lambic as a primordial beer, as the oldest beer style in Belgium and indeed, Europe. In reality it dates back only to the 18$^{th}$ century, while for instance white beer has been around for about three centuries longer, even if it's not brewed in the traditional way anymore.

I may be prejudiced, but to me the new, more accurate version that I have proposed is compelling as well. At the end of the 18th century, the brewers of Brussels developed a beer that was unique in the world: a yellow wheat beer based on spontaneous fermentation (the very different Jopen beer of Danzig was the only other well-known spontaneously fermented beer). Many of its original characteristics are still present today: brewed in winter, aged in wooden barrels, blended with care and skill. In the 19th century, all of Brussels drank lambic and its little sister faro. After 1918, very old lambic, called gueuze, became the norm in its bottled, champagne-like form. Blending it was even more difficult, and this is how lambic blending became no longer a trade but an art. And even though lambic could be and has been produced elsewhere, Brussels and its surroundings are the only place where it was born, and where it has been made ever since. Only there, it is part of local tradition, heritage and know-how.

## Note

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