



DNA Tribes® Digest September 30, 2010
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Introduction

Hello, and welcome to the September 2010 issue of DNA Tribes® Digest. This month’s feature article will examine the Belgic sub-region, incorporating more detailed sub-regional definitions within Northwest Europe¹. The Belgic sub-region includes populations of the modern “Benelux” nations (Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg) and northern parts of France, lands sometimes described as the Low Countries. This zone has played an important role as a contact point for Atlantic and Central European cultures in both ancient and modern times.

Best regards and I hope to speak with you soon,
Lucas Martin
DNA Tribes

¹ A map of current DNA Tribes® Europa sub-regions can be viewed at <http://dnatribes.com/dnatribes-europa.html>. The previous DNA Tribes® analysis of relationships within Northwest Europe is available at <http://dnatribes.com/dnatribes-digest-2008-11-28.pdf>. The more general “Norse” zone referenced in the 2008 article has since been split into the more specific Norse (Scandinavian) and Belgic (Low Countries and Northern France) sub-regions.

Gallia Belgica: The Belgic Sub-Region of Europe

Historical Background

The Belgic sub-region of Europe characterizes populations of the modern “Benelux” nations of Europe (Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg) as well as populations of northern France and (to some extent) Britain (see map in **Figure 1**). Since ancient times, these Belgic populations have straddled the cultural zones of Atlantic Europe (including Celtic cultures of the Classical period and Romance cultures in more recent history) and Central Europe (including Germanic cultures in Classical and modern times).

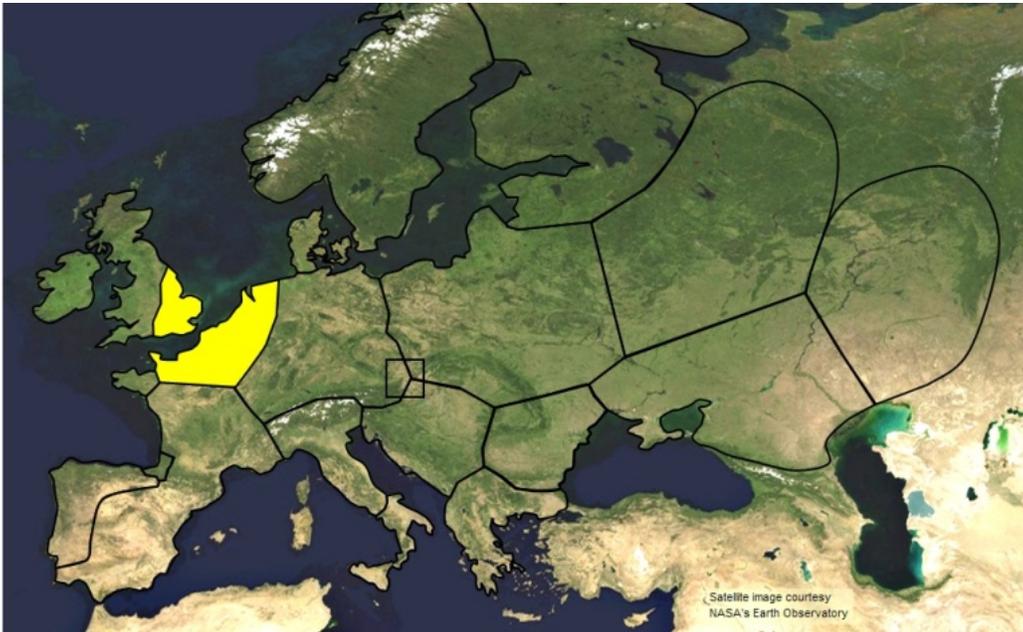


Figure 1: Map of the Belgic sub-region of Europe (highlighted in yellow).

At the time of his Gallic Wars, Julius Caesar² stated that Gaul was divided in three parts: an Aquitanian (probably Basque related) zone in present day southwest France; a Celtic (Gaulish proper) zone in present day central France; and a Belgic zone (*Gallia Belgica*) north of the Marne and Seine Rivers (that is, roughly north of present day Paris). According to Caesar, the Belgic tribes (Belgae) who inhabited *Gallia Belgica* had their own language and customs, distinct from their Celtic and Germanic neighbors.

Although the language of the Belgae was replaced by Latin (the ancestor of modern French) in the wake of Caesar’s military campaigns, some modern linguists believe that this zone constituted a distinct *Nordwestblock*, perhaps with its own Belgian Indo-European language that was neither Celtic nor

² Julius Caesar described his military campaigns in Gaul in [Commentarii de Bello Gallico](#) (“Commentaries on the Gallic War”).

Germanic (but possibly related to both). More controversially, the linguist Theo Vennemann proposed a possible Vasconic (Basque) substrate in languages of Atlantic Europe, including languages of the Belgic sub-region³.

These coastal cultures of Western Europe have been linked not only by historical empires (such as the Frankish Kingdom and Napoleonic Empire), but also by more ancient contacts. For instance, archaeological evidence supports extensive maritime links between the Iberian Peninsula, the British Isles, and neighboring parts of continental Europe during a period known as the Atlantic Bronze Age. This period predates the historical record, but perhaps is related to Celtic legends of the Goidelic Milesian dynasty that linked Ireland with Spain⁴.

Irish legends also recall an earlier group of seagoing cultures known as the Fir Bolg, whose name suggests a possible link with Belgic cultures of continental Europe. According to the medieval *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, the Fir Bolg were Nemedian (“Noble”) cultures linked to both Scythia and Greece⁵. A similar myth appears in medieval lore of the Sicambri, a Germanic speaking tribe of the Netherlands. According to the *Liber Historiae Francorum*, the Sicambri had links to Trojan dynasties that had fled to the Pontic Steppe following the Trojan War and later migrated west to the Rhine River. Modern historians give little credence to these legends, on the basis of evidence establishing local cultural continuity in Western Europe. However, perhaps these accounts recall an early “elite dominance” pattern of contacts mediated by a small number of “elite” specialists linked to steppe cultures, rather than a general population movement⁶.

Legends aside, these Belgic lands of Gaul are known to have been settled by Germanic tribes, such as the Frisians, Batavians, and Salian Franks. Germanic cultures can still be found in the Low Countries today, including the Frisian, Dutch, and Flemish cultures of the Netherlands and Belgium. Starting in the medieval period, these cultures participated in the maritime Hanseatic League that facilitated trade among cities throughout the North Sea and Baltic Sea. Together with local French speaking cultures such as the Walloons of Belgium, these Low Country cultures emerged from the Middle Ages to produce flourishing urban centers known for art, culture, and commerce.

³ Most linguists have rejected Vennemann’s Vasconic substratum theory. However, genetic data support the possibility of gene flow from Basque-like populations along the Atlantic zone of Western Europe. See “Old Europes (Part Two)” at <http://dnatribes.com/dnatribes-digest-2009-08-29.pdf>. Although evidence of gene flow from Basque-like populations does not necessarily suggest a Basque-like language substrate, it supports the possibility of population contacts that potentially could have influenced local languages.

⁴ See “A Closer Look at the Celtic Sub-Region of Europe” at <http://dnatribes.com/dnatribes-digest-2010-08-31.pdf>.

⁵ See <http://www.maryjones.us/ctexts/lebor3.html>. These legends are speculatively examined in “A Closer Look at the Celtic Sub-Region of Europe” at <http://dnatribes.com/dnatribes-digest-2010-08-31.pdf>.

⁶ According to Marija Gimbutas, Europe was “kurganized” in several waves, primarily by cultural diffusion rather than mass migrations. According to archaeologists Kristiansen and Larsson, modern scholars sometimes assume an “ideology of immobility” rooted in the experience of farmers during the Middle Ages. This sedentary paradigm contrasts with a “heroic” culture of long distance travel by “elite” specialists during the Bronze Age, who acted as transmitters of culture and established personal contacts over substantial distances. While local geography tends to be more important in general genetic relationships between populations, the role of smaller “elites” can be more important in understanding dynastic legends. See *The Rise of Bronze Age Society: Travels, Transmissions and Transformations*, pp. 32-33. Genetic evidence of a possible instance of Hungarian “elite dominance” is discussed in “Two Magyars” at <http://dnatribes.com/dnatribes-digest-2010-06-30.pdf>.

Genetic Analysis of the Belgic Sub-Region

Genetic contributions to the Belgic sub-region of Europe were identified. Results are summarized in **Table 1** and illustrated in **Figure 2**.

European Sub-Region	Genetic Contribution
Germanic	46.1%
Celtic	24.4%
Portuguese	10.3%
Italian	10.1%
Spanish	4.9%
Norse	3.6%
Other	0.5%

Table 1: Genetic contributions to the Belgic sub-region of Europe.

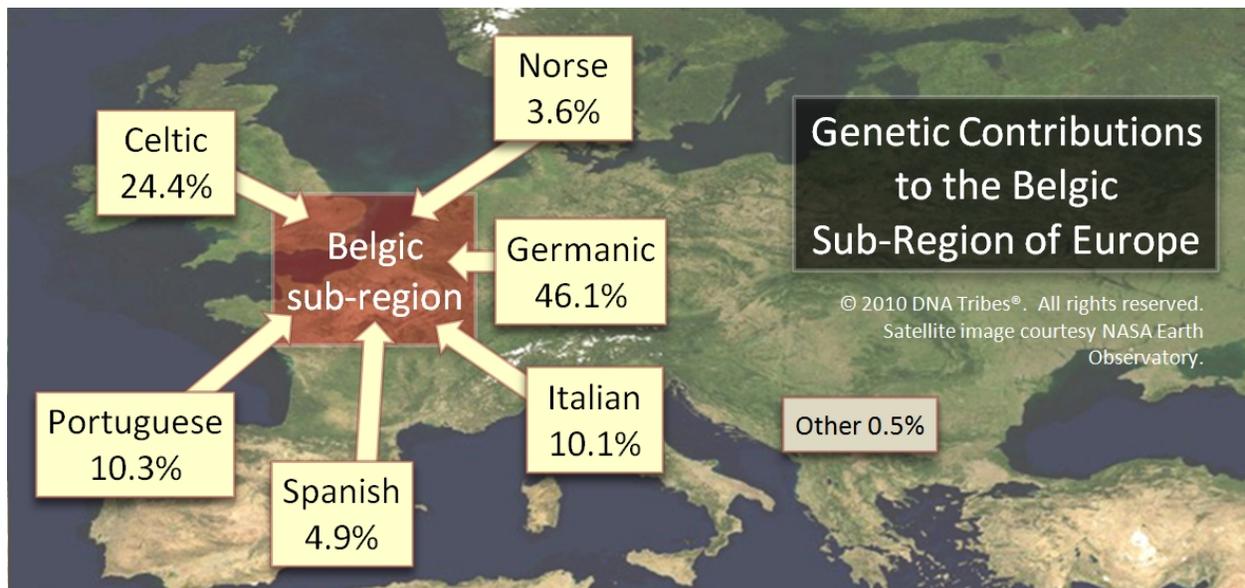


Figure 2: Genetic contributions to the Belgic sub-region of Europe.

Discussion: Results indicate contributions from several neighboring sub-regions of Europe. The largest contribution identified was from the Germanic region (46.1%), suggesting substantial gene flow from neighboring Central European populations. This continuity also suggests that, despite the apparently clear-cut linguistic division between westerly Celtic and Romance and easterly Germanic cultures in more

recent times, populations of the Belgic sub-region have been substantially linked with Central Europe in the long term⁷.

Results also identified genetic contributions from northerly neighbors, including the Celtic (24.4%) and Norse (3.6%) sub-regions⁸. The larger Celtic contribution of 24.4% might reflect historical contacts between Gaulish populations of continental Europe and the British Isles, as well as more ancient relationships dating to the Atlantic Bronze Age⁹ and earlier periods.

Also identified were substantial genetic contributions from southerly neighbors, including Portuguese (10.3%), Italian (10.1%), and Spanish (4.9%). These contributions might in part reflect contacts within the Gaulish world known to the Romans, which extended into the Iberian Peninsula and even northern parts of Italy (*Gallia Cisalpina*¹⁰). However, these contributions might also express older contacts along the Atlantic coasts of Europe, perhaps dating to the Atlantic Bronze Age and earlier. In particular, links with Iberian populations might have brought populations of the Belgic sub-region in direct or indirect contact with early Basque-related cultures¹¹ (such as the historically attested Aquitanians).

These genetic contributions from several neighboring regions suggest that the Low Countries have served as an important hub in the network of contacts linking populations throughout Western Europe since early times. This would be consistent with the location of the Belgic sub-region midway along the Atlantic coast of Europe, emphasizing the primary importance of geography in shaping genetic relationships among world populations.

⁷ For a speculative discussion of Central European-like genetic characteristics in relation to the distribution of Indo-European languages, see “Old Europes (Part One)” at <http://dnatribes.com/dnatribes-digest-2009-07-29.pdf>.

⁸ Based on available data, Norse genetic contributions are substantially higher in the Netherlands than in the Belgic sub-region as a whole. This is consistent with the geographical location of the Netherlands near the North Sea, and might reflect historical contacts with Frisians and other maritime cultures.

⁹ See “A Closer Look at the Celtic Sub-Region of Europe” at <http://dnatribes.com/dnatribes-digest-2010-08-31.pdf>.

¹⁰ See “Genetic Relationships in Southern Europe” at <http://dnatribes.com/dnatribes-digest-2009-03-28.pdf>.

¹¹ Based on available data, populations along the Atlantic coasts of Western Europe are characterized by small but substantial substrate contributions from Basque-like populations. These contributions are largest in the Spanish sub-region, but are also identified as far north as the Celtic and Belgic sub-regions. This Basque genetic substrate was explored in more detail in “Old Europes (Part Two)” at <http://dnatribes.com/dnatribes-digest-2009-08-29.pdf>.



Getting the Most from Your Testing

Once your testing is complete, we offer several options to keep your report current and to customize your genetic analysis for the information you want. (*Prices are listed as of September 30, 2010 and are subject to change.*)

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Native American Panel: A listing of your DNA match scores for all individual Native American populations in our database.

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