



Space exploration and Belgian society, 1911-2006.

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The Southern-part of the Low Countries acts as a microcosm of Europe, this region has always been open and culturally diverse. At the same time it exports and imports scientists including rocket and space scientists. Belgium also possesses no space agency of its own beside the European Space Agency.

This presentation will present a few short vignettes about the Belgian fathers of astronautics from André Bing who patented a multistage rocket in 1911, Auguste Piccard who first studied cosmic rays from a balloon gondola at 16000 m. in 1932 to the present situation. The way these scientists have been received by the Belgian society and their influence will also be commented. The Belgian population got also an instant education in modern rocketry at the end of World War II when supersonic V2 rockets were aimed at Antwerp and Brussels. The V2 rocket influenced so much popular culture that, with nuclear propulsion, it gave birth to the Tintin rocket.

It will cover also the influence on this merchant country of events like the first artificial satellite, the moon landing, the flight of the Belgian astronauts and of course, the recent successes of ESA planetary missions. Some of these events led to a measurable increase in the number of science students and had thus clear societal influence. The role of the Belgian scientists in participating to these events will also be described as well as their efforts of public communication.