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Summary Article: **Franche-Comté**

From *The Columbia Encyclopedia*

(fränsh-kôntā') or Free County of Burgundy, former province and former administrative region, E France. It is coextensive with Haute-Saône, Doubs, and Jura depts. Dôle was the capital until 1676; Besançon was the later capital and remains the chief city. Other important towns are Montbéliard, Lons-le-Saunier, and Saint-Claude. The Jura Mts. form the region's eastern border with Switzerland; the Vosges Mts. are in the north. The chief rivers are the Doubs and the upper Saône. Franche-Comté is largely an agricultural region and has a large dairy industry. Livestock is raised in the Jura district, where there are dense pine forests and extensive grazing lands. The Peugeot automobile company has two factories there. Other manufactures include clocks, watches, machines, and plastics.

The region was occupied by the Celtic tribe of the Sequani (4th cent. B.C.) and was conquered by Julius Caesar (52 B.C.). Overrun by the Burgundians (5th cent.), it was included in the First Kingdom of Burgundy and was annexed by the Franks in 534. The territory was united in the 9th cent. as the Free County of Burgundy, or Franche-Comté, a fief held from the kings of Transjurane Burgundy, who were later (933–1032) kings of Arles. Franche-Comté passed to the Holy Roman Empire in 1034; but the allegiance was tenuous, and for six and a half centuries Franche-Comté was perpetually invaded and contested by France, Germany, Burgundy, Switzerland, and Spain.

Philip the Bold, duke of Burgundy, acquired Franche-Comté through his marriage to Margaret of Flanders in 1369. After the defeat and death of Charles the Bold (1477), the region passed to Archduke Maximilian of Austria (later Emperor Maximilian I), who in turn gave it to his son Philip I of Spain. Governed by native officials and its parlement at Dôle, Franche-Comté enjoyed relative autonomy under the Spanish crown. At the end of Charles V's reign (1556), Franche-Comté became a possession of the Spanish Hapsburgs. Although some of the region's fortified towns were occupied by France during the Wars of Religion (16th cent.), peace and prosperity continued until the Thirty Years War (1618–48), when the region was ravaged by both Catholics and Protestants.

Louis XIV conquered Franche-Comté in 1668 and again in 1674 and finally obtained its cession from Spain. Although the parlement continued to function after its transfer to Besançon (1676), the provincial assembly was abolished, and Franche-Comté became an integral part of France. Established as an administrative region of France in 1972, Franche-Comté was merged with Burgundy to form the region of Burgundy-Franche-Comté in 2016.

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