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BOOK REVIEW

Matthew G. Stanard. ***The Leopard, the Lion, and the Cock: Colonial Memories and Movements in Belgium***. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2019. 338 pp. Photographs. Bibliography. Index. $81.00. Paper. ISBN: 9789462701793.

Critics have often lamented an apparent deficit or backlog in the knowledge and understanding of Belgium's colonial past. This argument is gradually losing its validity, as general and academic interest in both colonial and postcolonial history in Belgium have gained momentum in recent years. Never before has so much been studied and published on a wide variety of aspects of Belgium's presence in Central Africa between 1885 and 1960 as well as of its long aftermath in the decades that followed. In addition, public controversy in politics and society on the legacies and dealing with the colonial past remains unprecedented. Belgium is no exception in the wider landscape of postcolonial societies. Quite often historical scholarship tends to be ahead of the public debate, and the inaccurate impression is frequently provided that "for too long" there has been "little or no interest" in some traumatic or problematic past. The general public does not always fully take note of what professional historians have previously achieved. It is no different in the current postcolonial debate in Belgium.

Matthew Stanard's book, *The Leopard, the Lion, and the Cock: Colonial Memories and Movements in Belgium*, is a timely addition to the current debate. For a number of years, Belgium, following the example of its neighboring countries (France, the Netherlands, Germany, and Great Britain), has been witnessing intense debates on the legacies and memories of the colonial past, all strongly connected with questions of identity, migration, and citizenship. Stanard specializes in colonialism and the end of empire more broadly, and on the Belgian case in particular. His book offers a broad overview of the many traces of memory in both the material and immaterial culture of Belgium, before as well as after Congolese independence. This book brings a most welcome global and comparative perspective to the subject from an author who is also very well informed about the current state of historical scholarship in Belgium. The extensive bibliography shows that the author reads both French and Dutch. This gives the book a high degree of familiarity for Belgian specialists and enriches the mainly Anglo-Saxon-dominated general literature on colonialism and postcolonialism with a case study based on material written in languages other than English. This book can also be used as a handbook and guide to the many monuments that emerged from or refer to the colonial period in Belgium.

The enduring presence and visibility of the empire in the metropole—and not vice versa—constitute the central line of argumentation in Stanard's book. The author also seeks to provide answers to some larger questions, for example, how

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the colonial experience and its memories have impacted the relations between the two language communities in Belgium. Hence the title, the significance of which is probably not immediately evident to the general reader: How did the leopard (Congo), the lion (Flanders), and the cock (Wallonia) relate to each other? The colonial project as such, both in substance and in memory, had been preeminently a national Belgian affair (and significantly strengthened Belgian nationalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries), yet Stanard sees a number of differences within Belgium in addition to various similarities: a stronger focus on the role of missionaries in Flanders and a more positive appreciation of the monarchy and the colonial system as such in French-speaking Belgium. That Flemish nationalism used anti-colonial discourse in its own critique of the Belgian state, the monarchy, and the francophone establishment is therefore not entirely surprising. The book also suggests that losing the empire in 1960 hastened the decline of the Roman Catholic Church, since church and colony had formed such a strong symbiosis during the previous decades. From this, one could eventually draw far-reaching conclusions, namely that the postcolonialism debate—which began in the early 2000s—was also encouraged by the evaporation of the Belgian unitary state and by the rapid loss of power and influence of the Church (including its affiliated Christian Democratic party). However, these remain important assumptions that still require further empirical substantiation.

The Leopard, the Lion, and the Cock is much stronger as a panoramic overview of the many material traces left behind by Belgium's colonial past than as a thorough conceptual analysis. This book is not primarily intended for readers who are more interested in substantive historiographical arguments and controversies. Stanard presents his arguments in a careful and nuanced manner. For example, he advocates not speaking of "one" homogeneous memory, but rather of a layering of memories that have manifested themselves in different ways over time. Shifting contexts, new generations, and different memory entrepreneurs have changed the mnemonic landscape substantially. This is often overlooked, and memory cultures of the past are frequently misread—the myth about "forgetting" or "suppressing" the colonial past by previous generations serves as a recurrent example. The author treats this rich and multifaceted subject with an excellent sense of nuance and great detail. His book is a most welcome contribution to a debate that will remain on the political agenda for a long time.

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