

EARLY BELGIAN COLONIAL EFFORTS: THE LONG AND FATEFUL SHADOW  
OF LEOPOLD I

by

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In the September 22, 2002 edition of the *New York Times*, Dr. Guido Gryseels, director of the Royal Museum of Central Africa, was the subject of an article on the reverberations of the book by Adam Hochschild's *King Leopold's Ghost* on Belgium in general and the Royal Museum for Central Africa in particular. So great was the outcry as a result of this book that a parliamentary committee of some of Belgium's most significant historians was assembled to review the Congo and Leopold II. This would have been enough for most directors to hide from any outside inquiry and yet he, only a few months after the article, and his staff extended themselves for whatever I needed. Dr. Phillippe Marchand especially spent time and effort to provide whatever information I needed. Lastly, I want to thank my distant cousin, ten degrees perhaps, Phillippe Ansiaux, his beautiful wife Nanou, and his daughters Aude (Doctor Aude by now) and Daphné for the marvelous food (and wine!) and company they provided me and my family on our archival trips to Brussels. The conversations and discussions on Belgium and its colonial past filled in the human dimension lacking in the archives

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Language is a necessary limiting factor of any international study. I must therefore thank Ellen Bradley of Richland College, and Dr. Delores Holder of the University of Texas at Arlington for their help in French. I must also thank Peter Daert in Brussels for his Flemish translation and Yonara Tapp for her Portuguese translations.

Finally, almost, I thank my clients in my law practice for their patience and understanding while I balanced their needs with those of this work. They have been truly understanding. But I must again thank my wife Bobbi for her steadfast support,

even during tax season. Some things are simply above and beyond the call of duty, or marriage.

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ABSTRACT

EARLY BELGIAN COLONIAL EFFORTS: THE LONG AND FATEFUL SHADOW  
OF LEOPOLD I

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The continuing debate over the causes, effects and future implications of European colonialism and imperialism is perhaps best viewed through a transatlantic lens. The various phases of imperialism from 1415 through 1914 provide ample time and examples of this continuous cultural interchange. The last of these interchanges, forced or otherwise, is that of the New Imperialism of 1860-1914. Discussions of later globalization and economic/cultural imperialism are not covered. That discussion is a different subject perhaps requiring different tools of analysis, especially economic. The impact of this last period reverberates through the current world discussion on rights, obligations, morality and law, especially natural law. The basic question is: are there

truths that merit, no demand, their transmission by force or otherwise? Expressed more philosophically, “is man the measure of all things?”

Was there something the “West” had or represented that needed to be spread by word or by sword? Are there universal concepts, or to use the Platonic euphemism, “virtues” that are inherent to all men so that there is a need or quoting Jefferson “a duty”, to respond and spread them throughout the world? Or, quoting Lenin, is imperialism merely “the highest stage of capitalism” and this New Imperialism a mere economic and political exercise in power and arrogance?

There can never be a definitive analysis of imperialism which will yield a final answer to these questions. Continued historical inquiry does enhance both knowledge and understanding. This is a study of Belgium and its first king Leopold I in the years 1830-1855, a period before the New Imperialism. Why then is it of any value as a tool of analysis of the New Imperialism, decades before it took place? Because Belgium, its king, government and sense of nationhood were new. Yet, within a few years of its creation in 1830 its king at least viewed the world through the eyes of an imperialist. Its very newness and relative openness of its government allows the historian to poke around, so to speak. This is especially so in view of the later overwhelmingly successful imperialism of its second king Leopold II in the Congo Free State.

This is an inquiry into four examples of early Belgian colonial efforts in the Republic of Texas, Guatemala, Brazil and the Rio Nunez River in present day Guinea. The method employed is that of a historical inquiry into the event and then an analysis of the effort by the political, economic, social and scientific causes of the New

Imperialism in a search of analogies and differences. It is not as much a new study of the historical events themselves but an attempt to discern an overall or macro-historical view of Belgian, and by extension, European imperialistic motivation.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AMAE	Archives du ministère des Affaires Etrangères et due Commerce Extérieur. Brussels, Belgium.
AMRAHM.	Archives du Musée royal de l' Armée et d' Histoire Militaire, Ministère de la Défense Nationale. Brussels, Belgium.
APR	Archives du Palais Royal Brussels, Belgium.
BL	Blume Library, St. Mary's University. San Antonio, Texas.
BRAI	Bibliothèque Royale Albert Ier Brussels, Belgium
GLO	Government Land Office Austin, Texas
HL	Hartley Library, University of Southampton Southampton, England.
RA	Royal Archives at Windsor Windsor, England.
RGS	Royal Geographic Society London, England

## CHAPTER 1

### IMPERIALISM

Many of the cultural and historical debates of the last twenty-five years have centered on the European colonial and imperialistic expansion of the second half of the nineteenth century. This expansion of European dominance was different than what took place during the fifteenth through the eighteenth centuries. To the conquistadors, explorers, exploiters, and missionaries of that earlier time, it was the age of exploration and scientific discovery, a universal application of European and Christian ideals to a degenerate and pagan world and the triumph and transport of mind and soul to the very ends of the earth. It was also unbelievably profitable. It was clearly one of the most impressive, earthshaking, and devastating transfers of culture in world history, but it was haphazard and accidental. No one really knew what they would find.

It was, however, only the prelude to a more intrusive and malicious interchange of cultures: the nineteenth century colonial and imperialistic expansion of Europe, and to a lesser extent the United States, into the very heart and soul of Africa, Asia and, although in a more subtle sense, Latin America. It is the reverberations of this expansion that stoke the fires of intellectual and real-world debate today. The question of what drove this expansion of European culture continues to fuel today's cultural debates. This cultural, political, economic, and military intrusion must be analyzed if

we are to understand the non-Western world that has once again begun to feel its own destiny. Did Western society and its philosophical and political hegemony advance or retard the non-Western world and its own destiny? If it did advance it, as I think it did, *how*, and did it have any right to do so? I propose that any new or additional analysis of the roots of the New Imperialism may provide some understanding of the present world situation and its globalizing trend. Further, the imperialistic and colonial efforts of Belgium, certainly no imperial giant of the mid-nineteenth century, provide a unique, and to a large extent overlooked insights into these issues.<sup>1</sup>

The causes and motives for the expansion of European imperialism and colonialism in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the New Imperialism, remain a contentious topic. These roots, and their lasting effects, both positive and negative, are subject to often-deadly debate, as the last ten years have shown. The proposed background of this phenomenon has included economic domination, cultural superiority, religious destiny, social values, political balance, and strategic consideration. It could be added that opportunity and gamesmanship were certainly at work, as was a heavy dose of unmitigated arrogance. It was also unbelievably profitable, at least in the beginning.<sup>2</sup> Are these factors relevant? Will deeper knowledge of these factors change anything? Yes, because the wider debate on the nature of

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<sup>1</sup>The tendency among Belgian historians, at least until the last twenty years has been to treat the different colonial efforts on an individual basis.

<sup>2</sup>The realization that colonies were not generally profitable seems to have become evident in the early part of the twentieth century, especially in Britain, where the cost of military protection of South Africa and India exceeded the economic benefit. This realization was especially evident, perhaps to all but Winston Churchill, after the First World War. The possibility of home rule in some of the colonies at least, was contemplated, thereby reducing the size of the empire. See John Charmley, *Churchill; The End*

Western civilization and its impact and value (if any) revolves not around ideological logjams or philosophical debates but more basic issues such as whether it was beneficial, harmful, destructive, uplifting, satanic, or idealistic? These issues in turn are relevant because the world is a faster, smaller, and more dangerous place where the answers to questions such as these are often the difference between war and peace, between order and chaos, and, more importantly, between universal or natural rights and “whether man is the measure of all things.” The events of one hundred and fifty years ago may have passed, but their memory lives on; it is that memory, and how it is understood and studied, that determines how and if the facts of the past do indeed mirror our perception of it.

If we grant the relevance of this inquiry, the next question is, what does Belgium have to offer to the debate or analysis? The answer is not the Congo, Rwanda, and Burundi and the chaos and genocide that these former Belgian colonies or protectorates have etched in the modern mind. Those colonial manifestations are those of Leopold II and the later Kingdom of Belgium and are issues of great merit, but not here and not now, at least not directly, that is. It is the world of Leopold I and the larger issue of Belgian attempts in the mid-nineteenth century to establish colonies<sup>3</sup> that may provide

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*of Glory* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1993), 139-237 and Robert Rhodes James, *A Study in Failure* (New York: World Publishing Company, 1970), 109-150.

<sup>3</sup>The files of the Archives du ministère des Affaires Etrangères et due ommerce Extérieur show the following files opened at Leopold’s request in terms of possible colonial interest: Algeria, Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Paraguay, Mexico-State of Puebla, Sandwich Islands, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, San Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, Rio Nunez, Marie – West coast of Africa, Bolivia, Columbia, Guiana, Argentina – La Plata, Argentina – Villaguay, Patagonia, Florida, Texas, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Missouri, Kansas, Isle of Pines, Cozumel, St. Bartholomew Island, Haiti, Tortugas, Faeroe Islands, Portugal, Isle of Nordstrand, Cypress, Surinam, India, Java, Philippines,

insight into the nature of Belgian colonialism in general and whether it adds anything to the larger events of late nineteenth century European imperialism. It might also give some insight into Leopold II and the Congo Free State.

This study will be an attempt to determine whether the causes of nineteenth century imperialism in Belgium, through the eyes of its king, legislature, and people, can advance the discussion of both the larger question of European imperialism and the smaller theatre of Belgium. In other words, what were these factors and what do they have to do with the newly formed kingdom of Belgium and her first king, Leopold I?

It is perhaps relevant to ask how the early colonial attempts of Belgium that occurred fifty years before nineteenth century European imperialism relate to this discussion. The answer is that most studies relative to colonialism and imperialism in this period have concerned themselves with an analysis of the empires of Britain and France.<sup>4</sup> The reasons are, of course, simple; they were the imperialistic superpowers of their time. Between them they ruled almost 75 percent of the land mass of Africa, 90 percent of the Indian subcontinent, and they were vying for power as China, under the Qing Dynasty, began its inexorable decline into chaos and the end of four thousand years of Chinese dynastic rule. Britain exercised considerable economic, and therefore political, power in South America until World War One. The studies of colonial issues not involving these two countries have generally involved colonial issues such as the

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Abyssinia, Barbary Coast, Guinea Coast, Madagascar, Republic of South Africa, Nicabar, Singapore, New Zealand, New Guinea – Papua, Australia Fiji, Malaysia, Marianas Island, New Hebrides, Samoa. AMAE.

<sup>4</sup>Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998); and Marc Lafontaine, *L'Enfer Belge De Santo Tomas Le Rêve Colonial Brisé De Léopold I* (Ottignies: Quorum, 1998).

resurgent empires of Portugal in Angola and Mozambique and Spain in North Africa; the newly emergent nations of Germany in mid-Africa; Italian colonial attempts in North Africa; and, in the relation to Belgium, the Congo Free State and the Belgian Congo.

In this later regard, Leopold II and the Congo have been at the center of a firestorm of debate with the publication of Adam Hochschild's book King Leopold's Ghost in 1993. So transfixed did Belgium become with the issue that a committee of some of Belgians most significant historians was ordered by the parliament to investigate and report on the accusations in Hochschild's book.<sup>5</sup> This has included the reevaluation and revision of the purposes and emphasis of the Belgian Royal Museum of Central Africa, which was created by Leopold II and is located in the Belgian suburb of Tervuren, south of Brussels.<sup>6</sup> The book has generally ignited a national debate on Belgium, the Congo, and Belgium's overall colonial past. This book, its response, the wider reexamination of Belgian colonialism, and its relevance to this work, will be addressed later. Belgium therefore represents the possibility of new or at least different material to add to the literature not only of its own colonialism but that of Europe in general.

The advantage that a study of Belgium may afford is twofold. The first is that, unlike all the other colonial powers in Europe, Belgium apparently lacked any historical

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<sup>5</sup>The result of that inquiry is Jean-Luc Vellut, ed., *La Mémoire Du Congo Le Temps Colonial* (Tervuren: *Musée royal de l'Afrique centrale*, 2005).

<sup>6</sup>The publicity involving the Congo has also resulted in the changing of the emphasis and presentation of the *Musée royal de l'Afrique centrale* in Tervuren, outside of Brussels. Conversations with the director, Guido Gryseels, indicate the museum now shows a more balanced and open view of the Congo Free State. Critics have complained it was window dressing.

background, demand, or other compelling reason to push it into the colonial arena. Second, Belgium is for all practical purposes a one-colony empire: its expansion was exclusive to the Congo, or at least that is the general perception. As stated previously, all European powers involved in the “Scramble for Africa” in the later part of the nineteenth century, with the exception of Belgium, had either a long national history of empire and colonization or at least a nationalistic concept such as “German” or “Italian.” Before 1830 there was neither a nation of Belgium nor a nationalistic concept of a people who spoke Belgian or thought of themselves as “Belgian.”<sup>7</sup> Despite a seeming lack of nationalistic or historical “myths,” Belgium, or more precisely her king, tried over and over to initiate over fifty colonial endeavors throughout the world, establishing none. No Belgian colony was established during the reign of Leopold I. Why? This is especially pertinent in view of the single-minded success of Leopold’s son, Leopold II, in the Congo. The intent, then, is to look at Leopold I and his colonial adventures to understand what, if anything, can deepen our understanding of late nineteenth century colonialism and perhaps, as a side note, gain some insight as to Leopold II and his “success.”

It is outside the realm of this author’s knowledge, and perhaps that of all but a handful of Belgian historians, to view the entire thirty-year reign of Leopold I and his fifty-plus colonial attempts. The intent herein is to look at four colonial attempts during this period. They are the attempts in the Republic of Texas, Santo Tomas in Guatemala,

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<sup>7</sup>For a contrary view see Pirenne, Henri Pirenne, *Histoire De Belgique*, 7 vols. (Bruxelles: H. Lamertin, 1908), 1: 1-31.

Santa Catarina in Brazil, and Rio Nunez in present day Guinea on the west African coast.

Why these four and not any other of the fifty-plus other attempts? The first and foremost answer is that these four attempts are probably the best documented of Leopold's reign and in many ways the most significant. The colonial endeavor in the Republic of Texas presents the best source for this analysis because of the records kept in both Belgium and the Republic of Texas and to a more limited extent the United States and Great Britain. The records are fairly detailed, and in many case duplicate copies exist in the archives of both the Belgian Secretary of State and those of the Republic of Texas. Additionally, Texas, because of its strong sense of history, has managed to collect information on almost all immigration to the state, cataloguing records by national origin, among other criteria.

The disastrous colonial attempt in Santo Tomas in Guatemala is perhaps the most written-about colonial adventure of Leopold's reign, due to the large size of the colonial population, perhaps two thousand, which this venture involved. In the last several years there has been an increased interest in this colony because the failure of Santo Tomas seems to have left a pall over future colonial efforts, especially those sponsored or at least promoted by the government. This is at least the rationale given by many early Belgian historians.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>This at least has been the opinion of most Belgian historians through the end of the nineteen eighties. More recent study has seen a much wider analysis and pool of resources outside the typical government sources used in the past. Instrumental in this regard was J. Everaert and C. De Wilde, "Pindanoten Voor De Ontluikende Industriële Revolutie, Een Alternatieve Kijk Op De Belgische Commercerciele Expansie in West-Afrika (1844-1861)," *BARSOM*, vol. 37, no.3. (Brussels; Académie royale des sciences d'outre-mer, 1992), 315-48.

Santa Catarina in Brazil is a significant colonial attempt but one that has all but been ignored by Belgian historians. There is simply very little information on this colonial attempt outside the initial exploratory study, several small inquiries on events related to the colony, and at least one personal record by a Belgian colonist to Brazil following the initial transplantation. This inquiry will be the least documented due to constraints imposed by these limited resources. Additionally, there is a strong difference of opinion between Belgian and Brazilian historians as to the loyalty of the leader of this adventure, Charles Van Lede.

Rio Nunez in present day Guinea is perhaps the most unusual of these attempts. It is also the most well known outside of Belgium. The reason for the heightened level of inquiry and interest was due to its potential, at the time, to produce a major international scandal, as it involved a military action by both Belgium and France that in some ways was directed against the commercial interests of Britain. Belgian involvement at Rio Nunez did not involve a colonial attempt similar to the other three; it was, however, a colonial attempt from a commercial point of view, and in that regard was closer to what many in Belgium envisioned as a legitimate overseas effort enterprises during Leopold's reign.

The presentation of the colonial efforts is in order of occurrence. The beginning of the beginning of each effort was determined by the beginning of an interest in the venture by either the king or one of his ministers. The names of the colonial effort used

were the one by which they are generally referred to by Belgian historians and not necessarily the actual name or location.

If this is the why and the where, what is the how? The method used herein will be to first discuss the political and economic conditions in Belgium, the personality and background of Leopold I, and his position in Europe. This will necessarily entail a look at his unique relationship with his niece Queen Victoria of Great Britain, her then Foreign Minister Lord Palmerston, and Leopold's physician Baron von Stockmar. Secondly, it will attempt to discern the involvement and interactions, if any, of the Belgian legislature the chambers, the Belgian people, the Catholic Church, and Belgium's commercial sector. Lastly, for reasons to be discussed, it will look at the influence of maps in these attempts as either participant or record<sup>9</sup>.

It should be noted that there are intrinsic difficulties involved in this analysis. The first is the state of the records and variability of the sources. Belgium is one of those unique countries with two official languages, in this case French and Flemish.<sup>10</sup> As a result, a true scholar hoping to study anything involving Belgian history should have working knowledge of both of these languages. I have no knowledge of Flemish and where necessary have used Flemish translators. In addition, I have attempted to verify my French translation with appropriate professionals whenever possible. Where

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<sup>9</sup>Robert Ansiaux and Dennis Reinhartz, "The Truth Is ... Maps Are Weapons! Cartographic Impressions and the Doomed Belgian Colony of Santo Tomas." in *Margaritae cartographicae. Studia Lisette Danckaert 75um diem natalem agenti oblata* (Bruxelles: Archives et Bibliothèques de Belgique, 2006), 241-259.

<sup>10</sup>Flemish, a language related closely to Dutch, was not recognized as an official language in the country until the 1840's, where after all official pronouncements and government publications were required to be in both Dutch and French.

both the original script document and an accepted printed version were used, both will be cited, such as AMAE and BL or AMAE and Demougeot. Additionally, a shortage of information on Santa Catarina in English and French required inquiry in to several Brazilian texts in Portuguese that required outside translation. I take full responsibility however for all such translations. Secondly, despite the availability and ease of access of the archival divisions available to this author, the information is uncatalogued, sometimes illegible, in various states of preservation, and at times massive in content. I have tried to use the documents that seemed relevant but make no representation as to exhausting the available information, especially in the Belgian Foreign Office Archives, relative to these areas. Again, I am responsible for all such works and the conclusions drawn thereof. Lastly, as stated above, there is great disparity in the information available in these four areas; therefore, there will sometimes be little or no relevant information on a particular aspect of one or more of these areas of inquiry. It is to be noted that it has sometimes been impossible to determine the full names of some of the individuals herein. If the first time an individual appears there is no full name, I have not been able to determine the complete name. Lastly, there are certain references to documents in French where there was a demonstrably correct available English translation. I have used these where appropriate but where it has been used it has be indicated.

Survey of the literature. The general literature concerning Leopold I and general Belgian attempts to establish colonies is limited in French and Flemish and almost

nonexistent in English.<sup>11</sup> Until the last decade, most significant historical colonial literature produced in Belgium was somehow related to the Belgian Congo and Leopold II.<sup>12</sup> This is changing. There is a growing response within Belgium to the broader picture of colonialism, especially in view of the scathing accusations made by Adam Hochschild in the previously mentioned King Leopold's Ghost.

Until the last few years there have been remarkably few current histories of Belgium in English and not a great deal more in French or Flemish outside Belgium. Demetrius Boulger's 1815-1865 Waterloo to the Death of Leopold I and J. Devogeleer's A Short History of Belgium in Relation to Britain, in French and English respectively, are really far too broad. Henri Pirenne's massive seven-volume Histoire de Belgique is somewhat dated but is a monumental work nonetheless, and his works are enjoying new interest since their digitization at the library of the Free University of Brussels. More recently three histories of Belgium, Michael Dumoulin et al's Nouvelle Histoire de Belgique, Yves Manhès's Histoire Des Belges et de la Belgique, and Jean Stenger's Histoire du sentiment national en Belgique des origines á 1918, have been published and are more detailed and up-to-date; but still, by design and nature, they are general in their presentation and not specifically relevant to the colonial question.

There was a flurry of biographies concerning Leopold I in the years immediately after his death, but there does not seem to be a truly modern and in-depth look at the

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<sup>11</sup>The dissertation of Ora-Westley Schwemmer, "The Belgian Colonization Company, 1840-1858" (Ph.D. diss., Tulane University, 1967), was superior to any work the author was able to find in French or Flemish.

<sup>12</sup>The continuing political and human tragedy of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, successor to the Belgian Congo, had attracted the attention of the Belgian establishment before the revelations in Hochschild's book.

man many consider the most influential of Belgian monarchs. Those books that have been produced are usually related to his relevance and position within the greater European theatre of the mid-nineteenth century and the king's and Belgium's role as a neutral power. Carlo Bronne's Leopold 1er Et Son Temps is a bit hagiographic, as is the earlier work Egon Corti's Leopold I of Belgium – Secret Pages of European History, and the highly flattering if not adulatory two-volume work Memoirs of Leopold I, King of the Belgians by Theodore Juste that was published shortly after the king's death. In 2002 there was a biography by Henriette Claessens, Leven en liefdes van Leopold I in Flemish, which was not consulted. Presently, Dr. Gita Deneckere of the University of Ghent is preparing a political biography on the life of Leopold I with an anticipated publication date in 2007.

The biographical works on Queen Victoria are vast and in general were not particularly relevant to the colonial issues involved; however, they were instructive in relation to Leopold and Victoria's relationship, which was unique, to say the least. The most cited, if dated work, is Lytton Strachey's work Queen Victoria. An update of this material can be found in Elizabeth Longford's Queen Victoria: Born to Succeed. Other general works on Victoria are Stanley Weintraub's Victoria: An Intimate Biography, Christopher Hibbert's Queen Victoria: A Personal History, and Carolly Erickson's Her Little Majesty: The Like of Queen Victoria.

Two works that look at Victoria's relationship with Lord Palmerston are Algernon Cecil's Queen Victoria and Her Prime Ministers and Brian Connell's Regina

vs. Palmerston: The Correspondence Between Queen Victoria and her Foreign and Prime Minister 1837-1865.

The works dedicated to the study of Leopold and Victoria are also few and often extremely dated. In regard to the more general works concerning Queen Victoria and Leopold, Joanna Richardson's My Dearest Uncle – Leopold I of the Belgians is an interesting, well written work, but is not documented. A much older and almost contemporary work is the two-volume work by the prolific French historian Saint Rene Taillandier Le roi Lâeopold et la reine Victoria râécits d'histoire contemporaine, which deals with the larger question of Victoria and Leopold in nineteenth century European politics. The work, Reine Victoria, Roi Leopold 1er et leur Temps, by the *Musées Royaux d'Art et D'histoire*, although produced as an exhibition catalogue, provides a good overview of their entire relationship and is extremely well documented.

The interplay between Leopold, Palmerston, and Baron von Stockmar is not documented as such. There are several good works on Lord Palmerston and his foreign policy. David Brown's Palmerston and the Politics of Foreign Policy, 1846-55 does a good job on the period involving Rio Nunez. Palmerston's views and his dedication to what he perceived as Britain's place in the world and the concept of the place of British citizens (*civis Britannicus sum*),<sup>13</sup> in the world have kept his name before the historical world, as evidenced by Braithwaite, below. Also relevant are two works by Muriel Chamberlain: the more general Lord Palmerston and more specific British Foreign Policy in the Age of Palmerston. Books on the relationship between Leopold and

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<sup>13</sup> "I am a British citizen"

Palmerston are nonexistent. Lastly, there is no work this author was able to locate that discussed the more focused topic of Victoria, Leopold, Palmerston, and Stockmar, although there seems to be ample material available awaiting the interested historian.

Stockmar, in his initial capacity as secretary and physician to Leopold and later as advisor to Victoria and Albert, are discussed by his son Baron E. Von Stockmar in Memoirs of Baron Stockmar and in a general work, Victoria's Guardian Angel: A Study of Baron Stockmar, by Pierre Crabite.

In the area of overall Belgian colonial development in general there is, as mentioned before, almost no literature—French, Flemish, or English. The tendency in Belgium, and to a lesser degree in Britain, is to treat the endeavors such as the Congo, Guatemala, Rio Nunez, and other efforts, individually. Frans van Kalken's work Histoire De La Belge De Son Expansion Colonial looks at the larger colonial effort but is dated and does not reflect new sources and analysis, especially those of the last twenty years. One very recent and extraordinarily beautiful and interesting illustrative work is that of Patrick Maselis, From the Azores to New Zealand. This work looks at Belgian colonial development from a philatelic aspect.

The literature dedicated to the Belgian interest in Texas is somewhat limited due to the ephemeral nature of the endeavor itself. Dedicated works on the effort as a whole do not exist. The best work on the effort is a thesis by Lee Francis Brown entitled Victor Pirson Visits Texas, 1842. This is written in English and gives a good description and detailed look at the actual trip by Victor Pirson, an agent for Belgium, to Texas in 1841-1842. Mary Catherine Chase's work, Négociations De La République Du Texas

En Europe 1837-1845 is in French but is a good overview of the state of Texas diplomacy, with a good background on Belgium, from the archives of the European states involved.

The works concerning the Belgian colony in Guatemala consist of the early reports on the potential of Guatemala by the *La Compagnie belge de Colonisation* *Compagnie* by Remil de Puydt and others. The best book, although quite dated and in French, is Nicolas Leysbeth's Historique De La Colonisation Belge a Santo Tomas Guatemala. Joseph Fabri's Les Belges au Guatemala (1840-1845) is in French and a standard work especially relevant from the religious aspects. William J. Griffith's work Empires in the Wilderness—Foreign Colonization and Development in Guatemala, 1834-1844 is in English, and a good source for the initial British involvement and the roots of the Belgian colony. The most recent (1998) and readable, at least in French, is Marc Lafontaine's L'enfer Belge De Santo Tomas, which is highly critical of the whole endeavor and particularly of Leopold's involvement or lack thereof but is not documented. Lastly The Belgian Colonization Company, 1840-1858, a dissertation by Ora-Westley Schwemmer, is a detailed look at the Guatemala colony itself and the Belgian Colonization company and may represent the definitive work on the colony and company in English, French, or Flemish.

After the literature dedicated to Guatemala, the Belgian “colony” in Rio Nunez is the most discussed in the literature, but these few resources consist mostly of articles and short monographs. It is possible to glean an insight into an infamous Rio Nunez incident and its aftermath in Roderick Braithwaite's Palmerston and Africa, The Rio

Nunez Affair; Competition, Diplomacy and Justice. Most of the works relate to a discussion of the incident in which two warships, one Belgian and one French, fired on a British trading position at Boké on the Rio Nunez. A dissertation by Bruce Mouser entitled Trade and Politics in the Nunez and Pongo Rivers, 1790-1865 covers the broader issue of trade and power politics in this region of west Africa. Christian Monheim's work L'affaire du Rio Nunez, 1848-1858 is a standard, if not dated, rendition. R. Massinon's work L'entreprise Du Rio Nunez also covers the broader ground.

The least studied and documented is the Belgian colony in Brazil, generally referred to as Santa Catarina. The report by Charles van Lede, promoter of the initial colony in Brazil, is similar to that of De Puydt in that it is the *Compagnie belge-brésilienne de Colonisation's* report on the advantages of colonial life in Brazil. The only primary work on the colonial life of a Belgian in Brazil is a diary published by Madame Marie van Langendonck, a colonist herself but not in Santa Catarina. Une Colonie Au Brésil Récits Historique. There are several articles relative to this colony but the only overview is Patrick Maselis's previously mentioned work From the Azores to New Zealand. There are several works in Portuguese, Charles Van Lede e a Colonizacao Belga em S. Catarina by Carlos Ficker and As Colonias De Santa Catarina por Johann Jakob Von Tschudi by Walter F. Piazza.

Lastly, there are very few works that broadly address the general question of Belgian colonialism in terms of its expectations and aims. Alphonse de Haulleville's work from 1898, Les Aptitudes Colonisatrices des Belges et la Question Coloniale en

Belgique is an apologetic work attempting to fit Belgium within the larger world of European imperialism. Christian Monheim's work Colonisation, Principes et Réalisations does speak to the theoretical issues but is dated. There is also the work by the nineteenth century Belgian diplomat Charles Drouet in an internal report he produced around 1841, probably for the Foreign Ministry.

What, then, can Leopold, Victoria, Palmerston, and Stockmar tell about why the Belgian colonial attempts in Texas, Santo Tomas, Santa Catarina, and Rio Nunez failed, and what does that tell us about colonialism, imperialism, Leopold II, and the Congo Free State.

## CHAPTER 2

### BELGIUM AND NINETEENTH CENTURY IMPERIALISM

Western Imperialism has a long and complex history. It was not created in a vacuum. It is possible to discern three general phases of Western imperialism: 1415-1650, 1650-1860, and 1860-1914. The first period began with the capture of Ceuta in 1415 by the Portuguese; the circumnavigation and initial exploration of Africa and then the world; the discovery of the New World; the conquest of the Americas; and the beginnings of the Spanish, Portuguese, French, Dutch, and English empires in the New World. It ended with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648.

The second period, from approximately 1650 to 1860,<sup>14</sup> saw England and France begin to solidify and expand their colonial holdings in North America, the rise of the French/English overseas rivalry, the decimation of the indigenous American inhabitants, the rise of the American colonies as a major colonial enterprise, the wars of colonial/European impact that virtually ended the French Empire, the American Revolution, the First Industrial Revolution, the end of the Spanish Empire in North and South America, the French Revolution, the Napoleonic Wars, the Congress of Vienna,

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<sup>14</sup>The relatively minimalist additional colonial efforts in England in the early nineteenth century, the inability of the French to recreate their empire and the non existence of a German Colonial empire has some historians positing an end to this second period with the Treaty of Vienna in 1815. This has created a vacuum however for some historians (1815-1860) and historians apparently also abhor a vacuum. See relative to the thesis of Robinson and Gallagher, Patrick Wolfe, "History and Imperialism: A Century of Theory from Marx to Postcolonialism," *American Historical Review* 102 (April 1997): 400.

the revolutions of 1848, and the rise of the nation state and capitalism. It ended with the Sepoy Mutiny.

The last period, generally 1860-1914, began with the Second Opium War<sup>15</sup> and witnessed the successful creation of the modern states of Italy in 1870 and Germany in 1871, the evolution of the notion of nationalism as the legitimate end of political development, the Second Industrial Revolution, the rise of socialism, the secularization of Europe, the internationalization of world trade, and the last major physical expansion<sup>16</sup> of Western imperialism and colonialism in world history, the “Scramble for Africa.” It ended with the “guns of August” and the beginning of the First World War.

The third period, 1860-1914, the New Imperialism, is the subject of this study. It will be viewed, however, through the period of Belgian history between 1830-1855. What is imperialism and is it different from colonialism?<sup>17</sup> In a sense, this is one of the

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<sup>15</sup>The Sepoy Mutiny in 1857 has also been posited as another event to have triggered the New Imperialism as Britain took official control of India in order to prevent the failures under the British East India Company which were thought to have exacerbated the causes of that event. This gave rise to the British *Raj*.

<sup>16</sup>Present discussions concerning the rise and definition of later day imperialism have centered on the concept of globalism and whether there is any real need for physical domination of, or even any extra territorial presence in, imperialism today. See Wolfe, 402-404

<sup>17</sup>The above definitions are perhaps overly simplistic, and in a sense that is intentional. The literature on imperialism and colonialism is immense and is an area where continuity of terms and variety of discourse are wide indeed. The best recent analysis, although admittedly technical and perhaps somewhat dated, is Wolfe, 388-420. In terms of the mid nineteenth century in Europe and especially Belgium, at the end of the second period and the beginning of the third, the terms appear almost interchangeable. The major distinction between the two, at least based upon the research herein, appears to be the instrument of suppression or domination, whether economic, political or social, used by the dominating power. If the method of domination or conquest whether military, economic or social was essentially by government or military personnel, it was imperialism. If the method of achieving this domination or conquest was by the transplantation of part of the population of the dominate power, in addition to governmental agents or actions, it was colonialism. If the transplantation is merely population by itself then it was immigration. The difference in terms of the initial effect to the dominated entity does not seem to be significant. In the long term, however, the distinction produces a noticeably different type of outcome in terms of population composition, cultural identity and economic outcome in the dominated country or society.

more difficult issues of a study of this period. For simplicity, and specifically in regard to this paper, imperialism is defined as the political, economic, and military control or domination of one nation over another noncontiguous area or nation without the free consent of the people contained therein. Colonialism will be defined as imperialism with the added transplantation of people from the dominating nation to live in what becomes a colony. Although somewhat simplistic, these two definitions will suffice for the purposes herein. For convenience, and reasons to be discussed, the term colonialism will be used in lieu of imperialism unless imperialism is meant.

It is the general consensus of historians that there were three major causes of New Imperialism, along with several advances or conditions that permitted or helped it to occur when it did. These major areas were the political, economic, and cultural conditions that began in the early nineteenth century and came to a head in the last quarter of the century, along with the ability to translate these conditions into action. What distinguished this phase of Western Imperialism from all others was the depth, intensity, and unprecedented scale of its reach,<sup>18</sup> especially the “Scramble for Africa” in the 1880s.

Despite the tendency to reduce world history to its lowest economic denominator,<sup>19</sup> economics and industrialism were not in themselves enough to drive imperialism. Political justification and the *realpolitik* of the nations involved would be

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<sup>18</sup>Not only did Europe divide up Africa but Russia expanded its territorial boundaries throughout Asia, Japan began its march into Korea and later China and the United States expanded outside its continental boundaries across the Pacific as far as the Philippines, with territorial interests also in China.

<sup>19</sup>The classic economic discussions are J. A. Hobson, *The War in South Africa: Its Causes and Effects* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1900); and Vladimir Illich Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism; a Popular Outline* (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1970).

required to take such dramatic and far reaching actions across the face of the globe. These began to arise in the nineteenth century out of European nationalism for a variety of reasons.

The Peace of Vienna ended the Napoleonic wars and a hundred-year period of European history began that was previously unimaginable. For all practical purposes, Europe entered a period of *pax europa*.<sup>20</sup> Intrigue, alliances, revolutions, and national creations and dissolutions did not cease, but they were orderly, and war was generally kept at bay. It was a time that witnessed the nation state as the ultimate end of history,<sup>21</sup> with its resultant rise of imperialism and racism. With this enhanced sense of nationalism came hubris, jingoism, a forced sense of solidarity, universality of the national myth, linguistic uniformity, and intolerance of internal descent. All these trends, which were visible in all major European nations and nations-to-be, resulted in a stifling of dissent and a reversal of the Enlightenment's sense of the universality of all men and their equal accessibility to, and acquisition of, knowledge.<sup>22</sup>

To be English meant to speak a uniform standard language that was not Irish, Scots Gaelic, Welsh, Manx, or Cornish. It meant being a member of the Church of England, or at least Christian. It meant dedication to a rule of law, private property, *laissez-faire* economics, the crown, and classes. Literature revolved around Arthur, Lancelot, Guinevere, Saint George and the Dragon, Shakespeare, Marlowe, and

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<sup>20</sup>The main exceptions were the Revolutions of 1848, the Crimean War and the Franco-Prussian war, 1870-1.

<sup>21</sup>Most see Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hoffmesiter Johannes Hegel *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction, Reason in History* as the philosophical basis and drive for the nineteenth century's notion of the nation state and nationalism.

Johnson. This was the same whether you were French or Spanish and later Italian or German. Only the names and focal points varied. To be different was to be other and was not tolerated. It would give rise in the German states, as a result of the Napoleonic wars, to *volkstum*<sup>23</sup> or nationhood, to be later expanded by Hegel as *zeitgeist*, a moment and movement to rally around. But contrary to the Enlightenment's universality, nationalism necessarily created a hierarchy of nations, and by extension a hierarchy of people and mankind. Not everything was attainable by everyone.

The claustrophobic aspects of nationalism gave no vent to the often volatile internal disputes over national identity. The post-Napoleonic world of Europe and the Congress of Vienna had enforced a conservative shroud upon these dissidents despite the revolutions in 1848. A far safer method of venting these frustrations and controlling dissent was to export it overseas. This need to ensure internal conformity and the rising individual costs of industrialization, along with cries of the industrialists for markets and protection, gave rise to the increasingly vociferous call for colonies and, by extension, empire.

Each nation had its international agenda. England, especially after the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857,<sup>24</sup> expanded its empire for the preservation of its crown jewel, India. The protection of that jewel required coaling stations, ports, ships, and a navy, building a slow but steady road to a larger and larger empire. France began to assert its

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<sup>22</sup>Thomas Jefferson's concepts as espoused in the Declaration of Independence are perhaps the best, succinct example.

<sup>23</sup>An extension of *zeitgeist* it was used as the description of certain intellectual and spiritual trends within people.

independence after the Revolution of 1848 and to seek reestablishment of its empire. For Italy and Germany, the pressures and badges of nationhood and the need to create a national identity were easily satisfied in the quest for colonies, especially the “Scramble for Africa.” Once a colony was established, however, it had to administered and, most importantly, protected. Protection often meant the acquisition of more land to gain strategic advantage or at least prevent loss of advantage. This in turn became a self fulfilling prophecy of ever increasing needs to be met by new acquisitions until there was nothing left to take. This was the condition by 1910 that inflamed the already increasing continental pressures, which exploded in the First World War. The peace of Vienna kept a lid on European wars for a time, but the global transference of these nationalistic pressures produced catastrophic results in 1914 and in 1938. European wars became world wars.

It was nationalism that, in many ways, defined the imperialistic expansion of the last period of physical European imperialism. It is safe to state that imperialism is merely nationalism on an international scale.<sup>25</sup> The colonies of the previous stages of

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<sup>24</sup>This was the second shift in English colonial policy. The first occurred after the American Revolution and also resulted in a tightening of fiscal and political policy but allowed private commercial control to continue in many colonies.

<sup>25</sup>“It was not the businessmen or missionaries or empire-builders who launched the partition of Africa, but rather a set of diplomats who thought of that continent merely as a function of their concerns elsewhere ... Only at the end of the process did the businessmen arrive ... Imperialism was not the cause of the partition. It was the result...”

The sudden rush of formal annexations in Africa during the 1880s and 1890s did not result from a change to this general policy but from a fear that nationalist successes in Egypt and South Africa might jeopardize wider imperial interests, specifically trade routes to India (the Suez Canal) and to Australasia (the Cape). Fears for the security of the Suez Canal led to the British occupation of Egypt, which in turn, prompted France to annex large portions of West Africa so as to prevent the British from achieving cross-continental domination. Franco-British rivalry spiraled across the African interior, a situation that Bismarck was not slow to exploit. In this fracas, the strategic priorities that the contending parties displayed were not consistent with economic motivations. For instance, in order to keep the French out of Egypt, Lord Salisbury sacrificed West Africa, whose commercial potential was considerable, in favor

imperialism were generally thought of as simple assets of the mother country. Colonies were the basis of mercantilism and there were very little interests on the part of the earlier imperial powers to transplant a part of England or France or Spain to the colonies.<sup>26</sup>

The colonies, of, course reflected their mother country but only to the extent necessary to manage the extraction of the maximum volume of gold, silver, wood, or other materials needed by that country.<sup>27</sup> It would be the loss of these early colonial empires, including the thirteen colonies in North America, the colonial implosion of the Spanish Empire in the Western Hemisphere, and the Sepoy mutiny in India, that would cause a great reexamination of why imperialism had failed and what had to change to make it work.<sup>28</sup> The change, with the rhetoric of European nationalism fresh in everyone's experience, was to make the colony, as best one could with what one had to work with, into a reflection of the mother country. That meant the imposition of national culture, language, religion, and political economics upon the uncivilized natives of the colonies. Europe moved its thousand year history of war, conquest, intolerance, and struggle for power and borders to the colonial empires of Africa and

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of securing the Nile Valley, whose light soil was largely unproductive. Robinson and Gallagher concluded that the European powers had scrambled *in* rather than *for* Africa, their primary concern being to deny each other rather than aggrandize themselves." Wolfe, 400-1.

<sup>26</sup>British colonization on the North American continent, especially what became the thirteen colonies, was a notable exception.

<sup>27</sup>This was true for all but the British who were colonists first, explorers and merchants second, at least at that time.

<sup>28</sup>Ora-Westley Schwemmer, "Belgium and the Nicaraguan Canal Project (1841-1845)," in *L'Expansion belge sous Léopold 1er, 1831-1865; recueil d'études. De Belgische expansie onder Leopold I, 1831-1865; verzameling studi*, (Brussels: ARSOM, 1965), 292-310.

Asia.<sup>29</sup> The additional benefit of imperialism was that it allowed the strategic, political, and military aspects of nationalism to be played out somewhere besides Europe.<sup>30</sup> This in turn allowed the Second Industrial Revolution to move ahead without the constant disruptions caused by war. War would be made far from home, in someone else's backyard.

One unique aspect of Belgian colonialism appears to be the personal drive of the sovereign. Rarely has any prince, king, or emperor become more personally involved in imperial expansion, let alone colonial development.<sup>31</sup> In the case of Belgium it is simply impossible to discuss early Belgian colonialism without discussing Leopold I, and in the case of the Congo, Leopold II. It is the *persona* and drive of the king and, especially in the case of Leopold I, his personal political and diplomatic actions and relationships that must be examined. In this respect, Belgium presents a somewhat singular situation.<sup>32</sup>

What fueled this political expansion were capitalism and the economic conditions that began with the First Industrial Revolution and climaxed in the latter part of the nineteenth century with the Second Industrial Revolution. It was the Second Industrial Revolution, distinguished by its emphasis on heavy industry; transformation

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<sup>29</sup>Africa only became accessible with the medical advances in the nineteenth century. China did not show strong signs of its internal decay until the middle of the nineteenth century.

<sup>30</sup>Examples of European wars or disputes by proxy were France and Britain in West Africa and the Sudan, the warlike territorial dispute between Belgium and France over the north western border of the Congo and the acquisition of German East Africa under the nose of the British by Bismarck.

<sup>31</sup>The difficulty that Leopold I of Belgium encountered was that, he was an eighteenth century monarch in a nineteenth century constitutional monarchy. This, as we shall see, however did not stop him from trying.

<sup>32</sup>This might well validate the position that Robinson and Gallagher propounded as to circumstance and happenstance as causes for European imperialism as much as intentional coordinated actions. Wolfe., 400.

of iron into steel; and massive corporations employing tens of thousands and rabid competition among Britain, Germany, France, and the rapidly industrializing United States<sup>33</sup> that created the economic drive for global expansion for new markets and resources.

Early capitalism<sup>34</sup> had stood for the proposition of *laissez-faire* economics with its open and free markets that theoretically included unfettered access to all markets. It was a repudiation of the earlier nation-centered idea of mercantilism. What began to change in the nineteenth century was that this rapid growth created surplus capital, excess production, an expanding and more demanding work force, migration out of Europe, and the perception of stagnant national markets. The free market principles, along with the potential for expanding exports to colonies, brought demand for trade and industrial protection, which resulted in rising tariffs from 1850 onward. Additionally, the intense and cutthroat nature of the capitalist system as it grew in the early nineteenth century, especially in England, now faced growing international competition in addition to national competition for the same markets.

Lastly, the fear of depleting limited natural resources created an apparent need for new sources of raw materials, which seemed to be available only overseas. Thus began the call not only for new colonial sources but the imposition of increased tariffs and restriction of colonial trade on colonies that already existed.

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<sup>33</sup>In 1830 Belgium was the second most industrial nation; by 1870 it was the sixth.

<sup>34</sup>Adam Stuart Dugald Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (London: Ward, Lock and Tyler, 1870).

The relative peace of the period of 1815-1914 allowed industry and markets to grow without the artificial stimulus of wars. This created a condition that had not existed for hundreds of years in Europe. It also resulted in a decreased need for large standing armies and, to a lesser extent, navies. The issue of what to do with these institutions resulted in their use for the growing scientific inquiries and explorations of this period.<sup>35</sup>

These were the political and economic justifications for the pursuit of colonization. What was needed was a reason, besides patriotism and wealth, that reflected a cultural or social ethic if the average citizen was to identify with and ultimately champion this expansion. Religion, race, pseudo-science, and perhaps destiny provided that spiritual need and taste for empire and its colonies.

Despite the disarray brought upon Christianity by the Reformation, the Counterreformation, the scientific revolution, and then the onslaught of the Enlightenment, Europe of the early nineteenth century was a thoroughly Christian continent. But in the mid-nineteenth century a slow but discernable cloud of secularism began to overshadow religion.<sup>36</sup> The upheavals of the Industrial Revolution, the destruction of the Napoleonic wars, and the growing violence of the cities cut people off from the security of the villages and their churches. The slow but steady marginalization of religion began first among the educated and then spread among the masses of people

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<sup>35</sup>The discoveries and advances made in the second half of the nineteenth century were as a result of this *pax europa*. See Enrico Bellone, *A World on Paper : Studies on the Second Scientific Revolution*, 1st MIT Press pbk. ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1982).

<sup>36</sup>See Alan Lauffer Hayes, "The Background of Romanticism: Secularism in Europe, 1789-1815" (B.D. thesis, McGill University, 1971); and Erich Meissner, *Confusion of Faces; The Struggle*

in the overcrowded cities and factories, seemingly forgotten by God. Religion eventually became a private, internal outlook within a man's soul that was not necessarily reflected in his actions and certainly not in his society, government, and education.

The sense of faith and mission was still alive among many, however. If the locals were not interested, the "unchurched" natives would be—and what of the infidels? The perception of the inferiority of the animist religions of Africa and (to a lesser extent) that of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam provided an all-too-easy target, and perhaps justification, for imperialism. "Go therefore and make disciples."<sup>37</sup> Christians might disagree among themselves about the Bible and who was a heretic but clearly "*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*"<sup>38</sup> certainly applied to non-Christians. These two concepts drove the missionary zeal that justified a purer non-economic and political rationale for colonization. If the industrialists and their economic investments needed to be protected, how much more would the men and women of God?

The secularization of Europe brought with it a broadening of the applications of scientific inquiry. As the scientific method began to be applied outside the more rigid disciplines of mathematics, physics, and chemistry, the apparent randomness or at least unpredictability of nature and man began to be felt. The early work produced by Erasmus Darwin<sup>39</sup> on acquired characteristics and their evolutionary aspects and the

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*between Religion and Secularism in Europe: A Commentary on Modern German History, 1517-1939* (London: Faber and Faber, 1946).

<sup>37</sup>Mathew 28.19 RSV.

<sup>38</sup>"No salvation outside the church"

<sup>39</sup>Erasmus King-Hele Desmond Darwin, *The Essential Writings of Erasmus Darwin* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1968).

later work of his grandson, Charles Darwin, opened up a whole new world of scientific and pseudo-scientific thought. After years of research Charles Darwin produced his Theory of Evolution, which he developed in 1838 but did not publish until 1859.<sup>40</sup> Darwin's theory seemed to postulate a randomness and violence that was inherent in nature, which had not previously been appreciated. This was soon transformed by Francis Galton in 1869 in his Hereditary Genius to postulate a theory of selective breeding and the predominant role of genetics in human development.<sup>41</sup> It was only a matter of time before the seemingly logical extension of evolution into the field of ethics. Herbert Spencer, in his work First Principles,<sup>42</sup> made just such a leap. His phrase "survival of the fittest," with its application to human relations and a hierarchy of man, soon filled the scientific literature of its time. It was with Spencer that we saw the fundamentals of what became "Social Darwinism"<sup>43</sup> and its application of the concept of natural selection and survival of the fittest to races, cultures, and civilizations. It seemed a logical corollary that if nature, and mankind, were hierarchal and the result of these forces, then so must race and culture. It did not take the average European very long to look around at the advanced state of its scientific, technological, religious, political, and economic world and deduce who was the fittest. This sense of racial and

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<sup>40</sup>Darwin had realized the radical implications of his theory especially in regards to its religious fallout. He had intended to have his work published posthumously until he became aware that Alfred Russel Wallace was going to publish his theory, thus forcing Darwin to publish his immediately.

<sup>41</sup>Galton was a prodigious researcher in many fields but relative to evolution, he pioneered the statistical study and analysis of human differences, inheritance of intelligence and probably most importantly eugenics.

<sup>42</sup>In a sense Spencer returned to the sophist view that all truth was relative and the strongest prevailed. His effect on ethics and the consequences of ethical Darwinism is the source to which many of the racist theories, including *apartheid* and National Socialism can be traced.

<sup>43</sup>The term was actually not used until 1944 in Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought*, rev. ed. (New York: G. Braziller, 1959).

cultural superiority, along with the Biblical commands on discipleship “go therefore and make disciples,” created in many, especially the elite and religious, the obligation to bring those less fortunate up the evolutionary and spiritual ladder as much as possible. As Kipling so aptly quipped, it was “the White man’s burden.”<sup>44</sup>

The perceived economic and social reasons for empire had the added advantage of utilizing the potentially stagnant and peacetime military units that were not fighting continental wars. What better use could there be than to be involved in the glory of imperial military service against the savages of Africa and opium addicts of Asia? Colonies needed protection, and that protection was deliverable by the navies that grew ever bigger to connect, protect, and project the colonial world of nineteenth century Europe. War did not end in Europe, however. The peace in Europe for these hundred years had seen at least two major wars, the Crimean War (1854-56) and the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1). They reminded Europe that despite its recent success in preventing war on an annual basis, war was always possible, if not inevitable, and that required the availability of large experienced armies and navies. The use of these forces thus served the dual role of protecting the colonies and training and maintaining large armies should the *pax europa* end, as it did in 1914. What gave the political necessity, economic forces, spiritual drive, idealistic motivation, and adventurous spirit the ability to colonize the world, especially Africa, were advances in medicine, science, and cartography.

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<sup>44</sup>Rudyard Kipling, “*The White Man's Burden*,” McClure's Magazine, February 1899, 12.

The continent of Africa, parts of Asia, and the interior of Central and South America were veritable graveyards for Europeans until the 1850s. The scourges of malaria, yellow fever, and the additional African killer, sleeping sickness (*trypanosomiasis*) prevented any real European colonial activities. What overcame malaria was quinine. Known since the middle ages,<sup>45</sup> quinine was first used extensively by the French in their conquest of Algeria in the 1830s. It was not made medicinal and thereby useful until the 1840s and was not widely effective until it was used in solution, as a prophylaxis, on a daily basis by the British in the 1850s. Sleeping sickness, on the other hand, was more regional and waited until the first decade of the 1900s for an initial cure. The conquest of yellow fever required both an understanding of the mode of transmission, the mosquito, and the later development of a reasonably effective vaccine in the later part of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century.

The technological developments of the nineteenth century such as the railroad, telegraph, and steamship in Europe and later in the colonies gave Europeans a significant advantage over the transportation systems in place in Africa and Asia at that time. From a military standpoint, however, the repeating rifle, smokeless powder, iron ships, and later the machine gun prevented any effective means of native resistance and often were absolutely devastating in their consequences.<sup>46</sup>

The only item missing from this picture of political rationale, economic drive, and technological ability were directions or maps. Prior to 1850 Africa south of the

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<sup>45</sup>Quinine had been used as early as the malarial epidemic in Rome in 1631 after being sent by the Jesuit priest Agostino Salumbrino from South America. Its use and methodology however were not understood.

Sahara Desert was simply the “Dark Continent”<sup>47</sup> both due to the color of its people and the fact that that Europeans simply did not have any real knowledge of what lay more than twenty miles inland from any coast. The wider presumption, prior to 1800, was that since there were no external symbols of civilization<sup>48</sup> evident on the coast, other than those related to the now illegal slave trade, there was nothing of value; otherwise, someone would have taken advantage of it and a civilization would have arisen as a result.

Beginning in the 1800s the Scottish adventurer Mungo Park<sup>49</sup> (1771-1806) pursued some of the earliest exploration of the Niger, reaching Timbuktu. In the 1820s, the English adventurer Hugh Clapperton<sup>50</sup> (1788-1827) explored the area beginning at the Bight of Benin and going inland to the Yoruba and Fula kingdoms of south central Africa. Additionally, the Landers brothers, Richard (1804-1834) and John (1807-1839),<sup>51</sup> with Clapperton, and on their own, navigated the Niger and Benue Rivers and reached the inland Niger Delta. The Frenchman René Caillié<sup>52</sup> (1799-1838) explored

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<sup>46</sup>The use of the Maxim machine gun at Omdurman in the Sudan in 1898 resulted in 10,000 Ansar killed and 13,000 wounded. British losses were 48 killed and 382 wounded.

<sup>47</sup>The use of the term seems to have become common in the early part of the seventeenth century.

<sup>48</sup>The very meaning of the Latin root *civis*, “citizen” takes for granted group membership around a central authority that Western history has always identified with city. To the Western mind, the minimum requirement for civilization has always been the city.

<sup>49</sup>Peter Ludwig Brent, *Black Nile: Mungo Park and the Search for the Niger* (London: Gordon Cremonesi, 1977).

<sup>50</sup>Richard Lander, *Records of Captain Clapperton's Last Expedition to Africa* (London: Cass Library of African Studies. Travels and Narratives; reprint, London: Cass, 1967).

<sup>51</sup>Richard Allen and A. R. Lander ed., *Richard Lander's Journey to Sokoto* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964).

<sup>52</sup>Galbraith Welch, *The Unveiling of Timbuctoo: The Astounding Adventures of Caillié* (New York: W.Morrow & Co., 1939).

the Senegal River and crossed the Sahara desert. The German Heinrich Barth<sup>53</sup> (1821-1865) meanwhile explored northern Africa, the Sahara and traveled as far south as present day Cameroon. Almost simultaneously, the British adventurers Richard Burton<sup>54</sup> (1821-1890) and John Speke<sup>55</sup> (1827-1864) began their exploration of Somalia and East Africa and ultimately discovered the source of the Nile at Lake Victoria. Lastly, the travels and exploits of David Livingstone<sup>56</sup> (1813-1873) and Henry Morton Stanley<sup>57</sup> (1841-1904), beginning in South Africa and going into the Congo River basin, produced results that became intimately bound with Leopold II and the Congo Free State.<sup>58</sup> All these explorers, their reports, and maps opened up Africa and revealed a land of great wealth, profoundly fertile soil (especially in central Africa), and mineral wealth within the “Dark Continent.”

Perhaps more understandable, however, was the thrill of the chase, the sense of expectation and exhilaration (whether rational or not) that arose from conquest and war, glamour and danger, success and adulation. It is hard to view the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a purely rational period in this regard. The shift from the security and fecundity of the farms to the drudgery and despair of the industrial cities often led to wanderlust for what had to be a better life. The political and economic rise of the entrepreneurial classes was at the cost of the landed and titled gentry. Land, once the

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<sup>53</sup>Cornelia Essner, "Some Aspects of German Travellers' Accounts from the Second Half of the 19th Century," in *European sources for sub-Saharan Africa before 1900: use and abuse*, Beatrix Heintze and Adam Jones, eds (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden, 1987), 197-205.

<sup>54</sup>William Harrison, *Burton and Speke* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982).

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

<sup>56</sup>Basil b Miller, *David Livingstone, Explorer-Missionary*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Pub. House, 1941).

basis of wealth, now gave way to the vastly more profitable system of manufacturing and industry, which required neither title nor pedigree.

To the lord, earl, or duke with a run-down castle or manor house and little political and reduced economic power at home, the lure would have been appealing to many brought up on the stories of Raleigh, Cabot, Drake, and Wellington. Adventure, fame, and, if you were lucky, wealth, might be the reward for those with title and little more. The colonial and military services provided the opportunity and means to reinvigorate an old aristocratic line, or at least die trying. The queen would have wanted it that way. Women, stifled by the legal disabilities of their gender at home, could see opportunity, if not breathing room, in an empire far from the norms and restrictions of the mother country.<sup>57</sup> The exponential growth of the press in Europe in the nineteenth century was both fuel and fire with its daily dispatches from the colonies and the front.<sup>60</sup> What could be better for God, queen, and country? It was simply the most patriotic duty one could offer, especially with the war business in Europe all but silenced.

Many of the earlier colonists of the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries had left their home country to find economic or religious freedom. They were fleeing from religious persecution, economic deprivation or simply to economic opportunity. There was less need for colonists of this nature in this last wave of imperialism. There was a

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<sup>57</sup>John Bierman, *Dark Safari: The Life Behind the Legend of Henry Morton Stanley* (New York: Knopf, 1990).

<sup>58</sup>Hochschild. For a response see Vellut, ed.

<sup>59</sup>Friedrich Engels and Eleanor Burke Leacock, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State, in the Light of the Researches of Lewis H. Morgan*, 1st ed. (New York,: International Publishers, 1972); and Antoinette M. Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865-1915* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

greater need for civil servants, military men, and commercial entrepreneurs.<sup>61</sup> Thus, other than the military, there was little immigration of the common man to the new colonies created in the nineteenth century. There was a lot of interest in the colonies, but this could easily be satisfied by reading the newspapers and novels common at this time.

The political, economic, and social rationale was there. The medical, scientific, and cartographic tools were in hand. The stage was now set for the New Imperialism. This last age of physical imperialism would leave a long and lasting impression on what is now referred to as the Third World. It is not the purpose here to debate the advantages and disadvantages of the New Imperialism or even its consequence. The purpose is to place Belgium in this larger movement as a willing participant but through the lens of the period 1830-1855.

What can Belgium show us about imperialism and itself? What were the political, economic, and social conditions in Belgium during this period? What do we see in Belgium in the first half of the nineteenth century that might reflect conditions conducive to colonialism? What were the thoughts, actions, and intents of its king, its parliament, its church, its commercial sector, and its people? What role, if any, did the complex interrelationships between King Leopold, Queen Victoria, Lord Palmerston, and Baron Stockmar<sup>62</sup> play in Belgium's quest for colonies?

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<sup>60</sup>Robert H. MacDonald, *The Language of Empire: Myths and Metaphors of Popular Imperialism, 1880-1918* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1994).

<sup>61</sup>Roger Magraw, *France, 1815-1914: The Bourgeois Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

<sup>62</sup>Ernst Alfred Christian freiherr von Stockmar and others, *Memoirs of Baron Stockmar* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1872).

What did Belgium look like in the period 1830 to 1855? To understand Belgium, in order to properly gauge its aspirations and identity, requires a little history.<sup>63</sup> The *Belgae* as a people were referred to by Julius Caesar two thousand years ago in his Gallic Wars. Belgium as a nation did not come into existence until 1830. The area presently known as Belgium, from its conquest by the Romans, through its absorption by the Franks and inclusion (until the ninth century) within the Holy Roman Empire generally remained out of the mainstream of European history. During the ninth to the fourteenth centuries it was composed of a number of archbishoprics, duchies, counties, free towns, and principalities. The largest were Comté de Hainaut, Comté de Flandre, Comté de Namur, Principauté de Liège, and Brabant. Between the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries the area was loosely unified under the Bourbons of France and became part of France's area of influence.

Later, however, this area, including both present day Belgium and Holland, was able to achieve a semblance of freedom and unity known as the Seventeen Provinces. The Protestant Reformation and the Eighty Years' War (1566-1648) altered this picture. For the next 300 years Belgium, under Habsburg rule after 1482, was first under the slowly declining influence of the Spanish Habsburgs as the Spanish Netherlands (1556-1713) and under the control of Habsburg Austrians as the Austrian Netherlands (1713-1795). The Northern Netherlands, present day Holland, became an independent Protestant country known as the United Kingdom of the Netherlands that rapidly

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<sup>63</sup>Yves Manhès, *Histoire Des Belges Et De La Belgique* (Paris: Vuibert, 2005); Jean Stengers and Eliane Gubin, *Histoire Du Sentiment National En Belgique Des Origines Á 1918. Tome 1* (Brussels: Racine, 2002) ; and Vincent Dujardin, Michel Dumoulin, and Emmanuel Gérard, eds., *Nouvelle Histoire De Belgique, 1830-1905, Questions À L'histoire* (Bruxelles: Editions Complexe, 2005).

became involved in the world as a commercial and colonial power until its conquest by the French in 1795, when it became the Batavian Republic. From the sixteenth century through the early nineteenth century, this area was the scene of constant warfare and shifting alliances.

Modern Belgian history really began with the Napoleonic wars and the shaky path to unification and separation. Briefly “liberated,” then actually “conquered” by the troops of the French Revolution as a result of the battle of Jemappes on November 6, 1792, it was incorporated into France in 1795. It remained a part of France during the Napoleonic Wars until 1815. With the final defeat of Napoleon in 1815 at Waterloo, the allied powers, under the Treaty of Vienna, declared that the Netherlands and Belgium would be one state, The United Kingdom of the Netherlands: *un état, deux pays*,<sup>64</sup> under King William II.

The possible rationale behind the union of the Protestant, Dutch speaking, commercial, and maritime Holland with the Catholic, French speaking, industrial, and agrarian south: lack of choice.<sup>65</sup> In 1815, the Quadruple Alliance would not tolerate the idea of another Napoleon or resurgent France. The area of the two Netherlands had consistently been the source of past warfare. It was therefore decided that the former Austrian Netherlands must somehow be neutralized and put out of the reach of French desires. The only way to do this, it was rationalized, was to create a nation under the flag of the Netherlands that would act as a buffer to French intervention. William II was

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<sup>64</sup>“one state, two countries”

<sup>65</sup>Manhès, 111-117.

ecstatic; his kingdom would double in size and increase its population by almost 150%.

What advantage did this union have to Belgium? None!

In 1815 a referendum was held. It passed handily in Holland. It passed in Belgium, where there was widespread opposition and a boycott of the referendum, at least according to William II. As a duly constituted despotic monarch, William merely counted the non-votes as affirmative votes in favor of the union and *voilà*, it was approved. With that inevitable sense of distrust and confusion, it should not come as a surprise that the union was ill-fated from its inception.

The government of the Dutch nation was a monarchy with an advisory Parliament with all power basically vested in the hands of the king. Despite the *de facto* rejection of the union by Belgium in 1815, the two nations were combined, and William began an ill-advised path to introduce Protestantism on a basis equal to Catholicism. This was at least, the way it was perceived by the Belgians. This would have been a formidable task under the best of circumstances. The Belgian population represented 70 percent of the population of the new union, and it was thoroughly Catholic. The attempts to give equality to religion, secularize the schools, and introduce Dutch as the language of the government managed to forge a union between previously disparate Belgian groups. Beginning in the late 1820s, the secular professional class, which had arisen during the French occupation and desired freedom of press and an independent

judiciary, and the Catholic Church,<sup>66</sup> which desired freedom of religion and education, coalesced into one party.

In August of 1830, a minor incident at a Brussels opera performance rode a rising wave of discontent across Belgium, which culminated in an uprising in Brussels and the eventual expulsion of Dutch troops in September. The defeat of Dutch troops caused the local movement to blossom into a full scale revolution. Independence was declared on October 4, 1830. William did not quietly accept the severance of his kingdom. He immediately appealed to the members of the Quadruple Alliance for help. The Alliance convened the Conference of London on December 1830. The result was certainly not to William's liking. The conference arranged an armistice but then turned around and declared Belgium a free nation.<sup>67</sup> To the surprise of no one, William was furious and reacted by invading Belgium on August 2, 1831. Simultaneously, having opted for a constitutional monarchy, Belgium chose Leopold of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha as its king. He accepted the crown on June 26, 1831 and was immediately called upon to defend the nation which he and the small Belgian army were incapable of achieving. France and England immediately reacted. France sent a forty thousand-man army and England dispatched her fleet. William backed down, but not willingly. For the next eight years the two countries met mostly on the diplomatic battlefield. The final treaty

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<sup>66</sup>The Catholic Church under the conservative pope Gregory XVI (1831-46) took a very strong anti modernist view and the Belgian Catholic Church, in line with this attitude, would not tolerate its loss of the school system or deemed equality with any Protestant Church.

<sup>67</sup>Lord Palmerston's fear was that a weak or disruptive union of Belgium and the Netherlands would eventually invite French interference. French resurgence was his primary fear and its prevention the cornerstone of his foreign policy. Herbert 1:228-30.

that settled and secured Belgian independence was not signed until 1839. Belgium was then a *fait accompli*.

From 1839 through 1848 Belgium and her king, Leopold I, began to reflect the stated purpose of its creation, its position as a neutral in European politics.<sup>68</sup> After 1848 and continuing until Leopold's death in December 1865, the country generally prospered and became an accepted power in terms of international prestige while increasing its position as a neutral between the major powers of nineteenth century Europe. The question, especially for Leopold, was whether a real nation in nineteenth century Europe could exist without an empire.

Belgium now had a constitution, a king, a legislature, and a judiciary but not the sovereign, its elected representatives, or the government ministers had any experience or guidance in these early decades. Belgium was a work in progress. By far, however, the forceful and aggressive leadership of Leopold I was the predominant force behind Belgium's early government, especially in the area of international affairs. Was this consistent with the idea behind the constitution of 1831? It is difficult, looking at 1831, to know what the thoughts of the constitutional representatives were, especially relative to imperialism and colonies. The record is silent.

The Belgian Constitution of 1831<sup>69</sup> created a constitutional monarchy with a ministerial or cabinet style structure that specifically included ministerial responsibility

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<sup>68</sup>A reference to Nestor of the Iliad, portrayed by Homer as an "Elder Statesman". Leopold was given this informal title as a result of his role as a neutral, in the internal affairs of Europe. See Egon C. Corti, *Leopold I of Belgium - Secret Pages of European History*, trans. Joseph McCabe (London: Unwin Brothers, Ltd., 1923).

<sup>69</sup>Amos Jenkins Peaslee and Dorothy Peaslee Xydis, *Constitutions of Nations*, Dorothy Peaslee Xydis, ed., rev. 3<sup>rd</sup> edit. (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1965), 72-92.

as one of its more liberal concepts.<sup>70</sup> It was also composed of two legislative bodies the upper and lower chambers. It was a compromise between a representative democracy and a monarchy that evolved over the months of 1830-31 as a result of the push and pull of European politics and the internal divisions of Belgian society itself.<sup>71</sup>

The impetus for the Belgian Constitution of 1831 began with the French occupation and subsequent absorption into France of what had been the Austrian Netherlands in 1795. During this particular period, Belgium, a deeply introverted, agricultural, Catholic country, was exposed to the secular and Enlightenment reasoning of the French Republic. It was also during this time, and as a result of this exposure, that a class of educated secular professionals (such as lawyers, judges, and administrators) emerged and began to see the possibility of a Belgium different than the one that had existed prior to 1795.<sup>72</sup>

With its absorption into the United Kingdom of the Netherlands in 1815 at the insistence of the Quadruple Alliance (Austria, England, Prussia, and Russia), Belgium became part of a nation created to form a buffer against a potentially resurgent, France. It was a political solution to a practical problem. The incorporation of the industrial and agricultural, Catholic, French-speaking Belgium with the commercial/maritime, Protestant, Dutch-speaking Netherlands produced a situation that under the dictatorial William II inevitably gave way to separation, revolution, and a new nation. The two concepts, the enlightened liberalism of the French Revolution and the autocratic notions

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<sup>70</sup>Edwige Lefebvre, "The Belgian Constitution of 1831: The Citizen Burgher." Zentrum für europäische rechtspolitik an der Universität Bremen. (Bremen: Zentrum für europäische rechtspolitik an der Universität Bremen, 1997). 18-23.

<sup>71</sup>Lefebvre, 29-32.

of the monarchy under the protestant William II, would have been incompatible in the best of circumstances.

The experiences under the monarchial and dictatorial government of William II led to the creation of a committee in 1830, after the revolution, to draw up a constitution. The committee's mandate was to draft a constitution that would balance the demands for a generally conservative government acceptable to the Catholic party, while simultaneously reflecting the needs of the more liberal, secular middle class. The resulting constitutional monarchy emphasized the responsibility of cabinet ministers to the chambers. The adoption of a king as head of this constitutional monarchy was an attempt to placate both the conservative powers of Europe, especially Klemens von Metternich Austrian Foreign Minister, and the more conservative members of the Catholic Church.

The framers of the constitution had two key concepts in mind that were to be incorporated into the document: ministerial responsibility and constitutional monarchy. Article 29 states, "The Executive authority is vested in the King as laid down by the Constitution."<sup>73</sup> Article 63, however, states, "The King's person is inviolable: his Ministers are responsible,"<sup>74</sup> but Article 64 states, "No act of the king is effective unless it is countersigned by a Minister who renders himself responsible for it."<sup>75</sup> In this manner, there would be definite responsibility, in the office of the Minister, for all acts of Parliament that could be obfuscated by the prerogatives or divine right of kings. If

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<sup>72</sup>Lefebvre, 2-4.

<sup>73</sup>Peaslee and Xydis, 78.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 84.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid.

the king is “inviolable,” however, what is to prevent him from acting unconstitutionally? Lastly, Article 65 states, “The King appoints and dismisses his ministers.”<sup>76</sup> It appears that the king has it both ways, and they are both to his benefit.

In terms of foreign affairs and any authority to undertake colonial development, Article 66,<sup>77</sup> among other powers, states, “...He appoints persons to posts...connected with external relations...”,<sup>78</sup> Article 68 states, “The King...makes treaties of peace, alliance and commerce...”,<sup>79</sup> and lastly, Article 78 states that “The King has no powers save those formally vested in him by the Constitution and the special laws passed in accordance with the constitution itself.” There certainly seems to be ample room for an aggressive ruler such as Leopold I to see in these sections of the Constitution the power to advance colonial authority.<sup>80</sup>

These sections were obviously adopted with the reign of William II in mind, but seem to have been watered down by the process of compromise at the convention. The problem was, as with all new countries or constitutions, the lack of precedent. There were simply no earlier examples of how this was to function. Did this leave the king without the ability to pursue his own initiatives unless endorsed by Parliament or a minister? Could the king pursue programs and policies with his own backing that did not reflect parliamentary will? Was the king distinguishable from the monarchy, and if so, how?

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<sup>76</sup>Ibid.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid.

<sup>80</sup>Lefebvre, 37-8.

Given the limitations and inherent contradictions in the Belgian Constitution, how did the actual relationship between the king, chambers, and ministers function at that time? Between 1831 and 1847 Belgium was ruled by a union centrist party which had been instrumental in the revolution that created Belgium.<sup>81</sup> It was in the fullest sense a national unity party that included the liberal free masons and professionals that had been so influenced by the French occupation of 1795-1815 and the conservative Catholics who had demanded the catholicity of the nation and control over its educational system. As a unity government it was an example of compromise and often inaction. This was especially evident in the relations between the various governmental institutions.

The Belgian Constitution had mandated a constitutional monarchy that envisioned a king as a participant and leader, not a strong monarch. It had especially enshrined the concept of ministerial responsibility. The difficulty was that no one was quite sure what that meant in terms of real governmental relations, especially in terms of the duties and obligations of the king. Leopold, however, possessed definite ideas on what form of constitutional monarch he was to be. In his concept, he was perhaps secondary to the Parliament in internal matters, but international relations were an area legitimately within the king's interest and constitutional authority. In the world of mid nineteenth century Europe, many of the governments were monarchies that were not constitutional like those of England and Belgium. The kings or princes of these

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<sup>81</sup>Manhès, 121-130.

countries generally preferred dealing with royalty as opposed to ministers. It is here that Leopold was most at home, among his fellow monarchs.

Leopold, and to a certain extent Queen Victoria of England, looked upon the status of the constitutional monarch as a leader with hereditary duties and responsibilities much in the manner of eighteenth century monarchs. It seems fairly certain that in the area of foreign affairs, and especially colonies, Leopold felt it was his duty to lead an often reluctant Parliament and people to meet their destiny. In his opening remarks to the Parliament in 1845,<sup>82</sup> Leopold exhorted the Parliament and the people to revitalize the national spirit and show the greatness of the Belgian nation through colonial enterprises.

It appears that the nature of the union party government<sup>83</sup> in terms of Belgian colonial expansion was not positive, but it did not seem to know how to handle Leopold's continuous pressure on the colonial question. There was a certain blurring of responsibility on the issue of colonial activities. It was often impossible to discern whether it was the chambers, the king, or business interests that were behind the various colonial ventures, especially Santo Tomas in Guatemala and Santa Catarina in Brazil. It also seems that much of this confusion and obfuscation was intentional on the part of Leopold and some of his ministers.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup>*Moniteur Commercial*, 1845.

<sup>83</sup>The coalition did not have a real name but was often referred to as the "union of opposites." It began to disintegrate after 1842.

<sup>84</sup>There was a certain secretive side to Leopold and some of his ministers. It can be seen in the orders, whether written or otherwise, to Captain Victor Pirson to Texas, Major Scévola Guillaumont to Guatemala and Nicaragua, Major Charles Van Lede to Brazil, Captain J. Van Haverbeke to Rio Nunez and perhaps even Abraham Cohen in Rio Nunez.

As the members of the chambers began to understand their position and the memory of the revolution began to fade, the union party collapsed at the end of the 1840s, and Leopold began to withdraw within himself in the last ten to fifteen years of his life. Although the decrease in colonial attempts during this period was probably due more to Leopold's mellowing, however, there was definite assertion of parliamentary rights after the coalition collapsed.

Much of the later controls and limitations on the powers of the king would not be exercised until after the debacle of the Congo Free State in the early twentieth century under Leopold II. With regard to Leopold I, however, there was simply too much inexperience and confusion within the fledgling government.

The novelty of the Belgian political order was in many ways matched by the newness of the economy. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, only five to ten years after its absorption by France, Belgium was second only to Britain in terms of industrial development. This industrial development had been accomplished by the transport of knowledge and machinery from England. It was aided by the growing need to supply products for France and its army of which Belgium was then a part. Unfortunately, the demands of war were not the demands of peace, and this production vastly exceeded the consumption needs of a civilian economy.

Belgium continued to develop into an industrial power as a result of its integration into the United Kingdom of Netherlands. The creation of massive industrialization between 1795 and 1815, while Belgium was under French, rule did not abate after its union with Holland in 1815. In fact, the meshing of the two countries in

terms of industrialization and manufacturing in Belgium, as well as commercial and international marketing in Holland, created a symbiosis that worked relatively well causing somewhat of an expansion of Belgian industry.<sup>85</sup> However, the political reality and instability of the union was far stronger.

After its succession in 1830 and before the treaty securing its independence from Holland in 1839, Belgian industry was prevented from exporting its goods by the European tariffs and the closure of Dutch ports to Belgian goods. Additionally, Belgium had no merchant marine or navy with which to transport its products or defend them.<sup>86</sup>

Independence also immediately ended Belgian access to Dutch finance and marketing. The result was catastrophic in Belgium.<sup>87</sup> The unemployment rate soared, as did poverty and destitution. This resulted in a countrywide depression in both its agricultural and industrial sectors, which continued on and off into the late 1840s.

The resultant response of the government, which was a typical *laissez-faire* attitude of the nineteenth century, was to counsel charity, frugality, and patience.<sup>88</sup> Despite the value of these traits, there was little improvement in the life of the Belgian worker, and little help.

The industrial sector was not the only area that suffered. The western Flanders region, which had remained overwhelmingly agricultural, also suffered from a loss of

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<sup>85</sup>Manhès, 105-6.

<sup>86</sup>As broad general proposition there was no Belgian navy or merchant marine before 1830. However there is a strong history of Belgian service in the Dutch navy and merchant marine. One of the more surprising examples was the settlement at New Amsterdam which was predominantly by the Belgians not the Dutch. See Henry G. Bayer, *The Belgians First Settler in New York and in the Middle States* (New York: The Devin-Adair Company, 1925).

<sup>87</sup>Emile Cammaerts, *The Keystone of Europe - History of the Belgian Dynasty 1830-1939* (Kingswood: Peter Davies Ltd., 1939). 84-7.

markets and there was a series of droughts and crop failures that destroyed this previously self-sufficient sector of the economy. As elsewhere, this resulted in migration to the increasingly overcrowded cities, where the local response was often less than welcome. There was no remedy available to these peasants, as strikes and unions were outlawed. The government simply denied any social responsibility.

The government's response was to begin a process of cooperation between itself and business that has continued to the present.<sup>89</sup> There was a significant outpouring of legislation regarding corporations and corporate interests that became closely tied to the government. The availability of investment capital from both within and without the country, especially France and Holland, allowed for a rapid development of business entities whose identification as public, private, or royal could not easily be determined. These eventually reversed the economic situation, but only over a period of almost twenty years. Even more complex would be the involvement, especially under Leopold II, of the king in his capacity as a wealthy individual as opposed to a sovereign.

Much of the confusion that revolved around the Guatemalan and Brazilian colonial efforts can be, as we shall see, blamed on the inability to determine the position or backing of the government or the king for these colonial ventures. The requirement of governmental, if not royal approval, of these enterprises often confused the general public as to whether these were royally, privately, governmentally, or commercially sponsored entities or colonies. The Belgian Constitution does not clarify this issue. Both

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<sup>88</sup>Manhès, 124-26.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., 122-24.

Leopold I and II used their personal fortunes and access to state funds to back or finance quasi governmental ventures.<sup>90</sup> Leopold II, however, did so successfully.

As a rationale for colonial development in the later part of the twentieth century, the question of religion and the strong desire for conversion is frequently mentioned. The religious world of early Belgium, however, shows a uniformity of belief and little interest in external religious adventure. The unity of purpose that created the union party in 1828 with the conservative Catholic Church of Belgium had centered on the question of education and the primacy of Catholicism. The actions of the Belgian Catholic Church over the next thirty years solidified its position in education and assured its independent position<sup>91</sup> in the country.

Additionally, the two most ambitious colonial adventures, Santo Tomas and Santa Catarina, took place in the totally Catholic countries of Guatemala and Brazil, respectively. Part of the rationale for the choice of these countries was the fact that Belgium could offer the possibility of good, hardworking Catholic colonists who would not disturb the religious solidarity and peace of these countries.

Lastly, as the union party began to collapse into partisan politics, the secular Freemason element of the liberal party soon tried to limit any religious activity on the part of the Catholic Church, which included the official backing of the Belgian

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<sup>90</sup>Leopold I's income was relatively modest for a monarch. In addition to sums he received as King of the Belgians, he received a major annual disbursement of fifty thousand pounds from the British government upon the death of his first wife Charlotte. He was wise enough, however to put it in trust to maintain his English country manor Claremont. There was, however, no effective way for the British government to know how he actually spent the income. Leopold II was simply one of the richest people in Europe.

<sup>91</sup>The collapse of the union party was at least in part due to the church's refusal to allow secular schools.

government. Leopold's position as a Protestant monarch over a Catholic country did not seem to affect his actions in this regard, unless it could be used to his advantage in negotiations for his colonial aspirations.<sup>92</sup>

The population of Belgium in 1830 was three and a half million people. In the preceding thirty years it had transformed itself from an overwhelmingly agricultural economy to the strongest industrial economy after that of Great Britain. The costs, as we have seen, were extremely high in terms of the social fabric. The migrations to the cities were also accompanied by some migration to France and Holland. Most of this migration, however, seems to have been by artisans and merchants—those who could afford to leave.<sup>93</sup> The population density of Belgium at this time was second only to Holland, in terms of Europe. Again, there was no large scale attempt to emigrate. The vast number of unemployed and destitute stayed in Belgium. Why? Most of them did not seem to want to leave.<sup>94</sup>

By virtue of its recent creation, Belgium had no titled aristocracy, old or new, to be disrupted by the political and economic changes of its early years. But there was a pool of military officers and entrepreneurs available due to the industrial wealth created by its growing industrial middle class. These were men available for overseas adventures, should they present themselves.

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<sup>92</sup>Leopold I was protestant but considered religion something personal and not to be forced.

<sup>93</sup>There was emigration to the United States that was not of a governmental or commercial nature. See Torsten Feys, "The Emigration Policy of the Belgian Government from Belgium to the United States Through the Port of Antwerp 1842-1914" (M.S. thesis, University of Gent, 2003).

<sup>94</sup>Most preferred to stay in Belgium, migrating especially to the cities which became greatly overcrowded. Some of this reluctance to leave can certainly be explained by the horror stories from those returning from Santo Tomas and Santa Catarina.

It was this situation in Belgium that Leopold attempted to remedy; at least, that was his avowed purpose. The few colonists who did emigrate to Guatemala and Brazil did so as the result of desperation, governmental propaganda, commercial misinformation, and, in some cases, church support. On the whole there was simply very little interest in emigrating.

There were not many overt examples of racism or the attitude that developed in Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century. Herbert Spencer's ethical theory of social Darwinism was still thirty years in the future. Some of the reports<sup>95</sup> on the native populations indicated, however, that the universal brotherhood of the Enlightenment had already become mixed with the rhetoric of racism. Belgium did not at this time show any overt sense of mission or intellectual justification for dominance which one identifies with the New Imperialism.

Shortly after independence, the revolutionary forces under the newly crowned King of the Belgians, Leopold I, met the invading Dutch army. They were quickly routed. Over the next twenty years, Belgium attempted to raise a larger, more professional army. It never really succeeded. Initially, there was never a real demand for military forces; Europe was basically at peace until 1914.<sup>96</sup> Secondly, there was no military cadre that identified itself and the military with Belgium. Thirdly, Belgium was created as a neutral country.

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<sup>95</sup>Lieutenant P. L. N. Petit, captain of the *Louise Marie* on the first voyage complained in general about the laziness of the natives in Guatemala, as did Captain Pirson in Texas when he described the Mexican population in San Antonio.

<sup>96</sup>The only two times the Belgian military saw action before the German Army invaded in 1914 were in the first months of the Revolution when it faced the Dutch army in 1831 and at the battle of Boké on the Rio Nunez in 1849.

Leopold made a great effort to increase the army, but he lacked both popular interest and monetary commitment. Most of the officer corps came from either French or the German principalities. There were forts and garrisons, but they were small in comparison to those of other European powers. Lastly, Belgium was a neutral country. Why would a neutral country possibly need a large military? No one had yet heard of von Schlieffen and his plan.

Then there was the navy. At its height in the 1840s, the Belgian navy had two small frigates, the *Louise-Marie* and the *Duc de Brabant*. The entire navy consisted of five hundred officers and men. By the 1860s, for fiscal reasons, the Belgian navy had been disbanded, and the officer corps, as it was, joined the growing Prussian navy.<sup>97</sup>

From a technological and medical point of view there were few significant discoveries or improvements in Europe similar to those of the late nineteenth century. Ships were still made of wood, and muskets were the weapon of choice. In the technological transportation area, however, Belgium proved itself far ahead of the rest of Europe. The first railroad in continental Europe was completed between Brussels and Mechelen on May 5, 1835. This was a goal that Leopold had set at the beginning of his kingship. The first concerted use of quinine against malaria had begun with the French in Algeria in the 1830s, but its true medicinal use remained decades away.

As the more industrial part of the Netherlands, Belgium had little use for maps other than those of a local nature. When Belgium did develop a navy and use it in its colonial pursuits, it used maps from other countries, especially England and France.

During the colonial attempt in Guatemala, however, Belgium produced an extensive array of maps of Guatemala and Central America.<sup>98</sup>

The unique caveat to the political climate of Belgium relative to colonialism was the position of the king, Leopold I. Leopold was in many respects an eighteenth century king in the nineteenth century. What made him different was his hands-on approach, which in many ways he reserved for foreign affairs, especially in the colonial arena. Leopold's personal involvement and his intimate relationship with England through his niece, Queen Victoria; its foreign minister, Lord Palmerston; and Leopold's advisor, Christian von Stockmar, bear closer scrutiny.

It is easy to understand how the relationship between Leopold I and his ministers and the chambers would be central to any analysis of Belgian colonial efforts. However, the rather unique relationships that existed between Leopold I and his niece, Queen Victoria, and later the prince consort, Albert, clearly raise the specter of political pressure or at least the use of these relations for Leopold's and Belgium's advantage. Additionally, two other significant individuals, Lord Palmerston, as British Foreign Minister during this time, and Baron Frederick von Stockman, an intimate of both Leopold and the British royal couple, warrant our attention. The relationship between these individuals was maintained for over thirty years. The question here is whether Leopold attempted to use his relationship with the royal couple, directly or through Stockmar, to aid his imperial aspirations. In Palmerston's case, did Leopold use this

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<sup>97</sup>Both the *Louise Marie* and the *Duc de Brabant* were decommissioned and the name *Royale Marine* was abandoned.

<sup>98</sup>Ansiaux and Reinhartz, 241-259.

connection to soften his opposition or elicit approval of these policies from the foreign office?

The uniqueness of the relationship between Leopold and Victoria should not be underestimated. Victoria's earliest reflections of the most important men in her life began with Leopold, her mother's brother. Victoria's later reminiscences placed Leopold as one of the most significant influences on her life.<sup>99</sup> Stockmar, whom Victoria also knew and greatly respected from her earliest days, was later sent to Victoria as an advisor by Leopold. He would later serve as the private secretary for both the queen and her husband Albert, Leopold's nephew. Was Stockmar loyal to Leopold or to Victoria and Albert? It could be that Stockmar, when forced to choose between loyalty to Victoria and loyalty to Leopold, notwithstanding his pledge of loyalty to Leopold,<sup>100</sup> remained loyal to the queen. Leopold perhaps overestimated Stockmar's sense of duty and underestimated his sense of moral obligation. Stockmar simply had a different moral compass than Leopold in terms of duty and obligation.

The relationship of Leopold, Stockmar, and Victoria to Palmerston was far more complex. As we shall see, Palmerston is generally considered one of the greatest English Foreign Secretaries and Prime Ministers, if not her most aggressive advocate in the nineteenth century. Palmerston's concept of *civis Britannicus sum*,<sup>101</sup> modeled after

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<sup>99</sup>“Claremont remains as the brightest epic of my otherwise rather melancholy childhood-where to be under the roof of that beloved uncle...” written in 1872. Queen of Great Britain Victoria and others, *Regina vs. Palmerston; the Correspondence between Queen Victoria and Her Foreign and Prime Minister, 1837-1865* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1961), 10.

<sup>100</sup>*Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>101</sup> This was a modernization of “*civis Romanus sum*,” “I am a Roman citizen.”

the Roman concept of citizenship, had a profound effect on later British policy, especially on late nineteenth century imperialism.

Palmerston's relationship with Victoria was, at best, rocky. The queen never particularly trusted Palmerston;<sup>102</sup> there seems to have been a great deal of difference of opinion over her view of the influence of a monarch on the government and Palmerston's viewed the monarch more in the nature of a figurehead. Additionally, Palmerston did not feel that a constitutional monarch necessarily needed to know everything that was going on in the government, a view that was surely not shared by Victoria and subsequently resulted in Palmerston's dismissal.

Palmerston's relationship with Stockmar, at least based on what we can glean from Stockmar's memoirs and the reflections of Leopold and Palmerston, seems to indicate a general respect. His respect was tempered, however, by his fear of the German influence exerted on Victoria by both Stockmar, Albert, her husband and Leopold. The relationship between Palmerston and Stockmar does not seem to have influenced in any way Leopold's attempts at Belgian colonial expansion. Stockmar generally took the position that was most sanguine in terms of Victoria's general interest as queen of England.

The relationship between Leopold and Palmerston, whom Leopold later derisively referred to as "Filgerstein," was initially one of respect. After 1839, however, Leopold began to see Palmerston as his nemesis. Palmerston, on the other hand, felt

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<sup>102</sup>Palmerston was aware that Victoria and Leopold often used private or diplomatic couriers and several times he intentionally diverted or opened these letters. This was one of the reason cited by Victoria when she demanded Palmerston's resignation from Prime Minister Lord John Russell in 1851.

that the potential for harm from Leopold's overwhelming closeness and potential influence on Victoria was not always in the best interests of Britain and her people. Although he considered the establishment of Belgium his greatest achievement and despite the fact that Palmerston had something of a personal relationship with Leopold,<sup>103</sup> at least initially, this did not prevent the two from developing a sense of personal animosity that can only exist between two strong willed and determined individuals with opposing views. There is some indication that Leopold occasionally presented certain aspects of his proposed foreign policy, especially with regard to Central America, to Palmerston through his Ambassador to Britain, Sylvain Van de Weyer. Leopold seemed to respect, although grudgingly, Britain's ability to stop any attempts by Belgium to exert itself in an imperial or colonial way. This was especially evident when it clashed with the international interests of Britain.<sup>104</sup>

Lastly, it is worth noting that three other individuals are perhaps worth studying, although they will not be addressed in this paper. These are the previously mentioned Belgian ambassador to England for almost 12 years, Sylvain Van de Weyer; the British ambassadors to Belgium, Sir G. Hamilton Seymour and Lord Howard de Walden and Seaford together for a total of thirty years; and Leopold's private secretary, Jules Van Praet, to whom Leopold confided almost all of his most intimate thoughts in his later

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<sup>103</sup>Leopold and his family went on a trip to London once a year for almost his entire reign except in the last few years as his health deteriorated. They stayed so often that a group of apartments in Kensington Palace are still referred to as the "Belgian Suites."

<sup>104</sup>The records of the Hartley Library, HL, at the University of Southampton do not reveal was any correspondence between Leopold and Palmerston relative to colonialism or imperialism. A review of hundred of letters and other correspondence between Leopold and Palmerston and Palmerston and Queen Victoria also revealed no correspondence relative to the colonial ambitions of Belgium. It must be

life. They will not be addressed here because of the wide dispersal of their records and a desire to limit the scope of this work. The intent, then, is to give a brief overview of these individuals and their possible interrelationships and effects on Belgian colonial policy.

When Leopold Georges Chrétien Frédéric, youngest son of Duke Francis Frederick of Saxe-Coburg-Saalfield (later Saxe-Coburg-Gotha) was crowned Leopold I, King of the Belgians on June 26, 1831, it was in many ways a path well trod. The initial offer of the Belgians was to the Duc de Nemours, son of the French king Louis-Philippe, but Palmerston, British Foreign Minister, ever vigilant regarding a resurgent France, threatened war. The Napoleonic wars may have become a distant memory to the Belgians, but not to the British. The political interrelationship between the related crowns of Britain and Belgium continued to define and determine their foreign policy well into the twentieth century. The next and future king, Leopold of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, the recent rejecter of the Greek crown, a king in search of a kingdom, was something of a monarch on the loose, but most importantly he was a man known to Britain, Palmerston, and the royal family.

Leopold's path to the kingship was a tortuous one and certainly not one that would have been predicable at his birth as the youngest son of a minor German duke. Leopold was born on December 16, 1790, the youngest son of Francis Frédéric of Saxe-Coburg-Saalfield, duke of a minor German duchy<sup>105</sup> located in central Germany in the

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assumed that any correspondence will be found, if indeed it exists, in the correspondence between Leopold and Van Weyer, his ambassador in London.

<sup>105</sup>Saxe-Coburg-Gotha consisted of approximately nine hundred fifty square miles.

modern states of Thuringia and Bavaria. The exchange of Saalfeld for Gotha in 1826 produced the duchy of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha. Leopold advanced rapidly in the fluid situation of the Napoleonic period, rising from colonel to field marshal by the time of the Congress of Vienna in 1815 at age twenty five.

Leopold's path to the throne of Belgium began with his introduction, and eventual marriage on May 2, 1816, to Princess Charlotte Augusta, the only legitimate heiress to the future George IV of England. He stood, behind his new wife, as the potential prince consort of the head of the greatest empire on earth. The death of the princess on November 6, 1817 as a result of the birth of their stillborn son ended the first of three paths to royalty behind or on the throne.

Upon his move to England as part of his then impending marriage, Leopold had brought with him Christian Friedrich von Stockmar (later Baron von Stockmar) as his physician. As a physician to the husband of the princess, Stockmar had been in attendance at her death and was a source of deep consolation to the grief-stricken Leopold. Upon the princess's death, Stockmar, after pledging his eternal loyalty to Leopold, convinced him to remain in England for a period of almost thirteen years.<sup>106</sup> In 1818 Leopold attended the wedding of his sister, Princess Victoria, to the Duke of Kent, next in line for the crown of England. Their daughter, Alexandrina Victoria, who became Queen Victoria, was born on May 24, 1819. "My dearest uncle," as she referred to him, would remain a powerful, if not always successful, influence on the young and future queen.

The fourteen years<sup>107</sup> from 1817-1831, spent near, in, and around the British royal family and the powers of the Parliament, created a strong sense of loyalty to England and an influential group of friends and powerful acquaintances that would later serve him well on the throne of Belgium. Leopold's opportunity at royalty came in 1830 when he was offered, and accepted, the crown of Greece. Difficulties with terms and a somewhat unstable financial situation led him to withdraw his acceptance in that same year.<sup>108</sup> Still later in 1830 Belgium declared its independence and needed a king. Leopold had finally found his route to royalty.

Leopold's long and generally fruitful reign for Belgium can be broken down into three phases. The first, from 1831-1839, was a period of political and economic instability, as Belgium was not able to define her borders or utilize her industrial strength and lived in constant, albeit distant, fear of another Dutch invasion. The second period, from 1839-1850, was generally considered the high point in Leopold's reign as he assumed his chosen role as the new king of the Belgians and as a neutral arbiter for Europe as it entered the dangerous period before and after the revolutions of 1848. It was also during this period that Leopold began his most aggressive push for Belgian colonies. The last period, from approximately 1850 until his death in 1865, was one of slow withdrawal and physical decline as he began to see the limitations of his power in Europe. Belgium continued to prosper, however, requiring his guidance less and less.

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<sup>106</sup>Joanna Richardson, *My Dearest Uncle - Leopold I of the Belgians* (Oxford: Johnathan Cape, 1961), 67-73.

<sup>107</sup>He was occasionally referred to derisively by members of the British nobility as Prince "*peu a peu*", "little has little", "a nobody with nothing" This name was supposedly given to him by George IV.

<sup>108</sup>It was said that he rejected the crown of Greece because it was too far from England. Richardson, 109.

During this first period, from his inauguration in 1831 to the signing of the final treaty separating Belgium from Holland in 1839, Leopold went about the business of creating Belgium and Belgian kingship.<sup>109</sup> After his initial military action and the withdrawal of Dutch troops in 1831 removed the immediate threat of invasion, he began the process of constructing a Belgian government.

One of the most difficult tasks Leopold faced throughout his kingship was maintaining a balance between France and England. It was clear that the interest of Louis-Philippe in the Belgian provinces had not ended with the treaty with Holland, and a new Bourbon plot was always a possibility. His time and association with England and his marriage to Charlotte, however, created the need to balance the French perception that his loyalties lay with England<sup>110</sup> and thus nullified the presumption of Belgian neutrality. This was a situation that had to be addressed in a manner acceptable to all, especially the French king.

On August 9, 1832, Leopold married Louise-Marie Thérèse Charlotte Isabelle d'Orleans, the oldest daughter of King Louis-Philippe of France. This marriage, which was reasonably happy as royal marriages go, lasted almost twenty years and produced four children, one of which would become the future King Leopold II. Leopold spent his next thirty-five years carefully balancing the need for protection and debt he and Belgium owed to Palmerston and Britain despite the very French nature of Belgium..

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<sup>109</sup>What it took to create a nation and a sense of nation, especially in Belgium's case was difficult. See Stengers and Gubin, 7-28.

<sup>110</sup>“My fate is bound up with that of England, and whatever befalls the green isle, I shall not easily abandon it.” Leopold to the Archduke John in Richardson, 71.

The nature of Leopold's relationship with Victoria began to change during this period. Since he was no longer in England, their relationship was mostly in the form of almost daily correspondence<sup>111</sup> as opposed to personal visits. It was still his dream to somehow rule indirectly or at least exercise significant influence over England, by regency if necessary.<sup>112</sup> Stockmar also exerted his influence over the future queen, but there are indications that his loyalty in the early 1830s shifted from Leopold to Victoria, and especially Albert, at least where British affairs were concerned.

Leopold's relationship with Palmerston obviously began with Palmerston's creation of the state of Belgium,<sup>113</sup> approval of Leopold's kingship, and his continuing interest in the avowed neutrality of the country, as his fear of a resurgent France never abated. Palmerston's relationship with Leopold began to grow in the late 1830s despite what Palmerston perceived was an undue influence on the future Queen Victoria by her uncle. By 1839, however, it was clear that, at least for a short period, both Victoria and Palmerston agreed and united against Leopold in forcing him to accept the treaty with Holland, thus settling for less than he and the Belgian people had hoped for.

I regret to learn that you are still not easy about your own affairs, but trust all will be speedily adjusted. You always allow me, dear Uncle, to speak frankly to you; you will, therefore, I hope, not be displeased if I venture to make a few observations on one or two parts of your letter.

You say that the anger of the Belgians is principally directed against England. Now, I must that you are very unjust towards us, and (if I could) I might say even a little angry with you, dear Uncle. We only *pressed* Belgium for her *own* good, and *not* for ours. It may seem hard at

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<sup>111</sup> According to Miss Pamela Clark, Registrar of the Royal Archives at Windsor Castle the correspondence of King Leopold and Queen Victoria contains approximately ten thousand letters.

<sup>112</sup> Leopold was instrumental in the marriage of his sister, Victoria Mary Louisa, to the Duke of Kent. Any children would be next in line for the British crown. Her name was Alexandrina Victoria.

<sup>113</sup> Palmerston always claimed that his greatest achievement was the creation of Belgium. Richardson, 214.

first, but the time will come when you will see that we were right in urging you not to delay any longer the signature of the treaty.<sup>114</sup>

Palmerston's distrust of Leopold intensified after the marriage of Leopold's nephew, Albert, to Victoria in 1840. Palmerston feared an increasing threat to Britain from not only Leopold and Stockmar's Germanic influence but from Albert as well.<sup>115</sup> Leopold would continue to feel that Palmerston forced his diplomacy on other countries and he warned Victoria that it would eventually harm both he and England.

But Palmerston likes to put his foot on their necks! Now, no statesman must triumph over an enemy that is not quite dead, because people forget a real loss, a real misfortune, but they won't forget *an insult*. Napoleon made great mistakes that way; he hated Prussia, insulted it on all occasions, but still *left it alive*. The consequence was that in 1813 they rose to a man in Prussia, even children and women took arms, because they had been treated with *contempt* and *insulted*.<sup>116</sup>

Leopold continued to run at cross purposes with Palmerston until the end of their lives.<sup>117</sup> Palmerston first and foremost stood for a strong and resolute Britain. His England was the most powerful nation on earth, and he knew it. Leopold was a German who was king of Belgium; nation and king were very insecure. The apogee of Leopold's influence on Victoria, and thereby England, was the marriage of his nephew Albert to Victoria in 1840.

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<sup>114</sup> Victoria to Leopold, 9 April 1839, in Arthur Benson, *Letters of Queen Victoria*, 3 vols. (London: J. Murray, 1908), 1:151.

<sup>115</sup> Jasper Godwin Ridley, *Lord Palmerston* (New York: Dutton, 1971). 3-5 & 21.

<sup>116</sup> Benson, 1:233.

<sup>117</sup> Palmerston died on October 18, 1865. Leopold died on December 10, 1865.

During the first half of his reign, Leopold's efforts within Belgium itself seemed to stress the need for a country with a “more robust national spirit.”<sup>118</sup> To Leopold this meant, along with many other activities, the creation of colonial opportunities. There are few references to colonial adventures that have appeared in the written record,<sup>119</sup> there are mentions of the advantages and necessities of colonial enterprises in general, although there was a distinct bias in favor of such enterprises in Central America.<sup>120</sup> Leopold's difficulty was that he was neither able to convince the chambers nor the people that colonialism was to Belgium's advantage. His call for colonial endeavors were met with the response stated by one senator in the Chambers “What good is to look far away for outlets, when here, in our own area there are consumers”<sup>121</sup> Additionally, Leopold's interests in terms of imperialistic matters such as Santo Tomas, the Nicaraguan protectorate, and a transoceanic canal seemed destined to run counter to the policies of both Britain and the United States. Although he explained these colonial efforts as an attempt to end poverty and overpopulation, he was never able to do so and was often looked upon as an opportunist in terms of Belgian expansion.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>118</sup>Theodore Juste, *Memoirs of Leopold I, King of the Belgians* (London: S. Low & Martson, 1868), 194.

<sup>119</sup>“If we had some sense here other than to quarrel for miserable places we should buy some of the colonies of the Portuguese, it would do an immense amount of good for many of our young officers who we have no means of employing usefully, we want elbow room and it is not probable we shall get it in Europe.” Leopold to Victoria, 26 March 1847, APR, copy, original by permission of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, at RA (RA VIC/Y 73/35).

<sup>120</sup>Juste, 184.

<sup>121</sup>“A quoi bon chercher des débouchés au loin, alors que, dans des contrées proches, il y a déjà des consommateurs” Bronne, Carlo, *Léopold Ier et son temps* (Brussels: Les Ceuvres, 1942), 189.

<sup>122</sup>Roderick Braithwaite, *Palmerston and Africa the Rio Nunez Affair: Competition, Diplomacy and Justice* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 119.

After the diplomatic battles in 1848 and 1849 caused him to lose face in Europe,<sup>123</sup> and with the death of his wife on October 11, 1850, Leopold began a steady withdrawal into himself and began to divorce himself from everyday involvement in the Belgian government. He did, however, continue to attempt to place additional members of his Coburg family on the thrones of Europe.<sup>124</sup> These efforts gave rise to the designation by Bismarck referring to Leopold and the House of Coburg as the "stud farm of Europe."

Leopold first laid eyes on Alexandrina Victoria on May 31, 1819, seven days after her birth. In the dozen years between her birth and Leopold's accession to the Belgian throne, Leopold and Victoria became very close. She referred to him as "my dearest uncle" and him to her, "my dearest love." Initially speaking only German until age three, Drina, as she was referred to, spent what she later described as a lonely and unhappy life.<sup>125</sup> During the first twelve years of her life Leopold was one of her closest relatives, and along with Stockmar, one of her few male acquaintances. The relationship between Leopold and Victoria remained close, although fluid in its nature, all their lives. Her attachment to Stockmar grew even stronger as she approached her marriage with Albert, Leopold's nephew.

After his coronation, the physical distance between Leopold and Victoria gave ample time for the Victoria to begin to see that she could exist and especially rule without her uncle. After 1831, the correspondence between the two became more

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<sup>123</sup>Leopold's attempts to negotiate during the Revolutions of 1848 were perceived as betraying Belgium's neutrality which caused him to contemplate resignation in 1848.

<sup>124</sup>The House of Coburg eventually had members in the royal families of England, Spain, Portugal, Hungary, Bulgaria and Austria.

frequent, but Victoria began to search for other individuals in her surroundings who she could trust. After her coronation in 1837, Victoria began to place more and more confidence, and, it has been alleged, a minor romantic interest, in Viscount Melbourne, her Prime Minister (1837-1841). Over the next two to three years, in an attempt to increase her independence as the Queen of England, Victoria increased her reliance on Lord Melbourne, to the detriment of Leopold. Sensing this growing and palpable influence, Leopold sent to the queen his closest associate, advisor and Victoria's childhood acquaintance, Stockmar. Leopold would not easily let his dreams of being the power behind the throne slip away.

Beginning in the late 1830s, as a result of the final negotiations for Belgian independence and the continuing effects of a severe economic downturn, Leopold began to feel that his power to influence Victoria was diminishing. Leopold understood this most clearly when he attempted to influence the British government, and more particularly Victoria and Palmerston, regarding the final terms of the peace treaty between Belgium and Holland in 1839. Leopold felt Belgium was being forced to give up claims to too much territory. He complained to Victoria and requested her help. Victoria's response was respectful yet swift; this subject was something she and her Prime Minister, Melbourne, were fully capable of understanding. The territorial division was in Belgium's and Leopold's long-term best interests she retorted, and he needed to accept it. Leopold's exhortations to his niece that she should always do what was best and avoid outside pressure had been learned all too well. Beginning in 1837 and

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<sup>125</sup>Victoria and others, 10-11.

continuing through the end of the 1830s, Leopold began to be increasingly concerned with continental problems as he attempted to solidify Belgium's border and to walk the tightrope between England and France as king of neutral Belgium. The growing influence of Melbourne and the continuing opposition of Palmerston resulted in an increasing feeling of isolation on Leopold's part.

By 1839, Leopold felt that there was no way he could salvage his relationship with his niece. It was at this time, however, that he successfully maneuvered his nephew, Albert, into a second meeting with Victoria,<sup>126</sup> and they were married soon after. The relationship between Leopold, Victoria, and Albert became so close that the Belgian royal family began to spend weeks of every year in London to the great consternation of the cabinet, especially Palmerston.

Fortunately for the King of the Belgians, his growing dislike of Palmerston was soon shared by both the young queen and her new husband, Albert. Palmerston was concerned with the Germanic influence on the queen by her husband, Albert; her mother, Victoria; her uncle Leopold; and her private secretary, Stockmar. His actions, although clearly, at least in his opinion, in the best interests of England, often seemed to cross paths with those of Victoria and certainly Leopold. Palmerston often went days without responding to the queen's written requests, ignoring others, and sometimes even intercepting and opening letters to the queen. The relationship between the queen

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<sup>126</sup>The first meeting between Victoria and Albert did not go very well as she did not find him of any real interest. It took Leopold's persistence, and the rejection of another suitor from the Prussian Royal family, to convince Victoria to have a second meeting with Albert which obviously went quite well.

and Palmerston reached a climax in 1851 with Palmerston's resignation at Victoria's insistence. Although short-lived, Victoria's glee was hard to suppress.<sup>127</sup>

Victoria's reign continued on a positive note despite the unpopular and short-lived termination of Palmerston. She and Albert, with the ubiquitous Stockmar in the background<sup>128</sup> were constantly on the defensive regarding what was perceived as their pro-German stance and influence and purported meddling by Leopold. Despite these difficulties, Albert was generally able to overcome these biases and eventually won the respect of the English people. However, Albert died quite unexpectedly in 1861, an event which cast Victoria into mourning until her death.<sup>129</sup>

In later years Palmerston and Victoria reconciled sufficiently for her to twice approve of him as prime minister. Stockmar left for Coburg and became increasingly occupied with German unification until his death in 1863. Leopold's influence over Victoria slowly declined as the relationship of student and teacher gave way to one of sovereign and respected, but elderly uncle. It simply became more difficult for Leopold to maintain interest in both England and Belgium while simultaneously playing the Nestor of Europe. The changing relationship between Victoria and Leopold was looked upon with approval by both Palmerston and the Cabinet. Palmerston was clearly his own man.

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<sup>127</sup>“ My dearest Uncle,- I have the greatest pleasure in announcing to you a piece of news which I know will give you as much satisfaction and relief as it does to us, and will do to the *whole* of the world. *Lord Palmerston is no longer Foreign Secretary*—and Lord Granville has already named his successor!” Victoria to Leopold, 23 December, 1851, in Benson, 2:345.

<sup>128</sup>“...his spiritual son...” Pierre Crabitès, *Victoria's Guardian Angel; a Study of Baron Stockmar*, 1st. ed. (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1938), 212.

<sup>129</sup>Queen Victoria allegedly had a relationship with her servant John Brown many years after the death of Albert. Although there is no definitive evidence of the relationship it was seemingly verified by the

Henry John Temple, the third Viscount Palmerston, was one of the most influential British foreign secretaries and prime ministers of the nineteenth century, perhaps the height of Britain's power. Palmerston's early governmental career spanned approximately twenty years between 1807 and 1828 when he served as Secretary of War and Chancellor of the Exchequer. Neither of these positions would have been expected to produce one of the greatest foreign policy masters in British history. They gave Palmerston an incredible sense of detail and comprehension, and this, along with his incisive tongue, created an air of invincibility and fear unmatched by his contemporaries, as he drove his career as foreign minister and prime minister from 1830 through his death in 1865.

Palmerston is generally remembered for his creation of the kingdom of Belgium and his concept of British power and the international rights of its citizens, *civis Britannicus sum*. One of Palmerston's first difficulties, upon his appointment as foreign minister in 1830, was the Belgian problem. From the start Palmerston stood for the position that the primary tenet of British foreign policy was to prevent a resurgent France, either as its ally or opponent. It was from this position that he backed the creation of the state of Belgium from the United Kingdom of the Netherlands in 1831. A neutral Belgium, protected by England and/or the Quadruple Alliance, would remove the temptation from France to incorporate these French speakers into France as it had done in 1795. It was also from this foreign policy prospective that in 1839 he was able

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minister who performed the marriage. Victoria was supposedly buried with mementos of both her husband, Albert, and Mr. Brown.

to engineer the final end of the Belgian-Dutch dispute, despite the vehement protests of Leopold.

Palmerston's early relationship with the queen was quite cordial. He initially spent time explaining foreign policy and governmental workings to the new queen, while simultaneously teaching her how to play chess. The rift that developed and grew between Palmerston and the queen was essentially one of personality. Both were intensely strong-minded, obstinate, and sure of their position, and therefore they were bound to clash. Victoria viewed her position as queen to mean that she was the executive head of the British government, and Palmerston viewed the monarchy on a more ceremonial, although respectful, basis.

Palmerston was always concerned about what he perceived was the overly Germanic influence exercised by Leopold, Stockmar, and Albert over the queen. As his time in office and political power began to grow, Palmerston, also known as Lord "Pumice Stone" to his enemies, began to espouse what many felt was an overly aggressive view of British power and the concept of international personal sovereignty of the British citizen everywhere in the world. He is generally considered the originator of gunboat diplomacy with his use of the British navy to further British policy. Throughout his career, spanning over thirty-five years as both foreign minister and prime minister, the more conservative elements of Europe, which sometimes included Victoria and Leopold, generally considered him a grave danger to peace and the European order. Palmerston was generally thought of as aggressive, dangerous,

bellicose, and sometimes treasonous.<sup>130</sup> He was, however, immensely popular with the British public.

His relationship with Leopold went from practical acceptance of his position as king of the Belgians to a growing distrust of his attempts to control both Victoria and later Albert. Despite this growing sense of distrust between the two men, Leopold generally heeded, if not respected, Palmerston's opinion, especially in response to Belgium's attempted colonial adventures.

An overview of the majority of the correspondence between Victoria and Palmerston and Leopold and Palmerston does not seem to indicate that Leopold attempted or was successful in pressuring England in respect to Belgian colonialism through Victoria, and certainly not through Palmerston. Belgian interests in Central America, in a Transamerica canal project and a protectorate in Honduras, received Palmerston's attention and his quick response to what he considered to be the inopportune attempts to project Belgian power.<sup>131</sup> Palmerston's continuous distrust of what he considered the Germanic element, its relationship to the queen, and his attempts to arrest it resulted in his termination in 1851 at Victoria's request, although it was a short-lived victory. As Leopold began to fade from the European scene in the late 1850s, with Stockmar's return to Germany about the same time, and with Albert's death

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<sup>130</sup>“Palmerston, the most feared, the most hated and the most admired statesman in Europe...” Herbert C. F. Bell, *Lord Palmerston* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1966), 26.

<sup>131</sup>“The Foreign Office announced the opposition of the entire British Cabinet to the idea,...and reminded Brussels that the Belgium's limited military and naval resources were insufficient to guarantee the integrity of a protectorate” , Schwemmer, "Belgium and the Nicaraguan Canal Project (1841-1845)", 301.

in 1861, Palmerston was able to exercise his office as prime minister free from intervention by the royal family and its Germanic influence, perceived or otherwise.

Palmerston's place in British diplomatic and political history seems to be assured; he is generally considered one of the most successful British prime ministers and certainly one of her finest foreign secretaries in terms of his preservation of the British Empire. He has often been compared to Disraeli, Gladstone, and Churchill in terms of his influence on British politics. Palmerston's difficulties arose from a combination of factors that included an independent streak bordering on recklessness. His position was that of a liberal (although certainly not a democrat) in an era of conservatism that had prevailed since the Congress of Vienna. He believed in the use of British power and in liberal, although not democratic ideas.<sup>132</sup> These were not positions shared by Victoria, Leopold, Albert, or Stockmar. Stockmar was especially concerned with the balance between monarchy, constitution, and the nation state as he returned to the German States in hopes of the creation of a single, united German nation.

Christian Friedrich von Stockmar was born on August 22, 1787 in Coburg. He had been trained as a physician, and it was in this capacity that in 1816 he became associated with Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha. It was also in his capacity as physician that he went to London with Leopold upon Leopold's anticipated marriage to Princess Charlotte. Stockmar was with Leopold when the princess and her male child died in 1817. It was at the time of this deep personal loss to Leopold that Stockmar

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<sup>132</sup>Victoria and others, 22.

pledged his loyalty for life to the future Belgian king, and this pledge was to mark their relationship for the rest of their lives.

It was Stockmar who persuaded Leopold not to leave England and convinced him to stay there for the next thirteen years. As a result, Leopold began to feel increasingly comfortable and became well known among the British nobility and gentry. Stockmar reported that Leopold began an intensive process of reading and learning about Britain and began to identify himself with England. He was with Leopold when his sister Victoria married the Duke of Kent, a marriage that produced the future British Queen Victoria. He recorded in his memoirs that because of the debts of the Duke of Kent, who had died a mere eight months after the birth of his daughter, Leopold had agreed to pay a yearly pension to his sister of 3,000 pounds per year out of the 50,000-pound pension he had received from the British government as a result of his marriage to the now deceased Charlotte.

Leopold and Stockmar, by virtue of their presence in England and Leopold's generosity, were constantly present and influential upon, the young Victoria as she grew up without a father and at the largess of her uncle Leopold. She often stayed at his estate at Claremont. Stockmar always had a deep and abiding interest in the welfare of the future Queen Victoria and was instrumental in her marriage to Albert. He later continued his services as advisor and counselor to the queen and her consort during some of the most difficult years of Victoria's early marriage.

Although often distrusted as part of the German influence on Victoria, and by proxy on British policy, Stockmar was almost universally acclaimed as a disinterested,

if not necessarily approved, influence on the royal family.<sup>133</sup> Stockmar, however, may not have held a reciprocal opinion on Palmerston.<sup>134</sup> Palmerston, who spent his entire career trying to fend off German influences and could be somewhat xenophobic, found Stockmar to be an individual of marked even headedness, which he found unusual in a foreigner. In fact, despite his oath of loyalty to Leopold, Stockmar often advised courses of action that were detrimental to the aims of Leopold if he thought Leopold's motives compromised the integrity of either England or Victoria.

The question is what, if anything, did the unique relationship among these individuals have on the attempted colonialism of Belgium? Did Leopold try to use his unique relationship with his niece Victoria through Stockmar and his nephew to his benefit? Did his experience in the royal court and close association with the British ruling and political classes' aid or limit his designs? Lastly, and perhaps most succinctly what were Leopold's colonial designs?

Before looking at the individual Belgian attempts at colonization in the nineteenth century, it is worthwhile to discuss the levels or kinds of colonialism and the questions surrounding Belgian colonialism that were debated during this time within the Belgian Foreign office and royal household. It can be argued that the Belgian government, other than Leopold, at least during this time period, may have been the only European country to have engaged in colonialism without engaging in imperialism. In view of this apparent contradiction with my earlier definitions, an explanation is required. Imperialism was previously defined as the political, economic, and military

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<sup>133</sup>Ibid., 23 and 47.

control or domination of one nation over another noncontiguous area or nation without the free consent of the people contained therein. Colonialism was defined as imperialism with the added transplantation of people from the dominating nation to live in what becomes a colony..

There are various levels of imperialism exercised by Europe during the New Imperialism. But an examination of Belgian efforts during this period seems to indicate that Belgium may have been attempting to undertake colonialism without imperialism. Is that possible? There is some evidence from the three different eras of imperialism to support colonialism without some form of imperialism.<sup>135</sup> These periods show three major variations of imperial/colonial rule: direct colonial control; a protectorate, formal or otherwise, where local rulers remained in place and were directed from afar; and a sphere of influence which entitled the citizens of the mother country to special economic privileges, access to their own legal system, extraterritoriality, and small areas given over to them for their own private use. An analysis of the four attempts by Belgium to create colonies in Texas, Guatemala, Brazil, and Guinea does not seem to fit any of these.<sup>136</sup> Leopold's ambition, however, may well fit the definition of imperialism.

If the king was willing but not focused, if the relationship among Belgium, England, and France was problematic, if the chambers were hesitant at best, if the

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<sup>134</sup>“And the trusty Stockmar, who said boldly that Palmerston was insane,...” Corti, 222.

<sup>135</sup>It can be argued that the initial British colonies on the North American mainland were not imperialistic exercises by Britain. They were individual and group immigration for personal and religious reasons. This rapidly changed as Britain soon viewed the colonies as a valid check on Spanish, French and Dutch overseas expansion.

business sector was shortsighted and greedy, and the people only questionably motivated, what pushed Belgium into the colonial world? Was there any focused, thoughtful analysis given to the reality of Belgium and the quest for colonies?

In 1841, a minor official in the Belgian embassy in London, Charles Drouet, prepared a logical analysis of colonialism, its relevance to Belgium, and how the nation might analyze any opportunities that presented themselves. His analysis<sup>137</sup> (paraphrased) was as follows:

1. When and how is a colony useful?
2. When and how is a useful colony more of a burden than it is worth?
3. Is Belgium in a position to undertake colonial development?
4. What is the best colonial system?
5. If all of the above questions are answered satisfactorily, where do you find a suitable area?<sup>138</sup>

This is a truly systematic and analytical way to look at the question of whether, if, and how to undertake Belgian colonialism. Was it used, and if so, by whom? The document itself appears to have been conceived by Drouet on his own but with the knowledge of the foreign office. Did it ever influence Belgian development? Given the way colonization was undertaken, it does not appear that it did. Did it reach the foreign

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<sup>136</sup>All the Belgian colonial attempts seem to have been colonial adventures in the mind of all but Leopold and a few of his associates.

<sup>137</sup>“De l’importance du commerce extérieur en général et de sa situation en Belgique.” AMAE 2040.

<sup>138</sup>AMAE 2040. For an in depth discussion of Drouets analysis see L. Greindl, “Les Possibilités De La Belgique De Léopold I<sup>er</sup> Comme Puissance Coloniale (D’après un document de 1841),” *L’Expansion belge sous Léopold Ier, 1831-1865; recueil d’études. De Belgische expansie onder Leopold I, 1831-1865; verzameling studies*, (1965). 180-198.

minister (probably)? Did it reach the king (probably not)?<sup>139</sup> There was a great deal of confusion and lack of clarity, not to mention disinterest, in terms of governmental oversight over these colonial adventures. This may account for the likelihood that the document was read at the ministry but promptly ignored. There seems to be very little indication that Leopold ever saw it, as he would have probably used its logic and method to push for colonial efforts. He certainly does not seem to have done this. It was an opportunity that, properly used, could have changed the outcome. It was probably simply ignored and filed in the foreign office as the unsolicited work of a junior diplomat.

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<sup>139</sup>Leopold never articulated any organized plan for colonization in any work reviewed by this author.

## CHAPTER 3

### TEXAS

Two different and distinctive concepts of what the overseas expansion of Belgium should encompass surfaced within the driving forces behind Belgian colonial efforts. Leopold seems to have had a more imperialistic view of the need for colonies and empire. To Leopold, colonies were a representation or extension of the nation state. In this regard, he was ahead of his time by two or three decades. The reluctant cabinet and chambers, on the other hand, seem to have held a more mundane view that consisted of the economic and demographic benefits of colonies—if there was any benefit at all.

The difference between the colony at Santo Tomas and the colonial inquiry into the Republic of Texas may illustrate these two different concepts. Both were attempts to create a colony in North America. They were roughly contemporary in their initial aspects and contacts. Santo Tomas lasted for fifteen years because it was a real colony with real colonists and, as it turned out, had real problems. Texas, however, never went beyond the initial inquiry and preliminary investigative stage. The value of the Texas attempt lies in the fact that it is a relatively simple and well documented event.

There is some question, when looking at the record, as to whether Leopold was seeking colonies, empire, or merely outlets for Belgian industry and a growing population in terms of his interest in the Republic of Texas. There is sufficient

information, however, to allow a discussion in this regard. One thing that becomes evident is that sometimes opportunity and chance, more often than desire and planning, made the final determination as to colony, commercial venture, or nothing at all. This was certainly the case in Texas. The Belgian interest in the Republic, especially when viewed against the interests of the United States and Britain in Texas, and the Belgian and British opportunities in Mexico, would require that decisions and actions be made on the basis of sound field work in the areas of interest and a constant supply of deft and accurate political intelligence.

The earliest contacts between the Republic of Texas and Belgium occurred in 1837 with the republic's request for diplomatic recognition by Belgium. The initial response of the Belgian government was to wait and see. Initially, the question was whether the Republic would survive and secondly, how it would impact the ongoing negotiations with Mexico for a commercial treaty. The Belgian attempt to place a colony in the Republic of Texas must be viewed from three different perspectives. The first was the desire for a solid commercial treaty with Mexico. The second was the potential problem of how a colony would impact the United States and Britain. The third was the contemporary Belgian colony in Guatemala.

The deft use of political intelligence contributed to the continuing Belgian colonial interests in Mexico and, by extension, the Republic of Texas. During the 1830s, Belgian naturalists were involved in substantial research in Mexico that no doubt contributed to the knowledge, political or otherwise, that allowed it to assess its colonial

and commercial chances in that country.<sup>140</sup> Although Zacatecas, Veracruz, and the Yucatan peninsula in Mexico did not become the site of any Belgian colonies, commercial relations between the two countries, especially in regard to the establishment of transatlantic shipping and other commercial ventures, became an ongoing process throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth century. The colonial ventures in Mexico apparently petered out due to a lack of interest by the general public in migrating to Mexico and the general withdrawal of Leopold as the failure of the Santo Tomas colony became increasingly evident. Although hundreds of Belgians, especially artisans, did move to Mexico, the failure of the Belgian government to pursue these colonial ventures and the anti-colonial attitude by Mexico—especially as a result of the revolution in Texas—resulted in immigration, but not colonization.<sup>141</sup>

In 1839 the interest of the Belgian government again shifted to Texas<sup>142</sup> as a result of the actions of General James Hamilton, the Loan Commissioner of Texas.<sup>143</sup> Hamilton's mission had been to gain diplomatic recognition and a substantial loan from Britain and France. What he received in 1840 was only a treaty of recognition and trade from France, but no money. After several unsuccessful attempts to conclude a treaty

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<sup>140</sup>Jan Possemiers, "Naturalistes Belges au Mexique (1830-1840)," in Eddy Stols, ed., *Les Belges et le Mexique: dix contributions à la histoire des relations Belgique-Mexique*, Avisos De Flandres, (Leuven: Presses universitaires de Louvain, 1993), 31-35.

<sup>141</sup>Jan Possemiers, "Les Relations Belgique-Mexique (1830-1864)," in Eddy Stols ed., *Les Belges et le Mexique: dix contributions à la histoire des relations Belgique-Mexique*, Avisos De Flandres, (Leuven: Presses universitaires de Louvain, 1993), 9-29.

<sup>142</sup>The initial suggestion was at the behest of Lewis Cass United States ambassador to France. George Pierce Garrison, *Diplomatic Correspondence of the Republic of Texas* (Washington: G.P.O., 1908), 3:1266.

<sup>143</sup>James Hamilton was chosen because of his military record during the Texas Revolution, his willingness to take on the mission to Europe initially on his own funds and lastly because there was a substantial commission of ten percent attached to any successful loan amounts he was able to negotiate and the Republic was eventually able to receive. His title was Commissioner of Loans for the Republic.

with Belgium, Hamilton was successful in interesting Sylvain de Van De Weyer and Leopold in sending an agent to Texas to take a firsthand look at the Republic. Before the agent, Victor Pirson, was dispatched, Hamilton sent a letter to Van de Weyer<sup>144</sup> outlining his proposition to provide reduced duty rates on certain Belgian exports to Texas, as well as certain navigation and duty privileges. In return Belgium "...should guarantee a public loan for the Republic of Texas, of 37 millions of francs, redeemable in 15 years, by the operation of a sinking fund, bearing interest of 6%..."<sup>145</sup> to be secured by various lands, taxes, revenues, and other collateral. Leopold and Hamilton met, but nothing was concluded.

Not deterred, Hamilton wrote to the Belgian foreign minister, Count de Briey, two letters, one day apart, attempting to increase Belgian interest. He first offered the possibility of a country-to-country agreement on several previously discussed treaty points and added a mysterious "and more."<sup>146</sup> On October 21, 1841, Hamilton again wrote to de Briey and substantially increased the bait:

The supply of Fire Arms, Munitions of War and Steam Machinery to Liege alone will be worth the guarantee, whilst to the Cotton, Linen and Woolen Manufacturers of Belgium, and to the trade and navigation of Antwerp the boon will be greatly augmented in value – to say nothing of, probably, an ultimate territorial acquisition. (underlining mine) In case of war with England and the United States, Texas will be the Entrepot between these two great countries, for the import of manufactures and the export of cotton – Belgium in a preferred and protected trade, would have the carrying trade, between the Belligerents at least to Texas and supply the whole valley of the Mississippi in the United States with the products of her industry.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>144</sup>Hamilton to Van de Weyer, 6 October 1841, AMAE 2118.

<sup>145</sup>Ibid.

<sup>146</sup>Hamilton to de Briey, 20 October 1841, AMAE 2118.

<sup>147</sup>Hamilton to de Briey, 21 October 1841, AMAE 2118.

The letter seemed to imply some type of territorial transfer, although it is certainly not specific. Additionally, Hamilton was somewhat circumspect in his communications back to Texas, stating, "...from the arrangements I have made with the Belgian Gov't, our relations with that Country will be intimate and of a highly profitable character."<sup>148</sup>

It is apparent that Leopold felt, despite the relative newness of both his reign and the Belgian state in general, that he and his government were capable of handling the international aspects of colonial negotiation with the Republic of Texas. He also knew that sound, hands-on knowledge of this potential colony would be necessary. Based upon Hamilton's representations and the rising specter of a colony in Texas, Leopold reacted to the recommendation of Hamilton and agreed with the need for a firsthand look at Texas. In 1841 he appointed Victor Pirson, a 32-year-old artillery captain, for this purpose.<sup>149</sup>

Pirson's appointment was effective November 12, 1841, and he departed on his mission to the Republic of Texas on December 4, 1841. He landed in Boston on December 21, 1841 and immediately left for New York. Upon arriving in Washington, D.C., he met President Tyler in the White House on New Year's Day, 1842, leaving some presidential consternation in his wake regarding the purpose of his visit. He continued traveling through Charleston and New Orleans, finally arriving in Galveston on January 25, 1842. His stay in Texas lasted approximately three months. During that

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<sup>148</sup>Garrison, 3: 1527.

<sup>149</sup>The records of the Archives du ministère des Affaires Etrangères et due Commerce Étranger, do not provide any additional information as to Pirson's exact orders. The commission by Leopold I only indicates that he was on a special mission.

time, Pirson traveled to Galveston, Houston, Austin, and San Antonio, returning to Galveston in late March of 1842 and eventually departing for Brussels sometime in the latter part of April of that year. During this stay Pirson wrote over a dozen letters to the Belgian Foreign Office, specifically to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Count de Briery.<sup>150</sup>

Almost immediately upon his arrival in Galveston, he received word that the Republic had rescinded its offer of land for loan.<sup>151</sup> Pirson continued his mission, however, with the intent of obtaining as much information relative to the Republic's commercial viability as he could amass during the next two to three months. The investigation would be beneficial whether or not the colonial option was viable. Upon his return to Belgium, favorably impressed with the possibility of a Texas colony or at least increased commercial ties, Pirson continued his support of the colonial venture in a continuing correspondence with both Belgian and Texas representatives.<sup>152</sup> Pirson's report on his trip was relatively short by the standards of the Belgian colonization company in Guatemala and Brazil. It was, in effect, a study of the early and future State of Texas by a modern European explorer and neocolonial scout.

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<sup>150</sup>During Pirson's assignment with the Texas treaty/colonization question, he wrote approximately 38 letters to Comte de Briey, Foreign Minister. Pirson numbered all his correspondence from 1-38 and according to his enumeration letters 8 through 19 were written during his trip to Texas. Only letter 18 is missing.

<sup>151</sup>...the report of the Finance-Commission of the House of Representatives deciding to repeal the law authorizing a loan of five million dollars, and revocation of the powers granted to the commission to negotiate this loan." Pirson to de Briey, 18 January 1842, 2013 and BL.

<sup>152</sup>Despite his reassignment from his duties in Texas, a reading of the letters after his return, seems to indicate that he remained dedicated to at least the commercial advantages of a treaty with Texas if not the possibilities of a Belgian colony.

It is from Pirson's letters during his stay in the Republic and his final report that we may be able to see why he was chosen, what he was looking for, and what he found. This in turn may provide insight into Leopold's and Belgium's expectations.

If the letters of Pirson produced a brief whirlwind tour of historically valid insights, especially in the economic and political state of Texas, it is Pirson's final report that presents the reader with original observations and reflections on the early Republic of Texas. It is through these two sources that we will view his mission.

There are no records that reflect the reasons for Pirson's choice. An analysis of Pirson's military record,<sup>153</sup> however, reveals a career spanning approximately twenty-eight years, beginning with the Belgian Revolution of 1830 and ending with his retirement as a colonel in 1858. In a summary of his career attached to his military jacket, it is noted that Pirson volunteered on September 20, 1830 to join the Belgian Revolution and was commissioned a Lieutenant in the artillery. The artillery corps of most European armies generally produced officers closer in training to engineers than combat officers. Their studies generally included more science and engineering in the technical aspects of weapons, fortifications, ammunition, etc. This would have given Pirson at least a presumed inclination toward exactness and scientific objectivity. Several observations in his letters<sup>154</sup> and final report<sup>155</sup> seem to validate this assumption.

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<sup>153</sup>The Archives du Musée royal de l'Armée et d'Histoire Militaire, Ministère de la Défense maintains the military jacket of every soldier who ever served in the military.

<sup>154</sup>Pirson to de Briey, 15 January 1842, 2013 and BL.

<sup>155</sup>Ibid. and Pirson to de Briey, 8 February 1842, AMAE 2013 and BL.

Specifically in his letter of February 3, 1838,<sup>156</sup> Pirson seemed to lay particular claim to his competence in technical matters. The military record further notes that, in addition to Pirson's technical and observational abilities, he apparently possessed diplomatic and international experience. Prior to his assignment on his "special mission" to Texas, Pirson had been assigned to the Belgian Legation to the Ottoman Court in Constantinople and as a Belgian liaison in New York. Based upon this information, Pirson appears to have been carefully chosen for both his scientific and diplomatic skills.<sup>157</sup>

In general, his writings emphasized the land and its ability to be utilized commercially, as well as the agricultural and commercial potential of the Republic. His writings exhibit a very strong pro-Anglo-American bias.<sup>158</sup> Over and over he commented on the beauty of the American and Texas landscapes. He was awestruck by the fecundity and natural fertility of the land and the apparently almost limitless potential it presented as a future agricultural community.<sup>159</sup> Pirson proposed that the Republic, as it grew, would surely provide an almost constantly expanding outlet for Belgian goods. Although Belgium had only been a nation state for barely a dozen years, it already had an increasing population of approximately three and a half million people and an over extended industrial base which was in dire need of markets and demand. The Republic of Texas, on the other hand, had a relatively small population

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<sup>156</sup>Pirson, 3 February 1838, AMAE 2013 and BL.

<sup>157</sup>The summary of Pirson's career contained within his military jacket stated: "Few men have had more diverse careers with more remarkable variety of aptitudes." "*Peu d'hommes nt [sic] rempli plus de carrières diverses avec une plus remarquable variété d'aptitudes.*" AMRAHM.

<sup>158</sup>Pirson to de Briey, 15 January 1842, AMAE 2013 and BL.

<sup>159</sup>Ibid. and Pirson to de Briey, 8 February 1842, AMAE 2013 and BL.

(Pirson estimated between 75,000 and 100,000) but with a continuing influx of immigrants.<sup>160</sup> To Pirson's mind, independent of its suitability as a Belgian colony, Texas had excellent potential as a future market for Belgian goods. Increasing population meant increasing market size.

He related that although the Republic provided access to all its records, there were very few records to access, resulting in the constant need for him to gather additional information on his own. This information was predominantly gleaned from the foreign traders and consular officials in residence in the Republic.<sup>161</sup> Especially useful to Pirson in the colonial and commercial aspects of his trip was Henri Castro, a French diplomat, who had successfully negotiated the establishment of a colony approximately twenty miles west of San Antonio, and Andre Mallaerts, a Belgian trader in San Antonio, who provided detailed commercial information on that area of the Republic based on his personal observations and the experiences of other resident traders.<sup>162</sup>

Pirson indicated that he was not able to visit the location of the proposed Belgian colonies as a consequence of the Republic's rescission of Hamilton's authority and the additional difficulties presented by the terrain, the Indians,<sup>163</sup> and the Mexican capture of San Antonio. In fact, it was this later event that caused Pirson to shorten his trip and return to Belgium.<sup>164</sup> Pirson's failure to visit this area turned out to be

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<sup>160</sup>*Moniteur Commercial*, "Rapport Sur le Texas" VII (1843), 1. AMAE 2013.

<sup>161</sup>Pirson to de Briey, 10 March 1842, AMAE 2013 and BL.

<sup>162</sup>Samuel P. Nesmith, *The Texians and Texans* (Austin: The University of Texas Institute of Texan Cultures, 1980), 3-5.

<sup>163</sup>Pirson to de Briey, 15 January 1842, AMAE 2013 and BL.

<sup>164</sup>Pirson to de Briey, 10 March 1842, AMAE 2013 and BL.

something of a disadvantage in view of the later offer of the president of the Republic, Anson Jones, who gave Pirson, individually, the right to settle colonists in Texas.<sup>165</sup>

Shortly before his departure, and based on Jones' unexpected offer, Pirson enclosed a map (3.1) with one of his letters.<sup>166</sup> The map, traced by or for Pirson, showed the proposed location of the two new colonies, identified by individual.<sup>167</sup> It is obvious that with the exception of the United States, the proposed colonies were apparently intended to form a "buffer" zone north of the Rio Grande River along the disputed Mexico-Texas border, 3.2.<sup>168</sup> It is hard not to see these "colonies" as anything other than as protection from the Mexican army.<sup>169</sup> The geographic areas on the map were apparently written by Pirson based upon Jones's letter, but he does not provide any other information. In this regard, Pirson had written on the map:

"In the area granted the English and French Colonies, on the Nueces, and to the German Company on the Colorado, there are already many lots assigned. The sudden

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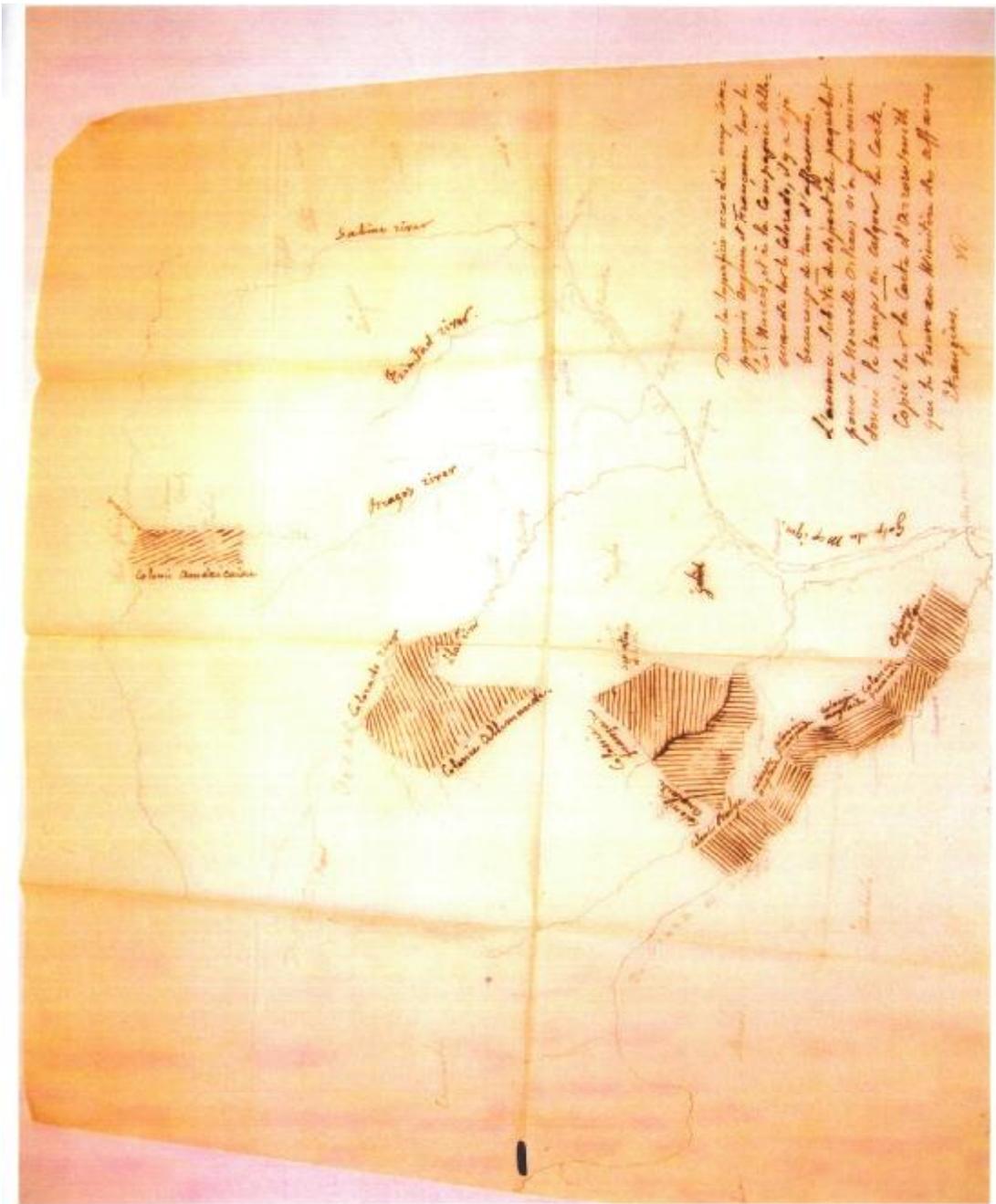
<sup>165</sup>Jones to Pirson, 9 March 1842, AMAE 2013 and BL.

<sup>166</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>167</sup>It is worth noting that on a later map (Map 2) reproduced from the original Arrowsmith map, which was the original basis of Pirson's map, the grants are represented by the individual holders of the grants, Kennedy, Castro and Pirson. They may reflect an attempt by the British government to project an individual nature to the territory in the grants so not to offend Mexico or the United States. It would also allow any of these nations at a later date to come to rescue of their nationals (*civis Britannicus sum?*) in a war between Mexico and the Republic of Texas and perhaps stay awhile to achieve stability and protect their citizens.

<sup>168</sup>John Arrowsmith, *Map of Texas* (1841), copy, GLO. The original border of Texas was contested between Texas and Mexico. Texas claimed it was the Rio Grande River which had been agreed to by General Santa Anna. Mexico claimed that the original border of the province was the Nueces River and that Santa Anna had made a mistake. Additionally, the treaty had not been approved by the Mexican government.

<sup>169</sup>Herbert Pickens Gambrell, *Anson Jones: The Last President of Texas*, 1st ed. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1948), 240.



3.1 Pirson Map

announcement of the boat for New Orleans did not even leave the time to mark them on the map.

Copied from the map of Arrowsmith, which is in the Foreign Office.”<sup>170</sup>

The original map, in the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Brussels, was apparently produced by someone within the ministry from a map by the British cartographer John Arrowsmith, 3.2.<sup>171</sup> There is no further information by either Pirson or the Belgian records as to the origin of this map. The nascent kingdom of Belgium would not have had the resources or the time to prepare original cartographic information on Texas,<sup>172</sup> but did, apparently, have access, surreptitiously or otherwise, to the cartographic information of the other powers in Europe.

The offer by Anson Jones to Pirson obviously caught Pirson by surprise. He was also apparently quite uncomfortable with the personal nature of the president’s offer. Pirson therefore immediately followed up this conversation with letters to Jones and de Briery, making it clear that he was not personally interested, but would turn the offer over to his government. In the written verification of his verbal offer, Jones indicated

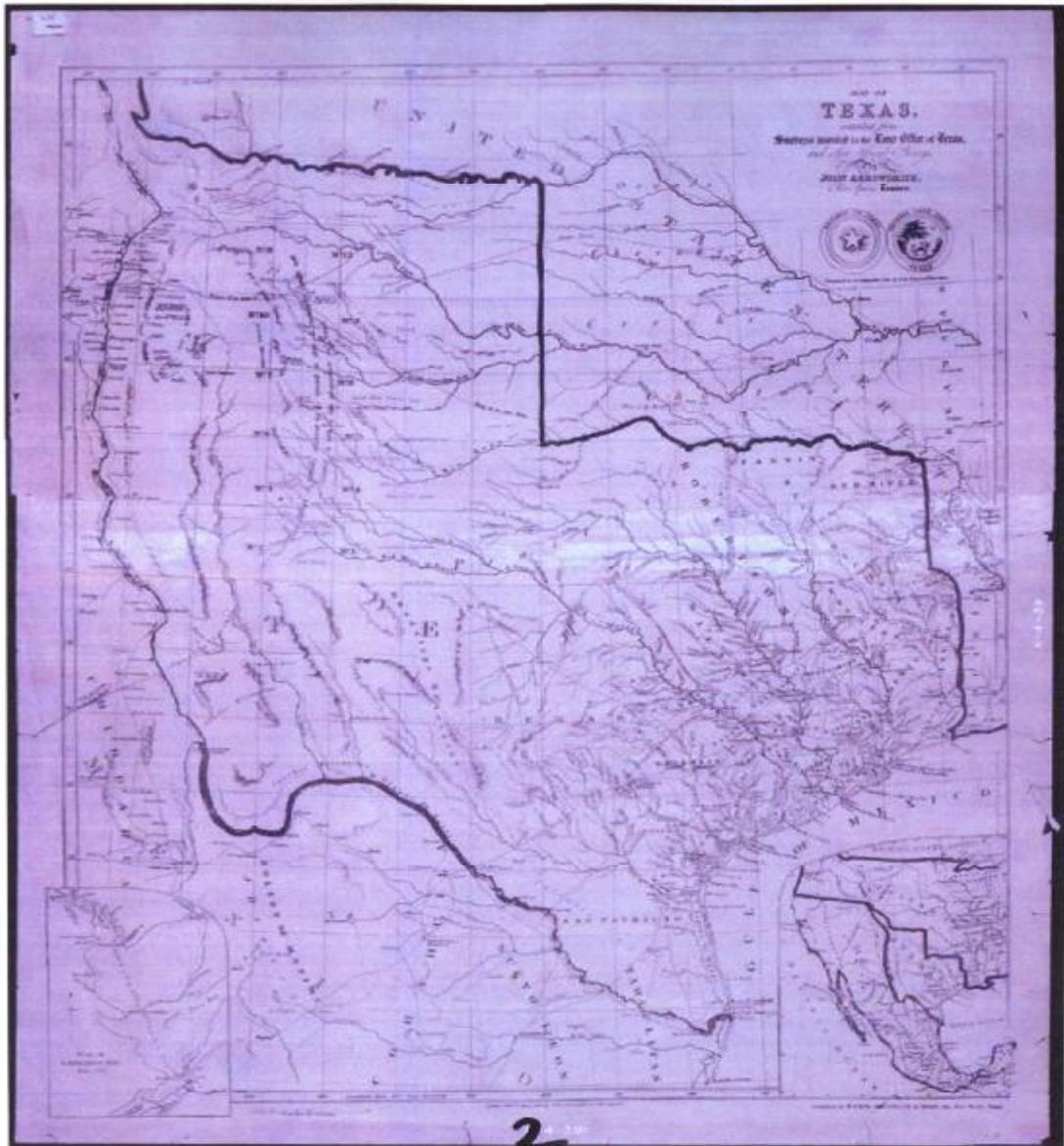
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<sup>170</sup>Pirson to de Briery, 10 March 1842, AMAE 2013 and BL.

<sup>171</sup>There was a significant cartographic interest in Texas and Mexico by Britain during the life of the Texas Republic and thereafter. Maps in the RGS include Gray, Map of the Sabine River (1841), US S/S.91; John Arrowsmith, Map of Texas (1841), US S/D.44; William Bollaert, Coast of the Gulf of Mexico (1842), US S.197; and John Arrowsmith, Map of Texas (1858), US D.88.

<sup>172</sup>It is a testament to the priority of the Guatemala colonial project that a dozen or more maps were produced, some of which, especially those of Nicolas Dally and Jean Dorn, are excellent examples of nineteenth cartography.

that the terms of settlement of the Belgian colonies would be the same, except as to the



3.2 Map of Texas 1841 by Arrowsmith

location, as those the Republic had offered Britain, Germany, and France (through Henri Castro).

The outline of the offer as stated by Pirson was:

If a company for the introduction of 1,000 families is farmed, the concessions accorded me will be as follows:

640 x 1000 acres for the colonists

640 x 100 acres with option

640 x 10 acres Church property

Total 710,400 acres or 160 square leagues, as 4428 acres make a league. In making the choice a surface reserved for me covers  $100 \times 25 = 2500$  miles = 277 leagues = 1.226.556.<sup>173</sup>

Although there was no further information in Pirson's writings as to the intended composition of the colony, the terms of the Henri Castro grant may offer some additional insight. Castro's grant was located approximately twenty-five miles west of San Antonio de Bexar, as it was then known. Under his grant Castro established not only Castroville (3.3), but the towns of Quihi, Vandenburg, and D'Hanis. The charter indicated a general statement of goals, laws, and rights that would be the basis of the settlements Castro established.<sup>174</sup> It did not state, or even imply, that there was any sort of extraterritoriality in the grant, something Leopold desired. It was a simple statement of purposes and ideals.<sup>175</sup> Additionally, Pirson was provided copies of the agreements

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<sup>173</sup>Pirson to de Briey, 10 March 1842, AMAE 2013 and BL.

<sup>174</sup>Pirson file AMAE 2013.

<sup>175</sup>Castro was able to attract almost 700 people (mostly from the Alsatian district of France) to this enterprise. Also present in AMAE, along with the two maps of Texas, was a copy of the original city layout for Castroville, (3.3) AMAE 2018. Although there is no way to relate this map to the purported Belgian colony, its presence in the same dossier as the other maps gives rise to a reasonable inference that it would have been consulted by the Belgian Foreign Office in regard to potential layout and design had there been a colony in Texas. It is instructive to compare the proposed map of Castroville with the proposed map of Santo Tomas (Map 4), Young Anderson, "Map of Abbottsville, (1837?) AMAE 2013; both seem to be highly stylized and attempted to project what the cartographer wanted the viewer to see or envision.

for the English and French colonies. Neither of these agreements gave any hint of sovereignty.

Having established the background for his mission, it seems appropriate to follow the outline he provided in his report while integrating his correspondence during his stay in Texas and to use the *matériellement*<sup>176</sup> outline of his report. Some of the principal causes that influence the development of a country's commerce are to be found in material elements, others in moral and political circumstances."<sup>177</sup> With these words, Pirson began his report to the Belgian Foreign Ministry and, ultimately, the king, concerning his trip to Texas. Pirson's outline as revealed in his report was a threefold one of "... material elements ... moral (circumstances) and political circumstances."<sup>178</sup>

The first *matériellement* of his report concerned the material or physical elements of the Republic. The report to the Foreign Minister gave detailed information concerning the everyday business aspects of trade, such as the weights and measures used, their Belgian equivalent, and the currency in circulation. He continued with tariff rates on the import and export of select goods and the appropriate pilotage customs, freight and tonnage, facility location, and custom fees and houses currently operating in Galveston, Victoria, and lesser Texas ports. In obvious anticipation of future resident Belgian traders and agents, he also provided housing rental rates, newspaper

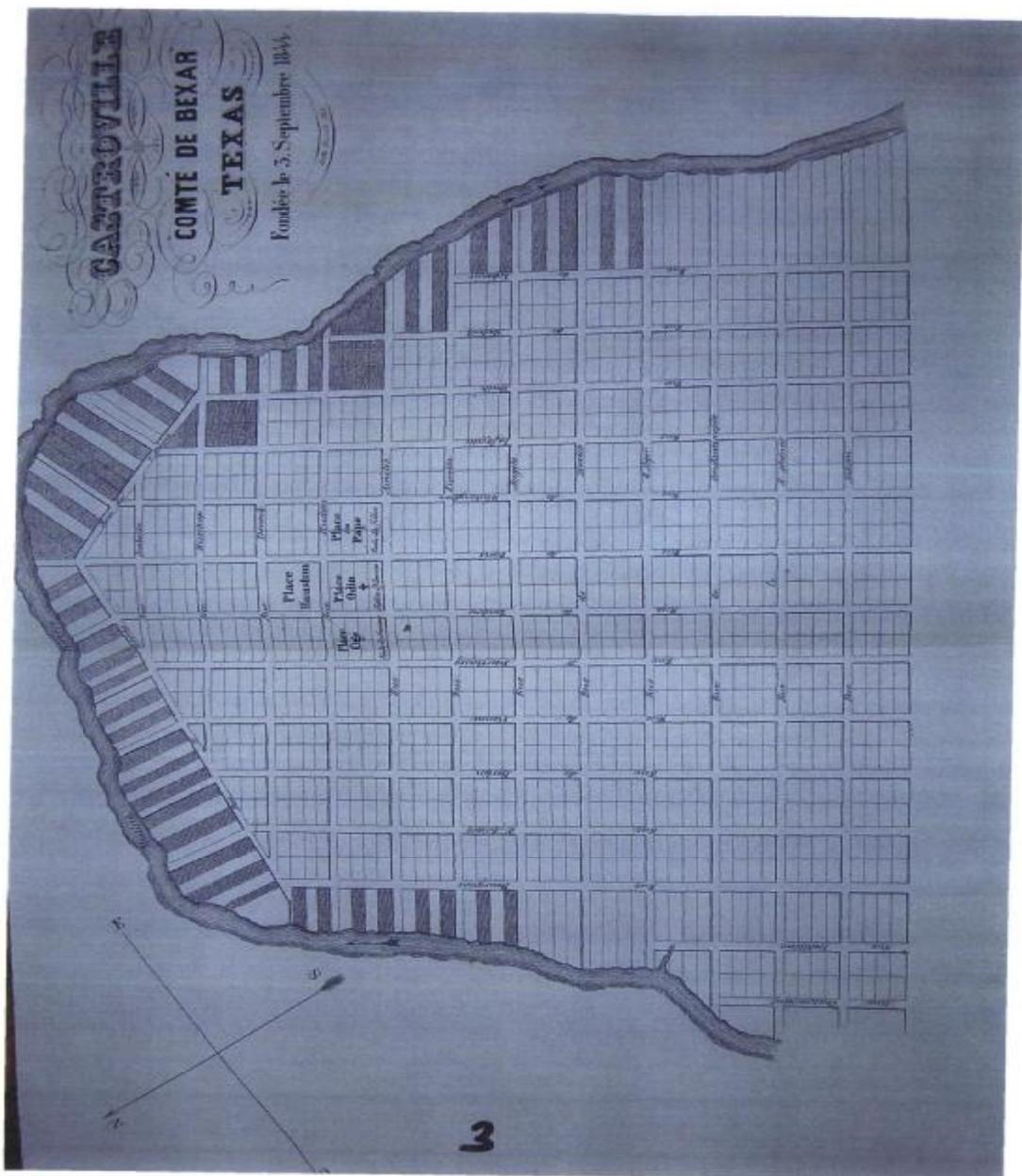
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<sup>176</sup>Material considerations or aspects.

<sup>177</sup>"*Les causes principales qui agissent sur le développement du commerce d'un pays, résident les unes dans les éléments matériels, les autres tiennent à des circonstances morales et politiques.*" *Moniteur Commercial*, "Rapport Sur le Texas" VII (1843) 259-89, AMAE 2013.

<sup>178</sup>Pirson, *Moniteur Commercial*, 1, AMAE 2013.

advertisement rates, and the availability of insurance coverage and the cost.<sup>179</sup> If



### 3.3 Map of Castroville

<sup>179</sup>Pirson, *Moniteur Commercial*, 10-11. AMAE 2013 and BL.

Belgium did not successfully trade with the Republic, it was not due to a lack of information from Pirson. Interestingly, buried within his report, Pirson noted that among the hides and pelts available in Texas were those of tigers, panthers, and leopards. A letter and Pirson's report<sup>180</sup> were apparently accompanied by some pelts for the minister's examination.

He continued with an analysis of trade commodities and trade practices, and finally the exports and imports of the Republic. This was a basic catalogue of the commercial aspect of the new nation.<sup>181</sup> He reviewed the principal advantages of the Republic in terms of international trade by virtue of its proximity to interior centers such as Santa Fe and the fact of its multipurpose nature and the hospitality of the Republic's ports, especially Galveston and Victoria, and their accessibility to European shipping. He pointed to the reduced distance and cost that would result in bypassing New Orleans and St. Louis, thus reducing time and exposure to the elements.<sup>182</sup> He clearly envisioned the Republic as a shortcut to the new settlements of the United States on the Western frontier that could not be duplicated by any other routes through either the United States or Mexico.

The portrait he painted is an assessment of Texas in 1842 obviously geared toward the commercial advantage which he perceived that the land possessed. Pirson's delineation of specific export items revealed an agricultural base predominantly rooted

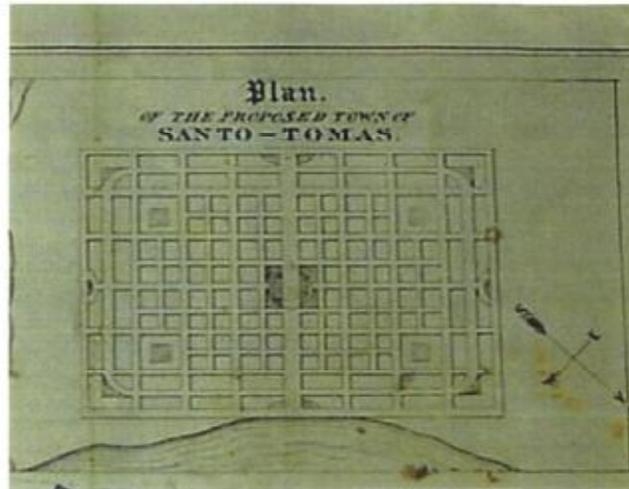
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<sup>180</sup>Ibid., 15.

<sup>181</sup>Pirson to de Briey, 5 March 1842, AMAE 2013 and BL.

<sup>182</sup>Pirson, *Moniteur Commercial*, 1-2, AMAE 2013 and BL.

in cotton, but also including major crops such as sugar, tobacco, cattle, and lumber,



### 3.4 Map of Santo Tomas Inset

along with smaller, more internally consumed items, such as sweet potatoes, wheat, barley, and rye.<sup>183</sup> He concluded the commercial aspect of his report with a description of the types, costs, quality, and origin of dozens of imported items from firearms, tools, and linen (Belgian specialties) to cloth, dye, and wood, etc. all calculated to provide the government and Belgian merchants with a fount of information predating today's economic intelligence.

Pirson's second and third *matériellement*, cultural and political circumstances, were not as coherently laid out and must be discerned from different and diverse sections of his final report and letters.

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<sup>183</sup>Ibid., 13-14.

The cultural and ethical atmosphere of the Republic was not explained by Pirson in a coherent manner. Pirson was greatly enamored with the Anglo-American people, drive, and success.<sup>184</sup> He further related that the Republic was governed, both politically and commercially, by immigrant white American males.<sup>185</sup> His representation of the Native American Indians, however, was a stereotypical one apparently formed from his association with both the Americans and Texans he came in contact with. One can say, however, in Pirson's defense, that the killing of three settlers, a scalping or two, and the apparent kidnapping of a child by "Apaches" while he visited Austin, anchored some of Pirson's opinion in reality, at least from his European perspective.<sup>186</sup>

His correspondence shows a certain impatience with many of the government representatives he dealt with, such as General Hamilton, who were incapable of delivering on various promises made on behalf of the Republic. He remarked that the general in particular was not beyond receiving substantial personal remuneration, all while employed by the state.<sup>187</sup> Additionally, Pirson clearly felt that many of the individuals drawn to the Republic were drawn by the five-year debt amnesty of the Republic and the rather open nature of the government; in other words, those with good reason to leave their past behind.<sup>188</sup>

Pirson's last *matériellement* discussed political circumstances. Here again, Pirson did not present a coherent picture or analysis. It is clear, however, that the

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<sup>184</sup>Pirson to de Brie, 15 January 1842, AMAE 2013 and BL.

<sup>185</sup>Ibid.

<sup>186</sup>Pirson to de Brie, 8 February 1842, AMAE 2013 and BL.

<sup>187</sup>Ibid.

political instability evidenced by the surrender of the Texas “mission” to Santa Fe and the capture of San Antonio by the Mexican army put a considerable damper on Pirson’s view concerning the political future of the Republic. Pirson had earlier complained about the apparently unauthorized actions of General Hamilton and the subsequent retraction of the offer by the Texas Republic to exchange a loan from Belgium for a Belgian colony. Additionally, the confused state of Austin (both physically and politically), and the dearth of records greatly impressed (or rather depressed) the organized mind of Pirson. He clearly viewed and reported the potential of the land but was not convinced that the Republic could be the vehicle by which the land would achieve its potential.

Pirson’s report is noteworthy, however, for two omissions: the slavery issue and the relationship between the native Mexican population and the white governing elite. The issue of slavery for the purpose of colonial status in Texas and commercial treaties between Belgium and Mexico complicated an already difficult situation caused by the refusal of the Mexican government (with whom Belgium had concluded a commercial treaty)<sup>189</sup> to recognize Texas. Additionally, Pirson’s trip aroused the suspicions of the United States government, under the mantle of the Monroe Doctrine, and its own commercial interests. The power of Great Britain over Belgian enterprises has been alluded to previously. Britain would also have its own difficulties arranging satisfactory

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<sup>188</sup>Pirson to de Briey, 15 January 1842, AMAE 2013 and BL.

<sup>189</sup>The relationship between Mexico and Belgium was an ongoing one that predated the attempts of Belgium to locate a colony in the Republic of Texas. The Belgian government walked a tightrope in its attempt to maintain relations between the two countries.

commercial relations with the Republic, because of the sensitivity of the slave issue, while it simultaneously attempted to expand its own commercial interests.<sup>190</sup>

The institution of slavery had clearly been transplanted from the United States . The majority of settlers who came to Texas arrived from the agricultural southern states where slavery was the predominant means of labor, especially in the cotton industry, which seemed to have a special future in the Republic. Pirson took no written position on the slavery issue other than his observations of its existence in Texas, but he was clearly aware that the issue was one that was creating great difficulties in the Republic's relations with Europe, especially Britain.<sup>191</sup> The troubled history of the Republic's attempt to gain financial stability through international recognition and treaties as a result of the slavery issue continued until the eve of its absorption into the United States.<sup>192</sup> Pirson understood that both Britain and Belgium had stated their national opposition to slavery. Despite this fact, Pirson made only casual references to the "Negro population, ... prices commanded by 'Negro' workers, ... the average number of Negroes on small plantations."<sup>193</sup> Although he displayed some sensitivity on the issue, he failed to specifically address it or the potential difficulty this issue might create should a Belgian colony or even a commercial treaty become a reality.

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<sup>190</sup>The third treaty between Britain and the Republic of Texas had provided for the elimination of slavery in Texas. This was not welcomed once it was received back in Texas and caused a renegotiation of the terms.

<sup>191</sup>Pirson to de Briey, 10 March 1842, AMAE 2013 and BL.

<sup>192</sup>A translation of portions of the town records in the German city of Bremen, from German to English by Joseph W. Schmitz reflects comments by Texas ambassador William Henry Dangerfield while in Bremen in his attempt to secure a commercial treaty "another man in my place would have left the Hague right away but I love the Germans and their character and I don't let them drive me away by the swollen headedness and boasting of such people like our half-Negroes and half-Indians of our neighbors." Statements such as these in the anti-slavery atmosphere that existed in Europe surely made matters much more difficult for the Republic. AMAE 2013 and BL, 378-380.

Secondly, it is surprising that Pirson provided little information or comment concerning the status of Anglo/Texan and Mexican internal relations. The leaders of the Republic were white men ruling over former Mexican citizens of unknown loyalty. He reported on the abortive raid on Santa Fe by the Republic and the later capture of San Antonio by the Mexican army, but in a manner indicating more a reflection on the nature of Texans than an insight to future problems.<sup>194</sup> Additionally, he did not specifically mention the Mexican background of the majority of the inhabitants of southern Texas. The area that contained the purported colony was, where it was inhabited at all, overwhelmingly Mexican. This was a situation that was bound to complicate, in view of Pirson's comments on the Mexican population of San Antonio, both colonial and commercial interests. His comments relative to the inhabitants of San Antonio included descriptions such as "Mexican smugglers ... generally poor ... no commercial experience ... ignorant."<sup>195</sup> Although this may represent a somewhat stereotypical view, it can be assumed that these impressions were formed at least partially as a result of Pirson's personal observations while visiting San Antonio and included information provided by M. Mellaerts, a fellow Belgian residing in San Antonio. The apparent dichotomy between the Anglo-American and Mexican citizens of the Republic and simply did not address the potential instability.

The Belgian colonies never materialized, despite Pirson's best efforts. The political instability of the Texas Republic, the questioned loyalty of the potential

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<sup>193</sup>Pirson to de Briey, 15 January 1842, AMAE 2013 and BL.

<sup>194</sup>Pirson to de Briey, 11 March 1842, AMAE 2013 and BL.

<sup>195</sup>Pirson, *Moniteur Commercial*, 16, AMAE 2013 and BL.

immigrants by de Briey, the continued commercial negotiations with the United States and Mexico, and perhaps most importantly the unfolding effort in Guatemala resulted in de Briey's cancellation, on November 24, 1843,<sup>196</sup> any official interest in Jones's offer.<sup>197</sup> The attempt to create a colony in the Republic of Texas was different than that in Santo Tomas in Guatemala, if for no other reason than there were never any colonists.<sup>198</sup>

As previously stated, the Belgian attempt to place a colony in the Republic of Texas must be viewed from three perspectives; commercial ties with Mexico, the impact a colony would elicit from the United States and Britain, and the existing contemporary Belgian colony in Guatemala. These were different than the perspectives to be taken into consideration when viewing Santo Tomas.

Noticeably absent from almost all aspects of the colonial attempt in the Republic of Texas was Leopold. If the assumption is made, as I think it can be, that the Belgian constitution envisioned a more distant relationship, at least in foreign affairs, between the king and the cabinet and the chambers, then in this case. Leopold seems to have been aware of the opportunities available in Texas but remained mostly in the background. We know that the initial inquiry came as a result of a meeting between Leopold and Ambassador Lewis Cass of the United States . This led to Hamilton

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<sup>196</sup>De Briey stated rather bluntly "The result of all these considerations is that the Government of Belgium has no interest in favoring the emigration of Belgian families to Texas, whether it be to produce more ample resources to them or to obey the instincts of the few rare ones who crave for adventurous undertakings.", *Report against the Project of Colonization to Texas*, 2 May 1843, AMAE 2013 and BL.

<sup>197</sup>The offer was to have expired on December 1, 1842 as indicated in the letter by Jones. Belgium had allowed it be signed prior to that date by a power of attorney to Joseph Waples, appointed by the Texas government for Victor Pirson.

seeking a commercial treaty and loan if possible. The meetings and correspondence, however, were with Van de Weyer and de Briey. Leopold was involved in several meetings with Hamilton, but nothing came out of them, and Leopold remained in the background.<sup>199</sup> Why?

First, Belgium had been attempting to sign a commercial treaty with Mexico for several years prior to the interest, colonial or otherwise, in the Republic of Texas.<sup>200</sup> Belgian commercial interest had been operating successfully in Mexico since Belgium's inception as a nation. It was large, profitable, and growing more so every year. The known hostility of the Mexican government toward the Texas Republic, especially after General Santa Anna's return to power, could not be overlooked. Belgium simply had too much to lose from a financial perspective, and Mexico had indicated as much.<sup>201</sup>

Secondly, Belgium had been locked in a major dispute with the United States over reparations resulting from damages to American property in Belgium during the 1830 Belgian Revolution.<sup>202</sup> Increasing frustration by the United States with Belgium's refusal to address the reparations issue was only exacerbated by the attempt to project Belgian power and place a colony not only in Texas but in Guatemala. These would be clearly looked upon as violations of the Monroe Doctrine. Although not initially willing to give up his colonial dreams because of these issues, Leopold became increasingly

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<sup>198</sup>Individual groups of Belgians did settle in Texas in both present day Grand Prairie and the northeastern part of Dallas County near Mesquite.

<sup>199</sup>Leopold had two meetings with Hamilton which resulted in Pirson's mission.

<sup>200</sup>P.H. Laurent, "Commerce, Colonies and Claims: King Leopold I and Belgian American Statecraft, 1832-1846," *L'Expansion belge sous Léopold Ier, 1831-1865; recueil d'études. De Belgische expansie onder Leopold I, 1831-1865; verzameling studies*, (Bruxelles: ABSOM, 1965), 557-560.

aware that the general well-being of the country might be more important than an individual colonial interest, at least in the Republic of Texas.<sup>203</sup> Additionally, in 1844 Leopold was informed by its ambassador to the United States that a steamship line was to be established between one city in the United States and one city in Europe, and Antwerp was high on that list. Simply put, other interests had priority.

In terms of Britain, her majesty's government was expressing increasing displeasure with what the cabinet and Palmerston considered Belgium's interference in their imperial plans. The question of Belize and the Nicaraguan canal project were too close to Santo Tomas and, despite an earlier lack of concern, resulted in several strong messages to Belgium from the Foreign Office voicing its deep concern with these Belgian activities.<sup>204</sup> Again Belgium simply had too much to lose.<sup>205</sup> Leopold's hope that the possibility of a war between the United States and Britain over the Oregon border ended with the signing of the Webster-Ashburton Treaty between the two countries on August 9, 1842. Additionally, there was the increasing likelihood of the annexation of Texas by the United States .

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<sup>201</sup>“Mexico entered the controversy by pointing out that she was about to liberalize her trade relations with Belgium, but would not do so if Belgium persisted in her dealings with Texas”, Laurent, 557.

<sup>202</sup>Laurent, 560-1.

<sup>203</sup>Laurent, 100.

<sup>204</sup>Laurent, 557. Referring to a dispatch from Van de Weyer in London to Leopold, 1 April 1842.

<sup>205</sup>“Belgium, in the Texas affair, does not have all the liberty of action she desires. Considerations such as the pending negotiations with the Mexican and American Governments dictate the avoidance of potential evils... abandoning any measures with Texas completely” quoting the Belgian Foreign Ministry to the Chamber of Deputies, 18 May 1844. Laurent, 560.

Leopold was either reacting to the events or biding his time, or was truly aware that there were political constraints on Belgian expansion.<sup>206</sup> Regardless of the reason, the combined efforts of the king, Cabinet, and the chambers ended the colony in the Republic of Texas.

Last, but not least, the timing of the Republic of Texas project was almost the same as that of Santo Tomas.<sup>207</sup> Most of the initial activity in Santo Tomas happened during the same time period as Pirson's involvement in Texas. The Belgian naval ship *Louise Marie* left Ostend on November 9, 1841 and arrived at the bay of Santo Tomas on January 6, 1842. Pirson received his commission on November 21, 1841. He departed for Texas on December 4, 1841, arriving in New York City on December 21, 1841. He arrived in Texas on January 25, 1842. Auguste T'Kint arrived in Guatemala City on February 12, 1842 and Colonel Rémy De Puydt shortly thereafter. The letter of Anson Jones to Pirson offering the land along the Rio Grande was dated March 9, 1842. The contract for the cessation of Santo Tomas was signed on April 16, 1842. Pirson left Texas in March 1842 and for Belgium in April 1842. De Puydt left Guatemala sometime in June 1842. Pirson's report was published in October 1842. De Puydt's was

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<sup>206</sup>Laurent felt that Leopold was exercising true wisdom in this regard. "With the guidance of King Leopold and a handful of talented diplomats, Belgium marched toward the goal of international peace and cooperation with strides only temporarily deviated. Laurent, 564. Others are far more skeptical, especially in view of his continuing, although somewhat more circumspect, colonial quests, over the next ten years.

<sup>207</sup>From Hamilton's first contact with Belgium in 1839 to de Brie's rejection of Jones offer in November, 1842 was about three years. Santo Tomas was roughly contemporary. If we date the effort from the nullification of the British grant by Guatemala in October, 1841 to the final termination of the Belgian grant in 1855 we have a period of almost fifteen years.

published in November, 1842.<sup>208</sup> There was certainly a lot on the desks of Leopold and the Belgian foreign office.

The Republic of Texas attempt was simply too complex and difficult from an international perspective for Belgium and Leopold to conclude successfully. The potential problem with the United States and Great Britain in a country that was contiguous with the Texas Republic was certainly a disadvantage. Guatemala, with its distance from the United States, certainly appeared to be an attainable and less complex prize. In effect, the constitutional system functioned as it was envisioned. Between Leopold,<sup>209</sup> the cabinet and the chambers, there was a continuity of logic and reasoning that has not been seen before or since in the realm of Belgian colonial affairs during Leopold's reign.

The economic potential of the Texas project, however, was definitively superior to those of Guatemala. Pirson was quite adamant that the colonial issue aside, Texas presented opportunities that could benefit Belgium. His report was only negative in terms of political and economic stability. The same drive for markets found in the Santo Tomas venture would probably have arisen in Texas if the venture had progressed

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<sup>208</sup> Although Pirson's mission to Texas was not apparently known in Guatemala, the lesson of the Texas Rebellion was fresh on the minds of the opponents of the Belgian grant. "What was Texas when it began," they asked. "and what is it today? Was it not a colony formed under the same illusions, with the same hopes, and with the same desire of accelerating time that has moved us in the approval of the contract with the Belgian company? And is it not today the cancer, the opprobrium, and the crowning evil that afflicts Mexico? Who assures us that our colony will not be for Guatemala what Texas has been for Mexico?". Griffith, 246-7.

<sup>209</sup> It is interesting to note however, that Leopold's penchant for secrecy was also evident in the Texas project. Pirson was under strict orders not to reveal anything about his mission other than that he was sent to Texas to study the potential commercial and economic advantages of trade between the two countries. There was to be no mention of the colonial or loan aspects of his mission. "... (your ) mission must maintain a confidential character as much as possible..." Official Instructions to Victor Pirson, 13 November 1842, AMAE 2013.

further than it did.<sup>210</sup> The much larger Mexican market was simply more settled and stable than that of Texas. The issue of slavery would, perhaps, have doomed a large-scale Belgian development in Texas, as there was strong antislavery sentiment in Belgium.

The best of Belgian intentions must be measured against the problems inherent in the position of the government of Texas. Similar to that of Guatemala, the Republic's government was deeply split over the sale of land to foreigners where terms of any accompanying loan seemed to impose any constraints on the Republic and the overriding question of independence versus statehood. The disagreement between Mirabeau Lamar, the first president of Texas, and Sam Houston, the second president, centered, among other issues, on whether it was best for Texas to remain a republic or continue attempts to join the United States . What seems to have driven the disagreement and ultimately the decision to join the union was the economic viability of the Republic. It was simply too economically unstable and did not give the impression that it would improve.

The rather casual attitude of General James Hamilton, in terms of his authority, definitely seems to have confused the issue. There does not seem to be any doubt that his offer of land to be "ceded" simply was not authorized in his position as "Loan Commissioner." His reluctance to inform the Republic of the nature of his promises and innuendos to Belgium lend credence to this view. Hamilton, in many respects, is the

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<sup>210</sup>It took a significant amount of persuasion by the government to soothe the commercial sector, especially, iron armaments and cotton when it announced that the government was abandoning its efforts to establish a colony in Texas. This was mostly achieved by the lure of a potentially more lucrative

culprit in the colonial aspect of the Belgian project. Although Belgium was interested in commercial as well as diplomatic ties to the Republic, Leopold seems to have increased his interest only after Hamilton's offer of October 21, 1841. Hamilton's subsequent dismissal, however, seems to have been less a response to these actions, than Houston's dislike of Hamilton. This seems to be verified by Anson Jones's later offer of land, although curiously without any loan requests, at a time when Texas was in desperate economic straits.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to determine what, if anything, the general population thought of the Texas project. It was given very little newspaper coverage and was generally conducted at the diplomatic level, as opposed to Santo Tomas, which gained widespread, mostly hostile, press coverage. There were no colonists because there was no colony, except as noted above. The economic conditions in Belgium, especially high unemployment, existed for both endeavors, but for the reasons already stated, the effort in Texas never expanded beyond Pirson's mission. It would appear that Santo Tomas captured the public's attention, and that there was only room for one debate at a time.

Texas also differed in that there was no private or semiprivate company responsible for the colonization effort. It was strictly a governmental affair. This probably accounted for its relative simplicity of actions and swift termination. No one had any money invested in the project that would have been lost when it ended.

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transatlantic steamship line from Belgium to the United States, which in fact Belgium did not obtain. Laurent, 561-2.

Similarly, there was no religious facet to the Texas colonial project because there was neither the desire nor ability to convert anyone.<sup>211</sup> In the same context, there is no real indication of any racist or supremacist attitudes on the part of the Belgian government or Pirson. His descriptions of the Indians and the Mexican residents seem to be more stereotypical than racist. This certainly cannot be said of Daingerfield, at least in view of his remarks in Bremen. There is some question of his failure to comment on the slavery he encountered, but we simply have no additional information in this regard.

Relative to the use of Belgium's military, there is the simple fact that the only person chosen for the trip was an artillery captain. According to Pirson's military file, he appears to have been chosen for his logical and scientific background and training one would associate with a military engineer of the nineteenth century. He certainly would have been an asset to Texas had he returned, as he seems to indicate he would have, had he been assigned that position.<sup>212</sup> His records did not seem to indicate that there were medical or tropical diseases that could afflict potential colonists. Texas was in the temperate zone and therefore mostly immune to these conditions.

The cabinet and Leopold in particular used the ambassador to London, Sylvain de Weyer, and his understanding and *rapport* with Palmerston to seek acceptance or at least neutrality in regards to the Texas project. He initially received British approval. But, as the potential competition Britain might encounter in both Guatemala and Texas

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<sup>211</sup>In comparison, the earlier *empresario* program of Mexico, which also had as its purpose the settlement of Texas, had given huge lands grants under specific conditions, including the need to convert to Catholicism.

from Belgium became apparent, it swiftly relayed its change of heart to the Belgian sovereign. Leopold, at least in the area of colonial efforts, always heeded the threats, stated or implied, of the British foreign office, and especially Palmerston.

Lastly, unlike the Santo Tomas affair, Belgium apparently had no maps of Texas. It was necessary, however, that Pirson had some cartographic information from which to identify the Republic and to scout out the potential colony. This seems to have been the background of his hand-traced copy of a major British map of Texas (Map 1), showing the borders and several interior features of the Republic. Pirson was fortunate in that he did not need to rely on maps during his investigation because there were simply were no others in his possession.<sup>213</sup> This shortfall did not affect the outcome in view of the fact that the Belgian colony in Texas was simply not to be.

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<sup>212</sup>Pirson's overall tone in the several letters he wrote after the trip to Texas indicated a general willingness to return if the government was interested in further contact with the Republic.

<sup>213</sup> There was a strong cartographic history in Belgium in the nineteenth century but it did not extend to oceanographic maps before 1830. Marcel Watelet. *Cartographie et politique dans la Belgique du XIXe siècle* (Bruxelles: Crédit communal, 1987). The monopoly of the Dutch on shipping from Belgium rendered any maps of the seas unnecessary.

CHAPTER 4  
SANTO TOMAS<sup>214</sup>

The colonial thrust into Santo Tomas, Guatemala during 1840-1855 is perhaps the best known because of its utter failure. It is estimated that between 1843 and 1850 perhaps two thousand “colonists”<sup>215</sup> migrated to Santo Tomas upon representations that were at best incorrect and at worst fraudulent. Many died, most within a year of arrival.

The choice of Santo Tomas as a potential Belgian colony was occasioned by a variety of factors including opportunity, fate, and inexperience. This combination of factors can also be seen in the disparate views and rationale of the men behind the venture with their unreasonable expectations, the government that showed little interest and the king who strongly felt that national, and personal, legitimacy necessitated the possession of colonies. As previously stated, Belgium in the latter part of the 1830s faced a variety of internal and external problems related to its position as a new country and the economic conditions that were created by its status as a former part of the larger United Kingdom of the Netherlands. The king and the country were also struggling with political and demographic problems created by this separation.

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<sup>214</sup> The correct spelling is Santo Tomás, however almost all references in both the archives and other texts in French relevant to the colony either omit the accent mark or hyphenate it as Santo-Tomas. To be consistent with the spelling in the Belgian works the (incorrect) spelling of Santo Tomas will be used.

<sup>215</sup> There is some disagreement as to the actual number of colonists that settled in Santo Tomas. This is partly due to the ships’ manifest listing families as opposed to individuals. The population of the settlements is often given without differentiating between Belgians and Guatemalans. See Maselis, 402-

For a variety of reasons<sup>216</sup> the political crisis that had enveloped Belgium for the previous eight years subsided sufficiently enough for the king to again proceed with the formulation of a Belgian colonial policy.<sup>217</sup> Leopold had always been interested in the colonial aspect, and, despite some questionable constitutional positions, he had managed to surround himself with a small but similarly minded group of supporters and backers.<sup>218</sup> Although almost all were outside the government, a few (Count Félix de Mérode and Baron Jean Baptiste Nothomb)<sup>219</sup> served in the cabinet. For its own part the chambers had little enthusiasm for colonial adventures. The most often expressed and compelling reason for this was the fear of expending capital on foreign adventures when there was a more urgent need for domestic investment. Leopold did not agree that one precluded the other and considered the attitude of the cabinet and the chambers and perhaps the constitutional system to be shortsighted.<sup>220</sup>

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05 for a list by name and origin of families and 104 where eight hundred eighty is given as the total number. The actual number may be closer to two thousand.

<sup>216</sup>The treaty setting Belgian boundaries and ending the war with the Netherlands was finalized in 1839.

<sup>217</sup>Previous attempts were Ethiopia and Mexico to name two.

<sup>218</sup>J. Deharveng, *Histoire De La Belgique Contemporaine, 1833-1944* (Bruxelles: Dewit, 1928), 489-92.

<sup>219</sup>Both Mérode and Nothomb served as ministers of various ministries, Nothomb also served as Prime Minister from April 13, 1841 to July 30, 1845. Edouard Blondeel van Cuelebroucke and Martial Cloquet were diplomats of lower rank and influence but were a strong supporter of Leopold's imperialistic efforts, as Blondeel's secret missions to Spain and Nicaragua, and Cloquet's activity in Guatemala showed.

<sup>220</sup> "...constitutional government, especially in a small country, takes a great deal of time, and causes sight to be lost of the questions, which lone can secure to the country a political future. I have many a time that I saw you feeling more and more interest therein, and I am very anxious that it should be so, for it is time to be seriously occupied with those questions; otherwise Belgium will find herself *at the tail* of all other countries.

I have heard that an association of German princes is actively occupied in an attempt at colonization in Texas..." Leopold to General Goblet, 27 February 1844 in Théodore Juste, *Memoirs of Leopold I, King of the Belgians, from unpublished documents* Translated by Robert Black. (London: Sampson Low, Son & Martson, 1868), 211.

In the late 1830s, as a result of increasing pressure from Leopold and several entrepreneurs, the prospect of a Belgian colony seemed all too tempting. Guatemala, although not the first colonial interest for Leopold and his supporters, became, however, the most interesting and perhaps the most tempting of colonial prospects.<sup>221</sup>

What was responsible for the change in the attitude of the Cabinet? The treaty that Belgium signed with the former United Kingdom of the Netherlands, now the Kingdom of the Netherlands, was finalized in 1839 and forever settled both the question of Belgium's succession from the Netherlands and its borders, thus allowing the king and the Cabinet to look at other matters. Second, although economic conditions actually began to worsen at that time,<sup>222</sup> the argument for colonies was framed in a manner that seemed to be economically advantageous to the country. Thirdly, to Leopold and his way of thinking, there was no better way to give a sense of solidarity to the new nation than to give it common cause or identity. To this end Leopold's continuous favoring of colonial and imperialistic development was natural and necessary. The example of England was foremost in his mind.

Santo Tomas was first and foremost an English attempt at colonialism in the Western Hemisphere.<sup>223</sup> It had as its basis England's earlier logging agreements (Concessions of 1783 and 1786) with what was then colonial Spain in the area of

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<sup>221</sup>In the case of Guatemala in particular and Central America in general Leopold was convinced that there would be a conflict between the United States and Britain over the Oregon territory boundary and neither would notice Belgian activity in Santo Tomas.

<sup>222</sup>The Netherlands reacted by imposing strong duties on all Belgian exports and blockaded the port of Antwerp.

<sup>223</sup>The best history of the British attempt in Guatemala in English is William J. Griffith, *Empires in the Wilderness - Foreign Colonization and Development in Guatemala, 1834-1844* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1965).

Central America known as Belize and later British Honduras. After the revolutions of the early nineteenth century had all but eliminated the Spanish Empire, Britain used these earlier agreements with the Spanish crown to maintain a semi-colonial presence in Belize as a base to expand, if possible, its commercial and political interests in the area.

After the breakaway of Central America from Mexico in the 1820s and the formation of the United Provinces of Central America or Federal Republic of Central America, the lack of a clear political order gave Guatemala and its ambitious new president, Dr. Mariano Galv3ez, (1831-38) an opportunity to advance Guatemala farther along the road to self sufficiency and perhaps European style industrialization. Galv3ez was well aware that Guatemala lacked the materials, money, manpower, and perhaps ambition as well, to create a modern state out of what was essentially a jungle wilderness.<sup>224</sup> To this end, the idea of European immigrants controlling, or at least containing, the expanding British logging and commercial presence along the disputed Belize-Guatemalan border and advancing Guatemala's self-sufficiency was seen as a viable response. Possibly, the plow of the farmer would replace the axe of the logger.

The initial grant to the East Coast of Central America Commercial and Agricultural Company from Guatemala (1834) consisted of four separate parcels of land. The grant from the government was given in a way that appeared to give control over the vast majority of the country, with little or no initial accountability, to what was seen by many Guatemalans as foreign development and colonialism.<sup>225</sup> The areas granted to the East Coast of Central America Commercial and Agricultural Company,

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<sup>224</sup>Griffith, 17.

an English company, and others may have represented a third of the total area of Guatemala.<sup>226</sup>

The history of the British attempt at colonization in Guatemala was one that would mirror that of Belgium. Underfinanced from the outset, it never became a viable enterprise. Additionally, it was caught in the crossfire of the civil wars<sup>227</sup> (1838-42) that initially saw the disintegration of the United Provinces and eventually the emergence of Guatemala, among others, as an independent state. The East Coast of Central America Commercial and Agricultural Company was a stock company created for the development of this grant. The company was never able to disassociate itself from the earlier scandals of a failed adventure on the Mosquito Coast of Nicaragua in the early 1830's. Many of the individuals involved in Nicaragua were also involved in the later Guatemala adventure. Suspect from the very beginning, the company was constantly subjected to criticism.<sup>228</sup>

The east cost of Guatemala was a rugged tropical land, alternating between swamps along the coast and inland along Lake Izabal and reasonably steep highlands that had essentially remained uninhabited except by Indians indigenous to the region for thousands of years. The difficulties of successful European colonization here, as in

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<sup>225</sup>Ibid., 74–119.

<sup>226</sup>The area under discussion with respect to the actual Belgian colonial location is where the grants meet near Amatique Bay on the east cast of Guatemala near Lake Izabal.

<sup>227</sup>The United Provinces of Central America, also known as The Federal Republic of Central America, lasted from 1823 to 1840. It was extremely unstable because of the differences in the power elites and different ethnic make up of the population. After its demise it became the separate countries of Guatemala, Honduras, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Nicaragua and part of Mexico.

<sup>228</sup>There was a great deal of cynicism expressed by both the English and Belgian press towards these purported colonial enterprises. The identification of the same individuals in Britain in both the

similar tropical areas of America and Africa, were related to the mosquito-borne diseases indigenous to both areas, which were neither depicted on a map nor mentioned in any brochures of either company. It does not seem to have occurred to anyone that if this was a tropical paradise (Illustrations 4.1 and 4.2)<sup>229</sup> there must be a reason why had no one had taken advantage of it before.

The story of how the disastrous British colony was sold as an opportunity for significant potential to the Belgians is long and complicated. It was envisioned by its original stockholders around the possibility of a quick financial return on very little investment, and, at least from Leopold's perspective, a potential colonial base from which to raise Belgium to the level of other European imperial powers.<sup>230</sup> If there was any nation that could be trusted in the realm of colonialism it was surely Britain, or so the Belgian entrepreneurs thought.

The actual process whereby the Belgian company substituted itself for the East Coast of Central America Commercial and Agricultural Company in eastern Guatemala, referred to as Verapaz, is complicated. Initially, the transfer revolved around Count Henri Charles Obert, a stockholder in the British company, and his connections to like-minded entrepreneurs in Brussels. Obert was able to assemble a group of Belgian

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failed settlement on the Mosquito Coast of Nicaragua and the Guatemala settlement at Abbottsville did not improve the credibility of the enterprise.

<sup>229</sup>These two illustrations in the company's publication, give somewhat of an unrealistic representation of what life in Santo Tomas actually looked like. *La Compagnie Belge De Colonisation, Amérique Centrale Colonisation Du District De Santo-Thomas De Guatemala, Par La Communauté De L'union, Fondée Par La Compagnie Belge De Colonisation* (Paris: Rignoux, 1844), preface.

<sup>230</sup>The two standard historical, but dated, works in French on the colony of Santo Tomas are Nicolas Leysbeth, *Historique de la colonization Belge Santo-Tomas Guatemala* (Bruxelles: Nouvelle



4.1 Illustration of Guatemala City

investors who, in January of 1842, agreed to buy approximately one million acres of the original grant.<sup>231</sup> The details of the transaction are of no relevance to the general picture of the circumstances that produced the colony and eventually doomed it. What is relevant is how the desire for quick profits based not on colonists but on land sales proved fatal from the start. Count Théophile de Hompesch, a friend of Leopold's, was instrumental in this regard. Despite the opposition of the cabinet which remained

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Society d'Editions, 1938); and Joseph Fabri, *Les Belges au Guatemala* (Bruxelles: Académie royale des sciences d'outre mer, 1955).

<sup>231</sup>Joseph Fabri, 30-34.

generally solid through the 1830s,<sup>232</sup> Hompesch and Leopold were able to convince the Cabinet to begin to seriously consider the grant by Guatemala as a potential site for a Belgian colony. The cabinet's stipulation, however, was that no colonists or funds were to be disbursed pending the results of an expedition to Guatemala, the receipt of its report and its publication.

The *Compagnie belge de Colonisation (Compagnie)* was chartered in 1841 as a stock company formed for the purpose of buying the land from the British company and procuring the necessary settlers for the colony. Leopold was present at its first meeting, held in Brussels at the Hotel Mérode. Established much like its counterpart in Britain, the *Compagnie* immediately attempted to sell stock. The initial failure to gain adequate financial support was indicative of its future financial problems. Widely advertised as a chance to acquire wealth and opportunity in a veritable Garden of Eden before even the first settler arrived, the colony was advertised to church and village as a way to leave the economic depression behind.

The expedition that resulted from the cabinet's mandate<sup>233</sup> left for Guatemala and spent approximately four months in the capital, Guatemala City, and at the colony's proposed site on the bay of Santo Tomas on the country's east coast.<sup>234</sup> The mission's purpose was twofold. The first was to verify that the sale of the land granted to the English company and sold to the Belgian company was still valid as far as the Guatemalan

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<sup>232</sup>Baron Alphonse Nothomb became Minister of the Interior in 1841 and was more favorable to the enterprise. Griffith, 225.

<sup>233</sup>*Instructions generales pour la commission d'exploration*. nd AMAE 2027.

<sup>234</sup>Also referred to as Vera Pas, Vera Paz, Verapaz or Verapas. The actual district in Guatemala in which the Santo Tomas was located was VeraPaz.



4.2 Illustration of Santo Tomas

government was concerned. The second purpose was to determine if the proposed site was indeed capable of sustaining a colony. Four individuals served as the primary members of the expedition. They were P.L.N. Petit, captain of the *Louise Marie*, the sole Belgian naval vessel for the expedition; Colonel Remy De Puydt, a representative of the *Compagnie*; Doctor Dechange, the medical and scientific member of the party; and Auguste T'Kint, from the Ministry of the Interior.

The answer to the first question, as to whether the original grant was still valid, was no. The Guatemalan government had indeed rescinded the grant to the British

company.<sup>235</sup> Colonel De Puydt, however, was able, despite significant hurdles, to secure a new, if somewhat less advantageous, grant for the *Compagnie*.<sup>236</sup>

The answer to the second question depended on which report was accepted. The report by the Captain Petit was overwhelmingly negative<sup>237</sup> and in many regards would reflect the later general consensus as to the reasons why the colony failed. One of the enticements to both Guatemala and Belgium had been the possibility of turning the bay of Santo Tomas into a deep water port. This would allow cargo leaving Guatemala for the Atlantic to avoid the detour through the harbor in Belize, which was subject to British control. In this regard Petit wrote “To the southeast, the coast is low, muddy, covered with palm trees containing a myriad of bugs. This part of the bay, until one reaches the Cape of *Trois-Points* is unapproachable; it leaves an unbelievable odor. All this area must be very unhealthy...”<sup>238</sup> In other words, to Petit, building a harbor there seemed incapable of being accomplished. Still later he wrote, “For the present time, I only see certain ruin for the colonist; for the European who is not accustomed and cannot get used to living as natives, the wild life has major costs.”<sup>239</sup>

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<sup>235</sup>“Because of the general fear that foreign colonists would ultimately wish to establish their independence on the pattern of Texas, the government insisted that all immigrant settlers in the future abjure the protection of their home governments and become Guatemalan citizens”. Griffith, 241.

<sup>236</sup>De Puydt seems to have made ample use of bribes in order to achieve the desired outcome. Maselis, 98.

<sup>237</sup>It has been alleged that Petit had been ordered by members of the government to turn in a strongly negative report so as to prevent Belgium involvement in any colonial schemes. I was unable to verify either the truth or origin, of this claim. Maselis, 100.

<sup>238</sup>“Au sud-est, la cote est basse, vaseuse, couverte de palétuviers d'ou il sort une myriade d'insectes. Cette partie de la baie, jusqu'au cap des Trois-Pointes est inabordable; il en sort une odeur insupportable. Toute cette partie doit être très malsaine...” Fabri, 48.

<sup>239</sup>“Comme des journaux opposés à la colonisation avaient dénaturé les événements auxquels T'Kint, Petit et Dechange avaient fait allusion dans -des rapports rédigés en même temps que celui de De Puydt, ce dernier publia une notice explicative dans le ‘Moniteur Belge ‘ du 16 octobre 1842. En effet le lieutenant de vaisseau Petit avait fait éditer le 23 mai 1842, un mémoire sur son voyage où il disait

The second report, by Dr. Dechange, was not much more positive: "I looked in vain around the miserable township, he confesses, for those bubbling gardens, these beautiful plantations which were presented to the general public."<sup>240</sup> Additionally he warned "...of the dim glow produced by the combustion of the hydrogen phosphorus that escapes. Harmful clouds of bugs generated by the heat and the humidity swarm under these arches of greenery, true putrid malarial cases. The difficulty in breathing and a state of general anxiety announce the danger that there would result if one stays for awhile and the need to come closer to seaside and rivers to breathe more restorative air."<sup>241</sup> For Dr. Dechange, there was only misery there, "This misery, according to him, came from only one reason: the impossibility for White (men) to acclimate themselves (to the climate)."<sup>242</sup> The third report, by T'Kint, was neutral but was somewhat more positive as to the possibilities.<sup>243</sup>

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notamment: 'Pour le temps présent, je ne vois que ruine certaine pour le colon ; pour l'Européen qui n'est pas habitué et ne peut pas s'habituer à vivre comme les indigènes, la vie animale coûte fort cher.' Il insistait aussi sur la rareté du numéraire et la difficulté qui en résultait pour les négociants qui ne parvenaient pas à se faire payer. Les Belges pouvaient vendre en Amérique Centrale de la toile, des draps et des cotons, à condition qu'ils fussent fabriqués de façon à soutenir la concurrence anglaise tant par leur légèreté et leur finesse que par leur bon (sic) ntarché; l'exportation d'objets tels que clous et cristaux aurait pu être envisagée." Leconte, 125.

<sup>240</sup>"Je cherche en vain autour de la misérable bourgade, avoue-t-il, ces jardins riants, ces belles plantations dont on a entretenu le public." Fabri, 52.

<sup>241</sup>"...des lueurs vacillantes produites par la combustion de l'hydrogène phosphore qu'elles laissent échapper. Sous ces voûtes de verdure, vrais réceptacles de miasmes putrides, pullulent des nuées d'insectes malfaisants engendrés par la chaleur et l'humidité. La gêne de la respiration et un état d'anxiété générale annoncent le danger qu'il y aurait à y séjourner quelques temps et le besoin de se rapprocher des bords de la mer et des rivières pour respirer un air plus vivifiant." Leconte, 126.

<sup>242</sup>Fabri, 52.

<sup>243</sup>"He concluded that the Verapaz, despite its fertility, did not present a good or secure future for colonization. The District of Santo Tomas, on the other hand, offered the same agricultural advantages as the interior province as well as additional advantages for commerce. He opined that a Belgian colony at Santo Tomas could avoid the mismanagement and disaster which had befallen the English at Abbottsville."

Schwemmer, "The Belgian Colonization Company, 1840-1858." 111.

The last and most important report, for purposes of the actual establishment of the colony, was that by De Puydt. It was a massive work that relied on statistical analysis and seemed to cover every aspect of the potential of Verapaz and Santo Tomas. It was this one that was accepted by the company and favored by Leopold. It was unbridled in its enthusiasm. De Puydt wrote, “This land of one sole district, adjoining the sea and embracing the beautiful Lake Yzabal and containing at a lower price than we were supposed to pay to the English!”<sup>244</sup> In the conclusion of his report he stated “Central America is a country which, by its geographical position, and the nature of its soil, contains the elements for big agrarian, industrial and commercial prosperity; ...The temperature is hot, but the country is healthy, Europeans can easily become acclimated to it, definitely live there, and keep their lifestyle there.”<sup>245</sup>

His report was published after the other three and blasted all contrary conclusions as not representative of the actual state of the enterprise. He claimed that Petit had not spent any real time in the country; that Dechange had been ill while in the country and as a physician was overly pessimistic; T’Kint had been too preoccupied with governmental matters and simply had not been exposed to as much information as he had been and therefore was not as enthusiastic. It did not address, however, the

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<sup>244</sup>“Ce terrain d'un seul district, contigu a la mer, embrassant le beau lac d'Yzabal et renfermant le port le plus commode de toute l'Ame-rique, nous le possédons a un prix inférieur a celui que nous devions payer aux Anglais!” Fabri, 60.

<sup>245</sup>“L’Amérique centrale est un pays qui, par sa position, géographique et la nature de son sol, renferme les éléments d’une grande prospérité agricole, industrielle et commerciale; il n’y manqué que l’application d’une force matérielle sagement mesurée.

La température est chaude, mais le pays est salubre, Les Européens peuvent facilement s’y acclimater, y bien vivre, et y conserver leur activité.” Remy De Puydt, *Rapport de M. De Puydt in Exploration L’Amérique centrale et particulièrement de la providence de Vera-Paz et du district de Santo-Thomas de Guatemala*.(Brussels: La Compagnie Belge De Colonisation, nd), 112. AMAE 2027.

health and climate issues, but rather put forth the possibility of a virtual Garden of Eden.

To soften some of the criticism from the disparity in reports and what later were stories of woe from some of the returning colonists, Hompesch stated, somewhat sheepishly, “He had written that every colonial family, upon arriving at Santo Tomas must find its own house and plantations. Men who leave their homeland to go to work a foreign land, always create within themselves more or less illusions; some precautions that need to be taken to warn them of this tendency, warnings that one gives them, [however] cannot stop them from imagining a Eldorado, at least a country without big pain where one finds the comfort of which one enjoys in Europe.”<sup>246</sup> Hompesch was merely repeating the age old legal adage, *caveat emptor*, buyer beware. De Puydt’s report, published on October 1, 1842, was accepted as the official report and the one used as the basis for the company’s position.

The first fifty-four colonists left Antwerp for Santo Tomas and arrived in May 1843. Over the next five years, perhaps as many as two thousand “colonists” arrived and settled in Santo Tomas or the smaller adjacent village, Sainte Marie. Within a relatively short period after the arrival of each group of settlers, many died of disease or malnutrition.

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<sup>246.</sup>“Toute famille de colons, avait-il écrit, en arrivant a Santo-Tomas, doit y trouver sa maison et ses plantations. Les hommes qui quittent leur patrie pour aller travailler une terre étrangère, se créent toujours plus ou moins d'illusions; quelques précautions que l'on prenne pour les prémunir centre cette tendance, quelques avertissements qu'on leur donne, on ne peut les empêcher de se figurer un Eldorado, au moins un pays ou sans grande peine on trouve le confort dont on jouit en Europe.” Fabri, 72.

As some of the earliest settlers returned with stories of woe and death, the company attempted to raise additional sums and gather more settlers to dispel what was becoming a din of criticism. The company sent a succession of on-site directors to the colony between May 1843 and November 1845 in a frantic attempt to stem the deteriorating condition of the colony.<sup>247</sup>

By 1845, however, it became obvious that of Santo Tomas, at least as managed by the *Compagnie*, was not and could never be a viable entity. A few settlers, especially from the German states, continued to come, but the dreams of the early colonists and quick profits for the *Compagnie* were gone. Some of the settlers who had not returned to Belgium or died dispersed to other parts of Guatemala. A few, perhaps twenty, settled in Guatemala City and became relatively prosperous. The fate of the company was eventually sealed by the inability of Count Hompesch, its leading promoter, to successfully negotiate sufficient additional loans or capitalization. The colony proved so disastrous for Hompesch himself that his failure to adequately guarantee company loans with his personal assets resulted in his flight to France and later imprisonment and death.<sup>248</sup> Despite direct intervention by the Belgian government over the next ten years,<sup>249</sup> the dream had become a nightmare.<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>247</sup>Captain Philippot (May 19- October 24, 1843); a colonial council, headed by various colonists including the Jesuit Father R. P. Walle (October 24,1843-March 6, 1844); Major Guillaumont (March 6, 1844-November 1844); Captain Dorn (April 1, 1845-November 1845); and Baron von Bulow (November 5, 1844-April, 1845).

<sup>248</sup>After his death, his wife, Madame de Hompesch, wrote a defense of her husband that attempted to show that the problems with the company and the colony arose from conditions outside the control of her husband. Greindl, 251-264.

<sup>249</sup>Leopold, based upon his relationship with the House of Rothschild in Paris, arranged for a credit up to 1,000,000 Belgian francs to the *Compagnie* for perspective lot sales in late 1842.

<sup>250</sup>The government of Guatemala rescinded the grant to the *Compagnie* in 1855.

Finally shaken out of its complacent attitude, the government sent a variety of commissioners to the colony to determine not only its condition and that of the colonists but the reasons for its apparent failure. Several came as a result of the cabinet's reluctant agreement to underwrite some of the costs of the colony. They were, in general, devastating in their criticism. One of the naval officers of the Belgian ship *Sinkel* remarked, "Important German Lords (of Hompesch) in order to restore their more than greatly impaired fortunes, made this speculation..... Amenable to prestigious influences, dazzled by the dust thrown into their eyes in profusion by aristocratic hands (duke of Ursel), pushed also by the desire to endow Belgium with a colony, with a new source of prosperity, with security, most of these explorers saw everything through rose colored glasses and the public saw as they did."<sup>251</sup> Another report on the colony by a resident there, Doctor Fleussu, stated, "I am astonished that with as many destructive elements brought on by the negligence, the lack of care, the constant indifference that prevailed, the poor choice.... compulsory use of the mealy potatoes, the salted provisions, of adulterated liquors, the imprudence, the excessive use and abuse of food and spirit for such a prolonged time, I am astonished that mortality was not higher."<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> "De grands seigneurs allemands (*de Hompesch*) afin de rétablir leur fortune plus qu'ébréchée firent cette spéculation. Pour eux, des hommes de science qui n'étaient jamais sortis de leur pays, des Belges, fonctionnaires du gouvernement, explorèrent la contrée et publièrent sur cette exploration des rapports élogieux dont on put tirer tout ce qu'on voulait. Soumis à de hautes influences, éblouis par la poudre aux yeux jetée à profusion par des mains aristocratiques (duc d'Ursel), poussés d'ailleurs par le désir de doter la Belgique d'une colonie, d'une source nouvelle de prospérité, de sécurité, la plupart de ces explorateurs virent tout couleur de rosé et le public vit comme eux". Leconte, 140.

<sup>252</sup>"Je m'étonne qu'avec autant d'éléments destructeurs amenés par la négligence, le défaut de soins, l'indifférence qui ont constamment régné, le mauvais choix des colons, l'encombrement, la malpropreté, l'usage forcé des farineux, des salaisons, des liqueurs falsifiées, les imprudences, les excès de table et de spiritueux si abusivement et si longtemps prolongés, je m'étonne que la mortalité n'ait pas été plus forte." *Ibid.*, 137.

Finally, Edouard Blondeel van Cuelebroucke, dispatched by the cabinet to inspect the colony in order to justify yet another potential loan guarantee, wrote upon his return:

... disappointed expectations, naturally follow-up of nostalgia, the rigor of the old direction, the excessive and forced work, the military exercises right in the sun during the intended hours to rest and factions during the humid nights without the least shelter against rains, the bad food regime, the discouragement, the moral constraint, the deprivation during a certain emergency time of the religion, the total absence of distractions, the bad choice of a big number of colonists under the report of health and the constitution (imagine that one sends into a newly established colony, where the question of the healthiness is not entirely resolute, of families, of people reaches of the caries, idiots, the rickety, the lame, blinds, asthmatics and dunces?), the clutter and the humidity of homes, the big heats to which the most was not accustomed, the long and extraordinary rains, the stagnant puddles due to the defect of out-flow, different natural poisonous fumes that result from it, the poor state of roofing, the dirtiness, as much inside as outside, poverty and finally, in excesses of drink and food.<sup>253</sup>

The reality of the desperate condition of the colonists caused the government to send the ship the *Adèle* to Santo Tomas to bring any colonists who wanted to return back to Belgium.<sup>254</sup>

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<sup>253</sup>... les espérances déçues, naturellement suivies de nostalgie, la rigueur de l'ancienne direction, le travail excessif et forcé, les exercices militaires en plein soleil pendant les heures destinées au repos et les factions pendant les nuits humides sans le moindre abri contre les pluies, le mauvais régime alimentaire, le découragement, la contrainte morale, la privation pendant un certain temps de secours de la religion, l'absence totale de distractions, le mauvais choix d'un grand nombre de colons sous le rapport de la santé et de la constitution (conçoit-on que l'on envoie dans une colonie naissante, où la question de la salubrité n'est pas entièrement résolue, des familles scrofuleuses, des personnes atteintes de la carie, des phthisiques, des idiots, des rachitiques, des boiteux, des aveugles, des asthmatiques et des crétins?), l'encombrement et l'humidité des demeures, les grandes chaleurs auxquelles la plupart n'étaient pas accoutumés, les pluies longues et extraordinaires, les flaques d'eau stagnante par suite du défaut d'écoulement, les miasmes de différentes natures qui s'en dégagent, le mauvais état des toitures, la malpropreté, tant à l'intérieur qu'à l'extérieur des cases, la misère et enfin les excès en boissons 'et en aliments.'" Ibid., 132.

<sup>254</sup>A substantial number refused to leave the land they thought they had gained title to by virtue of their hard work. The Guatemalan government would later cancel the grants but some of the colonists stayed on, and eventually acquired title to the land.

It may seem strange to ask why Santo Tomas failed. There does not seem to be any lack of reasons for its failure. Santo Tomas was a monumental undertaking in terms of the effort, organization, money, and manpower that it required. In the end the only part that materialized was manpower—the wrong kind.<sup>255</sup> Leopold’s fascination with Central America encouraged the endeavor as the most likely and potentially lucrative place for a Belgian colony. The problem was that the Belgian chambers, cabinet, and people were skeptical, to say the least. The organization of the Santo Tomas project, especially the *Compagnie*, was plagued by a fundamental lack of coordination and planning, coupled with a healthy dose of greed.

It is impossible not to conclude that many of the difficulties with the Santo Tomas project must be laid at the feet of Leopold. For his first ten years in power, despite earlier attempts, Leopold basically was a one-man *juggernaut* for colonies. The cabinet was able to successfully divert him due to the political and economic problems of the first decade of Belgium’s existence. He was, however, absolutely determined to have colonies. As Deharveng noted, “... Leopold making himself the promoter, the counselor, the moral supporter, and very often the financier of any project likely to lay the foundations for overseas concessions.”<sup>256</sup> As a result of his approval of the company’s charter, the king was able to name two ministers on the board, and the

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<sup>255</sup>Confusion over why the colony was created was endemic from the start. There was an initial presentation to the Guatemalan government of the colony as a means to create a harbor and transportation hub for the east coast of Guatemala. The information and reason for the colony’s existence in Belgium was represented as an opportunity to start a new life as a colonist, advertising its agricultural potential. Harbors and roads needed engineers. Farms needed peasants to work the land.

<sup>256</sup>Deharveng, 2, 489-491.

charter could only be dissolved by the king.<sup>257</sup> Additionally, by virtue of his ability to approve or disapprove the actions and membership of the cabinet, Leopold had a strong ability to influence the members, at least in terms of foreign affairs. In the back of his mind, however, he always saw the Santo Tomas land grant as a possible cessation of sovereignty by Guatemala to Belgium, despite the repeated statements by the government of Guatemala otherwise.<sup>258</sup>

Leopold's imperialistic intentions became clearer by virtue of his "secret orders" to Major Guillaumont (also Guillaumot in some references). Guillaumont had been hired by the *Compagnie* on September 15, 1843 to improve conditions at Santo Tomas. He was reportedly given a secret mission to obtain, one way or another, the district of Santo Tomas as a Belgian territory or colony not affiliated with Guatemala. There is no written information on point as to what exactly this mission was; however, there is information that Guillaumont had business other than the *Compagnie's* when he left for Santo Tomas.<sup>259</sup>

Again, in the fall of 1845, Leopold had given a second secret agenda<sup>260</sup> to Edouard Blondeel van Cuelebroucke, previous chargé d'affaires to Mexico, to negotiate

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<sup>257</sup>Schwemmer, 50.

<sup>258</sup>It was the question of sovereignty and loss of land that had led Guatemala to terminate the English company's grant. When José Carrera was in office he repeatedly refused any talk of Belgian sovereignty over any land under any circumstances. Ibid., 305-12.

<sup>259</sup>"... un officier du Roi chargé d'une mission qui lui a toujours paru de haute confiance; qu'elle appartient entièrement au Gouvernement de Sa Majesté, que le secret en est sacré et que sa communication ne peut être faite à un Gouvernement Etranger." "...one officer of the King given a mission which always seemed to him to be of high confidentiality; it (the secret) belongs to his majesty's government alone, the secret is sacred and its contents cannot be given to any foreign government." Cloquet to Guillaumot, copy, 26 December 1844, AMAE 2027.

<sup>260</sup>Schwemmer, 275-7.

a new treaty with Guatemala. Blondeel was to offer three options to Guatemala.<sup>261</sup> The first was an outright cession of the district to Belgium for two million francs. The second was for joint administration of the district by Belgium and Guatemala as a new state in Central America. The third was for the Belgian government to assume the contractual obligations of the *Compagnie*, at its cost, of improvements to Santo Tomas and the surrounding area.<sup>262</sup> Belgium would hold the lands previously given to the *Compagnie* as collateral. The terms would have changed the status of the colonists from Guatemalan back to Belgian. Blondeel van Cuelebroucke felt that the political chaos in Guatemala would ensure that the land would therefore fall into Belgian hands by default. President Carrera, despite the agreement on the treaty by its representatives, rejected all these proposals outright.

To Leopold, Santo Tomas was about sovereignty and land, not colonists.<sup>263</sup> Leopold was so committed, in the background at least, that he managed to arrange a loan of one million francs from the House of Rothschild in Paris to be made to the *Compagnie*. When it became apparent that the chambers and the cabinet would not support his colonial ambitions, he openly complained about the limitations of constitutional monarchs.<sup>264</sup>

The problem with Leopold's method of maneuvering and remaining in the background was that it often gave the impression that he was in fact an active backer

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<sup>261</sup>Ibid., 303-5.

<sup>262</sup>These included the building of a road from coast to the interior, making the river navigable and the establishment of a steamship line along the same river.

<sup>263</sup>Schwemmer, 312 and Juste, 105.

<sup>264</sup>Schwemmer, 313.

and that the crown, and more importantly, the treasury, was behind the *Compagnie*. Leopold was not financially able to back any substantial colonial adventures on his own during his reign and had not yet learned to sufficiently manipulate government funds on his own. These were two problems Leopold II would not have.

If Leopold single-mindedly prevented a more rational approach to imperial designs, Parliament, for its part, was single-mindedly disinterested in colonial ventures if they incurred any cost to the government, unless they could be justified on scientific or commercial grounds.<sup>265</sup> The chambers were effectively out of the discussion—almost all colonial ventures in this period were decided by the cabinet and the king, at least until the Rio Nunez affair.

The Cabinet, at least for the first ten years, was definitely ambivalent if not aimless in its colonial decisions. The change in the cabinet came as result of the elimination of the question of borders and sovereignty with the signing of the treaty with the Netherlands in 1839 and the installation of Jean Baptiste Nothomb (prime minister April 1841-July, 1845) as a minister in the cabinet. He was far more likely to support governmental involvement, monetary or otherwise, than his predecessors had been. The fact that the Cabinet, despite the obvious failure of the colony, was willing to back further colonial development in Santo Tomas in the years up to 1854 was even more indicative of its lack of accountability and sense of direction. A report, commissioned by the Cabinet, to be compiled by the Belgian diplomat Baron Francois de Behr, again on the basis of a possible government-guaranteed loan to the company in

1854, verified the absolute foolishness of further government backing and the possibility that it would reflect poorly on Belgium.<sup>266</sup>

Clearly one must also look to the Guatemalan government and its leaders to understand some of the reasons for the colony's failure. The change between Galvéz's presidency and José Rafael Carrera Turcios, Carrera, a true *caudillo*, and the underlying instability, played a major role in the confusion that plagued the Belgians. Galvéz had been far more willing to trust colonists than Carrera. Carrera was all too aware of the *empresario* program adopted by Mexico in order to entice colonists to Texas. Additionally, there had always been a strong undercurrent of resentment for the original British and later Belgian grant. By the time of the rejection of the grant to the *Compagnie* in 1855, Carrera, along with most of the Guatemalan government, was ready to terminate all previous colonial grants.

A few of the people of Belgium, on the other hand, believed in the king, the church,<sup>267</sup> and the representations of the *Compagnie*. They took the first opportunity given to make a new beginning in Guatemala, wherever that was. A different type of

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<sup>265</sup>It had previously approved the scientific missions to Mexico. See Possemiers, *Naturalistes Belges au Mexique* (1830-1840), 31-35.

<sup>266</sup>“Behr's (special diplomatic agent to Guatemala Baron de Behr) general impression of the colony was devastating. He wrote Brouckère (Belgian Foreign Minister) that the Belgian government had been ignobly deceived and misled by all reports. The colony was only a miserable village whose inhabitants lived for the most part from fishing. The actions of the Company agents had generated disgust everywhere and had disgraced the name of Belgium. All of the public works—roads, wharves, canals, municipal buildings—were a mere fiction. The Company had squandered 3,200,000 francs without a trace. Any money put up by the Belgian government would disappear in the same fashion. The stocks backed by land lots in portfolio which the Company offered as guarantee against monies borrowed, were, in Behr's opinion, worthless. He thought that the Company courted Belgian government intervention in a speculator's venture which had miscarried.” Schwemmer, 399.

<sup>267</sup>One of the last efforts to find additional colonists was a plea by the company, and approved by Leopold, to the local parishes to promote the colony. It produced less than a half dozen new colonists.

colonist was required for the agricultural colony advertised by the *Compagnie* and the one for the harbor and infrastructure requirements envisioned by the governments of both Belgium and Guatemala. The people of Belgium who went to Santo Tomas were, for the most part, farmers, unemployed factory workers, their family members, and minor tradesmen. It failed to include the engineers and trained professionals that were necessary to build a harbor, roads, and wharves. This could not be blamed on the colonists but on the *Compagnie* and government, which never agreed what in fact Santo Tomas was to be. The potential settlers had no idea what lay on the other side of the Atlantic other than what maps or pictorial representations had been made available to them.<sup>268</sup> They simply relied on the representations of the company,<sup>269</sup> the apparent backing of the king and the government, and to a lesser extent the church.

It is clear that the early inability of the *Compagnie* to sufficiently capitalize itself and its desire for quick profits were a prime reason for the colony's failure. The company that formed was mostly made up of investors and *nouveau riche* capitalists of the Belgian expansion of the previous forty years. Their actions were strongly approved by other capitalists and businessmen. To these industrialists, colonies would provide markets for Belgium's unutilized factories and work force. Whereas later industrialists were greatly expanding and were in need of more markets and raw materials, Belgian industrialists were looking for a way to overcome a depression and create markets, not

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<sup>268</sup>The various reports by the company included several sketches that presented the colony and Guatemala in general as a tropical paradise. See Illustrations A & B.

<sup>269</sup>The use of maps was not unique to the *Compagnie*, the East Coast of Central America Commercial and Agricultural Company had apparently also used maps in this regard. See Young Anderson, Map of Abbottsville, AMAE 2027, also in RGS, Guatemala S/S.4. Also at the RGS see, Serris and Co., Territory of Verapas (1837), Guatemala S/G.9.

expand them. There was a strong call from the industrial class in Belgium for colonial expansion, but it never was agreeable to either the government in general or the population at large.<sup>270</sup>

The issue of religion and conversion as an impetus to imperialism does not seem to be relevant to Santo Tomas. Both Guatemala and Belgium were staunchly Catholic countries. The agreement between De Puydt and the Guatemalan government was specifically predicated on the colonists being Catholic. The issue of the religious relevance, however, did arise with the attempt by several Belgian Jesuits to enter Guatemala as part of the Belgian colonial movement in order to sidestep the previous expulsion of that religious order.<sup>271</sup> The material by Fabri relates to the religious side of the colony.<sup>272</sup> The presence of the Jesuits added to the impression and fears of the Carrera and the Guatemalan legislature that the colony was being used to circumvent the expulsion.

The warping of Darwin's theory into the racism and the Social Darwinism of the late nineteenth century had not begun by the time of Santo Tomas. There does not seem to have been any real sense of racial superiority or manifestation of white superiority in the colonial aspiration of Leopold or Belgium. This of course overlooks the obvious issue of why Leopold felt he could buy, borrow, or bludgeon indigenous people in his need for colonies. The obvious answer is that he simply did not regard non-Europeans

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<sup>270</sup>This was in stark contrast to the general approval of the Belgian people of Leopold II and the Congo Free State, at least until the revelations of the eighteen nineties.

<sup>271</sup>Walle was head of the colony from October 24, 1843-March 6, 1844.

<sup>272</sup>Joseph Fabri author of *Les Belges au Guatemala*, which concentrated on the Jesuits role in the colony of Santo Tomas, was a Jesuit himself.

as equal to Europeans. Leopold clearly reflected the imperial mindset of mid-nineteenth century Europe, and more specifically Britain.

It is clear that most of the individuals involved in Santo Tomas came from the Belgian military. Again, Belgium did not have a long military history because Belgium as a state did have a long history. Many of the military personnel, including Leopold himself, had served in a military capacity for the armies of Prussia, the Netherlands, France, or England. Belgium's defining status as a neutral power did not envision a large army or navy. The colonial thrusts of Belgium in this period thus provided an outlet for a military that was short on military assignments.

The problems of disease and habitation faced by the Belgian colonists during this period are consistent with the view that advances in medicine were crucial to later European imperialism. Specifically, the creation of drugs and medicines to counteract malaria and other tropical diseases were essential in this regard. The comments of both Doctors Dechange and Fleussu anticipated these problems, but they were ignored.

Another issue that tended to obfuscate the intended purpose of the Santo Tomas colony consisted of the possibility of a transoceanic canal through Central America,<sup>273</sup> and more specifically Nicaragua. The initial commission for a canal had been granted to William II of the Netherlands in the 1830s, but he was not able to move forward on it. Leopold was acutely aware that the control of the first transoceanic canal between the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans would put the controlling country in a powerful

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<sup>273</sup>Schwemmer, "Belgium and the Nicaraguan Canal Project (1841-1845)", 292-310.

position.<sup>274</sup> Simultaneously with the Santo Tomas project<sup>275</sup> and the Texas colonial project, Leopold became aware of the proposition made by Francisco Castellon, jointly appointed by Nicaragua and Honduras as minister plenipotentiary and extraordinary envoy to Belgium, France, Great Britain, Spain, and the United States, to the *Compagnie*. Castellon's mission was to offer treaties of friendship, settle a dispute with Great Britain, and offer to Belgium the opportunity for a protectorate and the possibility of a canal project through Nicaragua. Leopold was greatly interested in this proposal, although the cabinet moved cautiously.<sup>276</sup>

It is here that Leopold seems to have used his relationship with Palmerston to prevent a potentially harsh British response. Through his ambassador to Britain, Sylvain van Weyer, Leopold let it be known that Belgium was considering the canal and a protectorate with regard to Nicaragua. Palmerston's response was swift and insipid.<sup>277</sup> Not only was Belgium incapable of such an undertaking, it lacked the military muscle to hold it. Belgium's one-ship navy, the *Louise Marie*, was not quite up to the potential problems. Leopold withdrew.

The technological and scientific knowledge of the Belgians was, however, among the most advanced in Europe at that time. The first railroad built in continental

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<sup>274</sup>Ibid., 295-7.

<sup>275</sup>Baron Louis Henri-Charles Obert had earlier met and drawn up an agreement with Bishop Jorge de Viteri, archbishop of Salvador, representing these concepts and it was signed by Count Hompesch on May 13, 1843. "Traité de 16 mai 1843 entre la Compagnie belge de colonisation et l'Evêque de Vitery plénipotentiaire des cinq états de l'Amérique centrale." AMAE 2027.

<sup>276</sup>Schwemmer, 300-304.

<sup>277</sup>The United States, under the provisions of the Monroe Doctrine, would not have permitted Belgium to assume a protectorate over any Central American nation, even if the request had originated with that nation, as it apparently had with Nicaragua. This seems to have been appreciated and understood by most of the Belgian cabinet but apparently not Leopold.

Europe was built in Belgium. The first engineer sent to Santo Tomas among the fifty-four initial colonists was P. Simons, who had been in charge of the construction of that first railroad. Unfortunately he died en route. The most knowledgeable of the early colonists was therefore not able to aid in the colony's development. He certainly would have been capable of at least understanding the possibilities of construction and harbor clearing that were initially envisioned. Lastly, the world renowned quality and accuracy of the Belgian arms industry could have provided a reliable supply of weapons if the need had ever arisen. There were additional considerations, such as the exportation and sale of Belgian armaments<sup>278</sup> to Guatemala and the attempts at the establishment of a Belgian-Central American shipping line, among others.<sup>279</sup> Such a multiplicity of purposes doomed the colony almost before it began. Leopold was attempting to create an imperial enterprise using local tools.

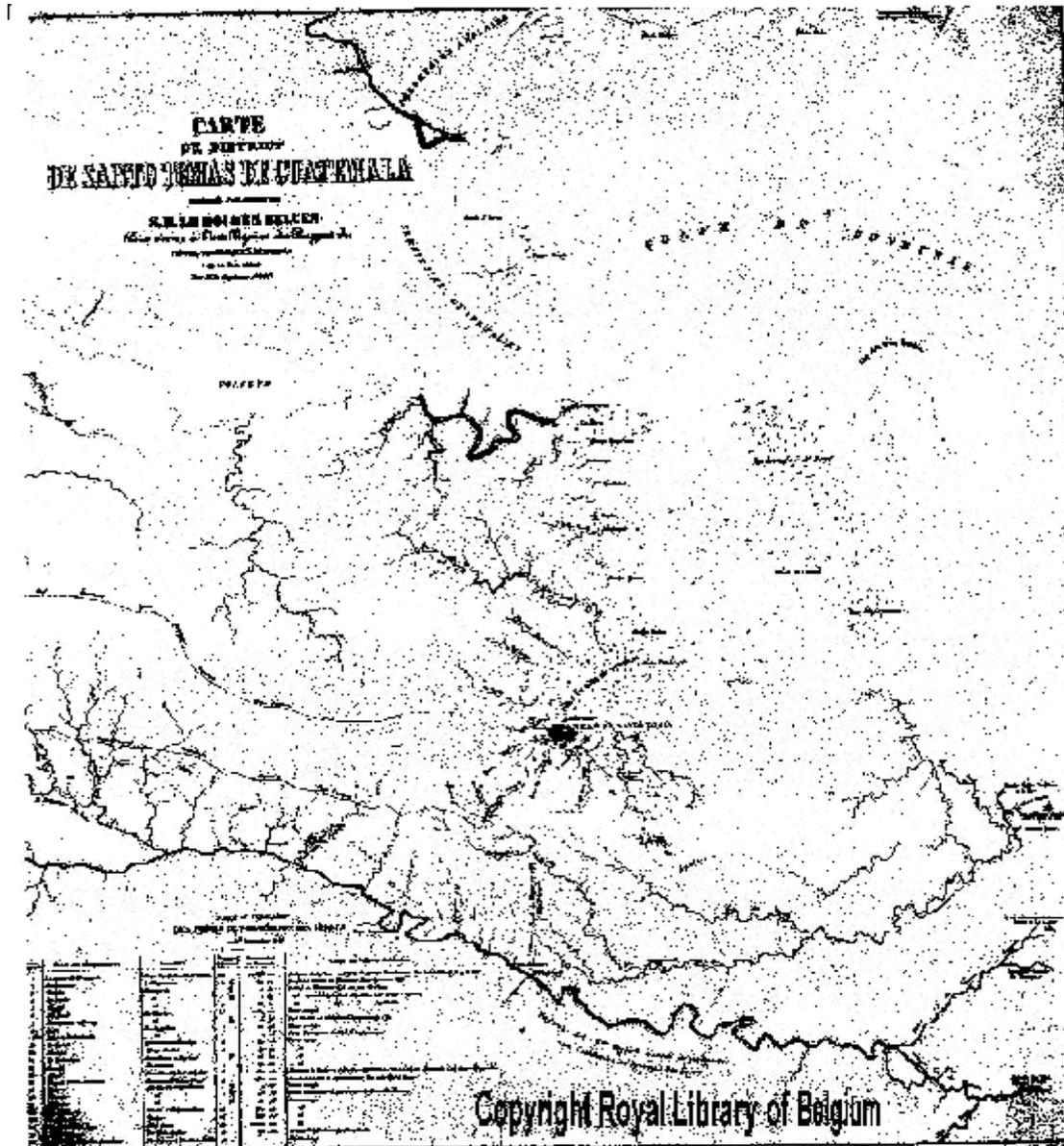
Finally, the records of the *Compagnie* and the later Belgian commissions convened to study the colony indicated that colonists continued to emigrate into the mid 1850s. What kept these settlers coming? There was, of course, the still unsettled but improving economic condition of Belgium, which continued into the 1850s. There was also the indirect but strong encouragement by the king, although he had begun to

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<sup>278</sup>There is some indication in the sources, which could not be verified, that part of the consideration offered by De Puydt to the government was a shipment of one thousand Belgian muskets.

<sup>279</sup>The issue of transoceanic shipping and relations with the United States, Texas and Britain was extremely complex, especially since they were simultaneous with the Santo Tomas effort. Laurent, 550-566.

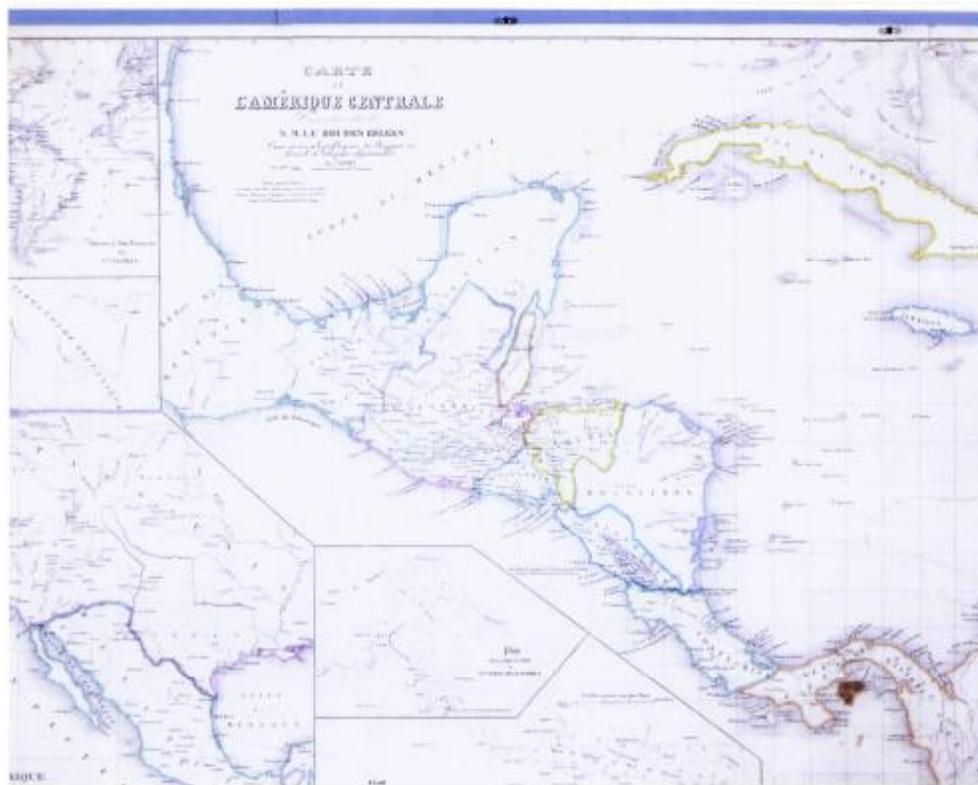
withdraw as an active political leader by the early 1850's. There is the possibility that



4.3 Map of Santo Tomas by Dorn

the vision of the colony created by maps and other images available at the time created a wanderlust or desire for the Eden across the sea.

Of all Leopold's colonial attempts, none were more cartographically represented than Santo Tomas.<sup>280</sup> New depictions of the colony produced by the *Compagnie*, especially for the king, seemed to widen the distance between reality and perception.



4.4 Map of Central America by Dally

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<sup>280</sup>Ansiaux and Reinhartz, 241-259.

Early maps had been somewhat general. The maps of Jean Dorn<sup>281</sup> (4.3) introduced maps with weight and substance. Located here were real flesh and blood Belgians. Additionally, there were additional maps (4.4)<sup>282</sup> of the Americas and Vera Paz Province, Guatemala created by Nicholas Dally for the king. The problem was that the actual plots and habitations contained little that would have been recognizable to the villagers of Belgium. The village of Santo Tomas was little more than shacks and huts. Additionally, many of the inhabitants had either left or died. These maps could be used to show stability and order where little existed. Although there is no actual record of their use as such, Dorn's and Dally's maps were doubtlessly used by the *Compagnie* as it made its last desperate efforts to obtain financial salvation both from the public at large and the very skeptical chambers. In the end the effort failed. The fundamental reason, at least in the beginning, for the failure of the British and Belgian colonial attempts seems to have been the general ignorance and lack of understanding on the part of all involved as to the tropical nature of the area to be colonized and the resultant deadly conditions in terms of disease and habitability that existed in Central America.

What part did maps play in this misunderstanding? It is difficult to know how much reliance was placed on the maps of Santo Tomas. The stylized nature of the maps and their pictorial inserts would seem to bring one to a recognition and sense of

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<sup>281</sup>Jean Dorn "Guatemala, District of Santo Tomas (1843), vol. XXIV page III 9.567, BRAI. Jean Dorn was an officer on several of the missions to Santo Tomas that produced these maps.

<sup>282</sup> Map 6, Nicolas Dally, 'Nouvelle carte...l' Amerique centrale' (1843), vol. XXIII, page III 11.180, lithographed by J. Bielards, Brussels, BRAI, is an example of sophisticated propaganda. The map was dedicated to Leopold by the *Compagnie* and relates the little colony of Santo Tomas to all of Central America and the Caribbean. Also see , unk, "Guatamela District, Santo Tomas (1840?), vol. XXIV, page III 9.560.

familiarity that simply was not there. It is known that the sketches and lithographs, at least in the publications released by the *Compagnie*, were apparently widely available.<sup>283</sup> After looking at the vast majority of these maps, however, the unknown remained unknown.

Santo Tomas and its lessons have been credited by many historians as putting a shroud over the future efforts of Leopold I and the colonial and business efforts at overseas expansion through the end of his reign. Each of the problems enumerated herein, in themselves, certainly did not cause the failure; they were endemic from the colony's beginning. It is undeniable, however, that in concert, they clearly combined and produced, from its inception, a sense of false hopes that did not correspond to the actual conditions of the colony and its often fatal outcome. Although Leopold would not become as deeply involved with any future colonial developments, it seems that it did make him more cautious and more importantly seem to have hardened his view away from colonialism and more to imperialism. "The Santo Tomas experience convinced him that successful overseas ventures depended on securing the sovereignty of a territory before beginning the physical labors of colonization."<sup>284</sup>

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<sup>283</sup>These were probably the images referred to by Dr. Dechange "... plantations... fountains..." See 240 above.

<sup>284</sup>Schwemmer, "Belgium and the Nicaraguan Canal Project (1841-1845)." 308.

## CHAPTER 5

### SANTA CATARINA

The Belgian colony in the Santa Catarina province in Brazil is distinguishable from the previously examined attempts in that it proceeded without any governmental financial help and rose and fell primarily as a result of one man's efforts and rejection.

Santa Catarina from a colonial perspective is Charles Van Lede. It can be argued that without Van Lede there would not have been any organized Belgian colony in this area of Brazil.<sup>285</sup> Van Lede, like Victor Pirson, was an engineer who claimed to have served in the Belgian army as a major. Unlike Pirson, who assumed more diplomatic assignments in his career positions, Van Lede was a soldier who fought in many different campaigns for many different nations. Similar to Hompesch in regards to Santo Tomas, Van Lede was generally considered to be both the creator and destroyer of his colonial child.

Van Lede traveled widely throughout South America. He was fluent in both Spanish and Portuguese. His background in engineering and desire to utilize, or perhaps exploit, the wealth of South America and especially Brazil seemed to be perfectly suited to the merchants and traders in Antwerp. In 1838 these merchants created the *Société Commerciale de Bruges* for the express purpose of encouraging trade with, and perhaps

colonization of, Brazil. The *Société* was one of several companies being formed at the end of the 1830s and early 1840s to create Belgian outlets for its industrial products. The country had been in the depths of the depression that the closure of Dutch ports and rising protectionist tariffs had produced. The *Société's* windfall, or so it appeared, was the fact that it came into contact with Charles Van Lede. Like Abraham Cohen in the Rio Nunez affair below, Van Lede has been the subject of various allegations with regard to the nature of his loyalties.<sup>286</sup>

Much of the discussion revolving around Van Lede is similar to that involving Cohen. In the name of whose interest did he undertake the Santa Catarina colonial effort? The answer, at least according to some Brazilian historians,<sup>287</sup> is that he was no doubt working for himself. The Belgian sources, of which there are very few, do not shed much light on Van Lede in any context other than the benefactor who abandoned the colonists after 1845.<sup>288</sup> The tendency in Belgian works, especially among the diplomatic officials at that time, was to place the blame on those who followed Van Lede, such as Philippe Fontaine and Henry Schutel, while applauding the actions of Gustave LeBon.<sup>289</sup>

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<sup>285</sup>The story of Madame Marie Van Langendonck is an exception. See Madame van Langendonck, *Une Colonie Au Brésil: Récits Historiques* (Antwerp: Imp. L. Gerrits, 1862).

<sup>286</sup>Van Lede was never able to overcome the accusations of the Belgian chargé d'affaires in Rio de Janeiro that he had tried to negotiate the grant for himself and his own company.

<sup>287</sup>See Johann Jakob von Tschudi, *As Colônias De Santa Catarina* (Blumenau, Brazil: Fundação "Casa Dr. Blumenau", 1988); and Carlos Ficker, *Charles Van Lede E a Colonização Belga; Subsídios Para a História Da Colonização De Ilhota, No Rio Itajai-Açu Pela "Compagnie Belge-Brasilienne De Colonisation."* (Blumenau, Brasil: Blumenau em Cadernos, 1972).

<sup>288</sup>Charles Maximilien Louis van Lede, *De La Colonisation Au Brésil. Mémoire Historique, Descriptif, Statistique Et Commercial Sur La Province De Sainte-Catherine*, (Brussels: La Librairie Polytechnique D'Aug Decq, 1843).

<sup>289</sup>Charles van Lede, *De La Colonisation Du Brésil* (Brussels: s.n., 1846).

Van Lede's initial contact with the *Société Commerciale de Bruges* occurred in 1841. To the *Société* Van Lede was the perfect agent to advance its Brazilian agenda. It was agreed that he would leave for Brazil in order to contact the Brazilian government about the creation of a colony or settlement which would be inclined to rely on Belgian goods and services, at least initially, and thus increase Belgian-Brazilian trade. As noted before, the result was certainly within the colonial interest of Belgium at that time in terms of the view of an overpopulated Belgium under a great deal of economic pressure.<sup>290</sup> As in other Belgian colonial efforts at this time, there was interest on Leopold's part as to what could be an opportunity to undertake a project that could be

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<sup>290</sup>“The first of Van Lede's letter to the Minister of Foreign Countries of Belgium, provoked an exchange of heavy correspondence and letters between the ministers of the Foreign Countries and the interior, to the Belgian Legation in the Rio de Janeiro and the Commercial Association of Bruges about the huge advantages of Belgian emigration in Brazil and the consequent stimulus to the commerce, to the industry and the navigation between the two countries. Finally, there was a project that deserved the full support of the real Belgium government. In November 26, 1841, the Minister of Foreign Countries in Brussels notified his legation in the Rio de Janeiro, Monsieur C. de Jaegher, that it was the intent of the Belgian government to support the Van Lede project, and requested the entire diplomatic aid. A topic that had wide repercussions in the ministerial mail, was the doubt about the Brazilian laws in regard to the nationality of the Belgian children born in Brazil and if it existed, in Brazil, the right of the private estate.” “O primeiro ofício de Van Lede ao Ministro do Exterior da Bélgica, provocou uma troca de correspondência volumosa e ofícios entre os ministros do exterior e do interior, a Legação Belga no Rio de Janeiro e a Associação Comercial de Bruges sobre as enormes vantagens de uma emigração da Bélgica para o Brasil e o conseqüente estímulo ao comércio, à indústria e à navegação entre os dois países. Enfim, um projeto que mereceu o pleno apoio do governo real da Bélgica. Em 26 de novembro de 1841, o Ministro do Exterior em Bruxelas, oficiou à sua legação no Rio de Janeiro, Monsieur C. de Jaegher, o propósito do governo belga de apoiar o projeto de Van Lede e solicitou o inteiro auxílio diplomático. Um assunto que repercutiu largamente na correspondência ministerial, foi a dúvida sobre as leis brasileiras quanto à nacionalidade de crianças belgas nascidas no Brasil e se existia, no Brasil, o direito da propriedade particular.” Ficker, 8-9. Note that going forward all footnotes relative to the correspondence between Belgian diplomats and the Foreign Office quoted by Carlos Ficker will not contain a citation of AMAE. The author apologizes but due to a loss of several folders of AMAE records he made, he could not verify the exactness of the citations of Ficker, a local historian of Santa Catarina Province and its environs who has written several books on this area and period of Brazilian history. I accept full responsibility for any inaccuracies but it was impossible to obtain copies before the publication deadline.

imperialistic in nature.<sup>291</sup> Leopold's interest, however, was apparently focused on the Santo Tomas effort, which was beginning to accelerate in 1842, as was Pirson's Texas mission.<sup>292</sup> Leopold did not lose interest in the Santa Catarina effort, but at the time it did not elicit the response that Santo Tomas did.

The question of Van Lede's loyalties comes into focus as a result of a series of actions he undertook prior to and during his first trip. Before sailing for Brazil in December 1841, he created his own company, the *Compagnie belge-brésilienne de Colonisation*, with himself as a director. He arrived in Brazil on February 12, 1842 and immediately began negotiations with the Brazilian government on the subject of a colony to be situated near the Itajai River in Santa Catarina province, located on the southeastern coast of Brazil. His initial agreement with the Brazilian government involved the grant of approximately 350 square miles. In view of the later controversy regarding Van Lede, it is significant to note that the original grant contained mineral rights to the land.<sup>293</sup>

Another aspect of the controversy regarding Van Lede surrounded the translation of the grant by the chargé d'affaires for Belgium, C. De Jaeger from Portuguese to French. The Brazilian government made the grant subject to several specific parameters, several of which were significant in the long run. These were a

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<sup>291</sup>Leopold had considered lending members of the Belgian military to Brazil both to train that army and gain new military skills. Jacques Robert Leconte, "Un Projet De Recrutement De Militaires Belges Pour Le Brésil (1838)," *Carnet de la Fourragère* 9/4 (1950): 286-299.

<sup>292</sup>Pirson is in Texas from January to April, 1842.

<sup>293</sup>“...first plan, the mineral and commercial exploitation and, only in the second plan, the establishment of an agricultural colony alongside the Itajaí Grande,...”, “meio plano, a exploração comercial e mineral e, somente em segundo plano, o estabelecimento de uma colônia agrícola nas margens do Itajaí Grande,...” Ficker, 10.

requirement for minimum capitalization of the company<sup>294</sup> a contribution toward the construction of certain required infrastructure,<sup>295</sup> a minimum immigration of 100 people per year, and a stipulation that all children born at the colony would be Brazilian subjects.

Van Lede claimed that the translation of the grant was purposely wrong for the simple reason that De Jaeger disliked Van Lede. De Jaeger responded by asserting that it was an accurate translation but pointed out that the lands were in Van Lede's name, not the *Société's*, and that regulations regarding the cost of the listed infrastructure could be construed as binding the government of Belgium since a Belgian company was involved.

Whether there was any truth to De Jaeger's suspicions, the explanation he provided had the effect of destroying any hope of the *Société's* attracting investors or colonists and it, along with Van Lede's company, was dissolved by their respective incorporators. Van Lede, however, was able to obtain a new charter from the government. This one had the apparent approval of Leopold and the Belgian government in 1844.<sup>296</sup> It also received from the government the use of two ships<sup>297</sup> for

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<sup>294</sup>The grant from the Brazilian government specified a 6,000,000 francs capitalization which the company never was able to raise. Ficker, 13.

<sup>295</sup>Part of the friction that developed between Van Lede and De Jaeger was the latter's opinion that the requirements of Article five of the grant could be construed as binding the Belgian government to the requirement to provide at its cost the infrastructure. *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>296</sup>The confusion on the question of what position the king had in relation to the Santo Tomas colony continued with the Santa Catarina effort. The written publication of the initial stock subscription of the *Compagnie belge-brésilienne de Colonisation* contained in the first line "...established under the patronage of his majesty king of the Belgians and the strong protection of his majesty the emperor of Brazil...", "...établie sous le patronage de S. M. le roi des Belges et la haute protection de S. M. l'empereur de Brésil..." , 5 March 1844, AMRAHM.

the purpose of assisting with the supply and transport of company personnel and the colonists.

When Van Lede returned to Brazil in 1844, he found that the grant had not been approved. The difficulty was the slowness and debate in the Brazilian Parliament. However, the first shipload of colonists was already on its way despite the government's failure to approve the grant. Van Lede had not anticipated the slow bureaucratic and political infighting of the Brazilian political system.<sup>298</sup> It has been alleged that the Belgian government possibly anticipated some problems with the grant and that "... it was resolved, before Van Lede's trip, that in case the attempt to obtain from the Imperial Government the transfer of the granted lands failed, the colonial undertaking should be camouflaged in a private company in name of Charles Van Lede and the colonization, in Santa Catarina, should be commenced with all possible means."<sup>299</sup>

The solution reached, which created a major problem for the future, was to purchase additional land in the same area but not part of the same tract.<sup>300</sup> These parcels

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<sup>297</sup>This decision was apparently made with the idea that the one ship, soon to be two ship Belgian navy, would be involved with efforts in Santo Tomas and the other colonial efforts and could not also serve Santa Catarina.

<sup>298</sup>"Van Lede did not count, however, with the delay, by bureaucratic motives, of the provincial applications.", "Não contava Van Lede, porém, com a demora, por motivos burocráticos, dos requerimentos provinciais." Ficker, 18.

<sup>299</sup>"Assim, ficou resolvido, já antes da viagem de Van Lede, que em caso de fracassar a tentativa de conseguir do Governo Imperial a entrega das terras concedidas, o empreendimento colonial deveria ser camuflado em empresa particular em nome de Charles Van Lede e a colonização, em Santa Catarina, deveria ser iniciada com todos os meios possíveis. Ibid.

<sup>300</sup>"Without waiting for the negative result of the application, Van Lede acquired from the major Henriques Flores a square of land in the right alongside of the Itajaí-Açu, in the place called "Ilhota" because of a small island that existed there.", "Sem aguardar o resultado negativo do requerimento, Van Lede adquiriu do major Henriques Flores uma légua quadrada de terras na margem direita do; Itajaí-Açu, no local chamado "Ilhota" por causa de uma pequena ilha ali existente." Ibid.

were not in the Company's name but in that of Van Lede. The first 109 colonists arrived on August 24, 1844. They settled on Van Lede's newly purchased land located along the Itajahi River.<sup>301</sup> The settlement was named Ilhota, "little river" in a local Indian dialect. Almost immediately the colony experienced a major problem. Sixteen of the colonists, including its only doctor, refused to go to the new settlement, opting instead to move to San Jose, approximately forty miles to the southwest.<sup>302</sup>

The loss of the doctor was significant in and of itself, but the real problem was now twofold. First, the Brazilian government had not approved the grant, so the colonists were illegal. The second problem was that the grant had stipulated the emigration of 100 families and the best van Lede could produce on the colony site was a total of ninety colonists. He responded to the first problem by organizing the colonists to create a working community. He responded to the second problem by going to Rio de Janeiro.

The efforts of the colonists were initially successful in a little over six months; they had successfully constructed over a dozen houses and several other buildings, including a church. Simultaneously they immediately began to clear the land and plant. The difficulty was that their European methods were ineffective in clearing the land of the virgin forests of Brazil. Despite a tremendous effort, little land was actually cleared. Additionally, the colonists were not aware of the flooding capabilities of the Itajahi

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<sup>301</sup>Also spelled Itajai and referred to as the Itajahi or Itajai Acu River."

<sup>302</sup>Van Lede insisted that they had merely used the company to obtain a free ticket while they maintained he did not bring them to the designated area which had been part of the Brazilian grant.

River and planted in and along the flood plain. Shortly after the crop was planted there was a raging flood, which destroyed the crops that had been planted.

The reaction of the colonists was predictable. A fairly large group of colonists, perhaps one quarter to one third of the settlement, chose to return to Belgium. On July 28, 1845 the Brazilian Parliament approved the grant. However, it had several changes, one of which proved ended Van Lede's interest. The House of Deputies had removed the mineral rights in the grant; they remained with the government. Van Lede, along with his wife, returned to Belgium, stating that he would try to have the matter resolved. It is hard to see what returning to Belgium would have accomplished since it was the Brazilian government that had changed the terms, not the Belgian. Before leaving Van Lede had put Phillipe Fontaine in charge of the colony, a move that would prove quite destructive to the fledging colony.

Van Lede never returned to Brazil. In 1848 he was appointed to the Provincial Council and for all practical purposes this was the end of Van Lede's interest in the colony and the *Compagnie belge-brésilienne de Colonisation*.

Again, the issue of Van Lede's dedication seems to be highlighted by his failure to return. The only really significant change made by the Brazilian legislature was the elimination of mineral rights. Van Lede's background was in engineering, and he had previously been appointed as an engineer for the Chilean Department of Roads, Bridges, and Harbors. Early interest in the colony did seem to be centered on the issue of mineral wealth. There is no plausible explanation other than he could no longer attain his primary objective.

Under Fontaine the colony deteriorated rapidly. He was accused of underpaying the colonists for their work so as to drive them out of the colony in order to sell their land. He did in fact sell some of the colony's land to a group of German colonists.<sup>303</sup> He seems to have been involved in smuggling, misusing its status as a colony to import goods into the colony without paying import duties. Lastly, Fontaine is alleged to have sold one of the two ships provided by the Belgian government for the colony.<sup>304</sup> He was arrested by the Brazilian government and accused of theft and smuggling.<sup>305</sup> He immediately fled to Belgium.<sup>306</sup>

The colony was visited by Consul Charles Sheridan, who reported on the wretched condition of the colony and the colonists.<sup>307</sup> As a result of Sheridan's report, Gustave LeBon took over as the head of colony, and he proceeded to seek and gain the help of the neighboring communities of Blumenthau and Joinville, containing mostly German colonists.<sup>308</sup> In the middle of 1847 chargé d'affaires Auguste van der Straten Ponthoz reported to the foreign office that the colony was, for all practical purposes, no longer existed.<sup>309</sup> After LeBon departed, the colony was left to the care of Henry Schutel, who appears to have done absolutely nothing; at this point the colony became

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<sup>303</sup>Ficker, 19.

<sup>304</sup>Marsalis, 130.

<sup>305</sup>The entire crew of the *Jan Van Eyck* was also imprisoned although it is doubtful they were aware of the violations.

<sup>306</sup>He wrote a report exculpating himself entitled *Rapport sur la situation de la Colonie Belge*. Ficker, 28.

<sup>307</sup>"...however the new chargé d'affaires from Belgium in Rio, Baron Auguste van der Straten-Ponthoz, sent a letter about the matter to the Foreign Minister in Brussels, severely critical of Van Lede.", "...ficou resolvido, porém o novo *Cfargé d' Afâaircé* da Bélgica no Rio, Barão Auguste van der Straten-Ponthoz, enviou um ofício sobre o assunto ao Ministro em Bruxellas, levantando as mais severas críticas contra Van Lede", Straten-Ponthoz to d'Hoffschmidt, 22 May 184(5?). Ficker, 22.

<sup>308</sup>Tschudi, 110 and 130-132.

part of the larger group of German colonists in the unofficially combined community of Ilhota/Blumenau/Joinville.

In December 1874 Count Conde d'Ursal verified the previous discovery of the Belgian chargé d'affaires that the land the colonists had farmed for decades had not been owned by the *Compagnie belge-brésilienne de Colonisation*, but by Van Lede personally, who had deeded the properties to a hospital in Antwerp. Despite the Count's recommendation that the land be given to the colonists, it took a fifteen year fight for the colonists to defeat the claims of the hospital and obtain the land.

Why did the colony of Santa Catarina and the village of Ilhota fail? Many of the same reasons can be applied to the failure of Van Lede's effort that can be attributed to Santo Tomas. In fact, Santo Tomas may be a reason in itself for Santa Catarina's downfall. The worst years of the colonial attempt in Guatemala coincided with the bad years in Brazil. Additionally, the Belgian government had begun, partially as a result of the failure of Santo Tomas, to look into methods by which it could transplant, safely and cheaply, some of its citizens other than by a formal colonization project.<sup>310</sup> The government had come to a realization that perhaps the best location for Belgians would be in an area where the climate was similar to Belgium's.<sup>311</sup> This was certainly not the case in Guatemala and Brazil, not to mention the west coast of Africa. This led to the major decision to look into the possibility of settling Belgians in the United States.<sup>312</sup> This effort and its subsequent efforts did not fulfill Leopold's imperialistic aims but did

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<sup>309</sup>“La colonie est en ruine,” Straten-Ponthoz to d'Hoffschmidt, June 1847. Ficker, 27.

<sup>310</sup>Feys, 33-35.

<sup>311</sup>Ibid., 31.

have much broader support in the chambers. Santa Catarina seems to have been lost in the effort to find a more temperate climate.

This new non colonial effort to transplant its citizens did not fulfill the imperialistic aims of Leopold but did have much broader support in the chambers. Leopold's involvement in Brazil had taken several different aspects. He had briefly considered Brazil in 1838 and 1839 in terms of either exporting the excess prison population or training the Belgian army by lending it to the Brazilian government in its attempts in to increase its military at that time. Leopold had let his name, as had the Brazilian Emperor Don Pedro II, be used on the share certificate of the second *Compagnie belge-brésilienne de Colonisation*. As late as 1846, Leopold indicated that he thought that he could or should help the colony in Santa Catarina, perhaps by a stronger association of his name with the effort. But he was strongly dissuaded from doing so by the foreign minister.<sup>313</sup> Soon the events of 1847 and 1848 began to divert his time and effort, and he seems to have lost interest in the Brazilian effort.

A significant distinction between Santa Catarina and all other Belgian efforts in the colonial area was the oversight that was available, and the fact that despite Belgian governmental oversight, the colony still failed. From the first involvement of De Jaeger in 1842 through the visits by van der Straten Ponthoz in 1847, Van Lede and his successors were in constant communication with members of the Belgian legation in Rio de Janeiro. Although the distance was over four hundred miles between the main settlement at Itajahi and Rio de Janeiro, it was a certainly a lot closer then Texas, Santo

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<sup>312</sup>Ibid., 22-4.

Tomas, or Rio Nunez to Brussels. The chargé d'affaires, De Jaeger, was aware of Van Lede's and the *Société's* plans before he arrived in 1842. The negotiations which Van Lede conducted were accomplished with the advice and consent of the government.

The problem was that Van Lede ran into several difficulties that rendered much of the potential help of the Belgian government unusable. The Brazilian government's failure to timely ratify the grant created the need to purchase additional land not part of the original transaction. The failure of the colonists to seek information on farming in Brazil instead of using European methods and their failure to seek advice on flooding added to the confusion and initial disillusionment. But perhaps the argument that Van Lede did not really seek to establish an agricultural colony but a mining venture is a sound one. This is especially so in view of his failure to return after the mineral rights were not transferred. There is even a question as to whether he was in fact an officer in the Belgian army.<sup>314</sup> Like Hompesch and Obert in the Santo Tomas effort, the company was not sufficiently capitalized nor directed by competent leaders.

Of some interest, however, was a strong desire to emigrate on the part of certain Belgians despite the economic and political realities. One of the more remarkable stories to come out of this period was that of Madame Marie Van Langendonck. In 1857, she was a widow with two sons, who decided to move to Brazil. She did not go to Itajahi or any other area near Van Lede's colony but settled outside the city of Porto-Alégre, approximately two hundred miles south of Itajahi on the Brazilian coast among

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<sup>313</sup>Leopold to d'Hoffschmidt, August 1846, AMAE 2028.

outcasts and convicts.<sup>315</sup> What is relative to Santa Catarina was her repeated insistence that Belgium should increase its colonization efforts and Brazil should encourage it to do so.<sup>316</sup> She makes this same personal plea in a letter to the Emperor of Brazil, Don Pedro II.<sup>317</sup>

Another unusual aspect of this colonial effort was that it came at the beginning of a national debate on what, if anything, the government should do in terms of emigration.<sup>318</sup> The cumulative effect of the colonial effort in Texas, Santo Tomas, Argentina, Ethiopia, Algeria, others, and now Santa Catarina had begun a process of inquiries as to what the responsibility of the government was to help its citizens leave the country. The final result of this effort was a law passed in 1856 that forbade the government from actively involving itself in these population transfers.<sup>319</sup> It did not address the issue of imperialistic adventures, or those of a commercial nature. Leopold, if he so desired, was still free to pursue his dream. The economic situation in 1845 and 1846 was disastrous in terms of agriculture, as there were two crop failures<sup>320</sup> and weather related incidents that simply did not allow for funds to be spent on

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<sup>314</sup>The records of the Archives of the Royal Museum of the Army and Military History, which maintains the records of all Belgian military personnel does not have a military Jacket for Charles Van Lede. Maselis, 125.

<sup>315</sup>Langendonck, 42.

<sup>316</sup>Ibid., 88.

<sup>317</sup>Referring to the loyalty and hard working nature of the Belgian colonists despite the difficulties “If some colonies are still available, someone will populate them. I am sure that these colonists, although isolated, will thank your majesty. They will find some Belgians among them who work hard and persevere to advance the country despite the fact that distance to the market place reduces of their harvest the value by half.” Langendonck to Emperor Don Pedro II, 21 November 1865, in Marie Langendonck, *A Colony in Brazil*. Translated by Paula Berinson.(np: Edunisc, 2002), 64.

<sup>318</sup>Feys, 18-9.

<sup>319</sup>Ibid., 9.

nonessentials. The state of the colony at Santa Catarina and the small number of colonists involved was not significant enough to raise a sufficient level of concern, especially in view of the problems at home.

Aside from the question of whether Van Lede was indeed an officer in the Belgian army, Santa Catarina is also distinguishable in the use of the military as the initial explorers or investigators. In this case, however, the Belgian navy, which was the backbone of the efforts in Santo Tomas and on the Rio Nunez, had no appreciable part in this effort.

As in Santo Tomas, the question of missionary work was not an issue. In addition to the lack of a religious commitment, Brazil, although it guaranteed freedom of religion in its constitution, was an overwhelmingly Catholic country, as was Belgium. What did come during this period, and as an indirect result of the Santa Catarina effort and the study of the United States as potential source of immigration, was the commitment to send Belgian priests to the western hemisphere, especially the United States .<sup>321</sup>

Similarly lacking in this effort was any intent to spread superior European values. Brazil was arguably, after Mexico, considered the most sophisticated country in Latin America. In fact the stability of the country was a welcome exception to the situations previously encountered in Texas and Guatemala and what was found on the Rio Nunez.

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<sup>320</sup>A significant reason for the failure was the potato famine that wiped out the potato crop in Belgium as it had and continued to do in Ireland between 1845 and 1849. The Belgians, like the Irish had relied on the potato as a cheap plentiful food crop, although not nearly to the same degree.

A more interesting aspect of any attempt to discern racist motives on the part of the Belgians was the reverse concept, a major force in later Brazilian social and political life, of the “whitening” of the country. Brazil in the mid nineteenth was perhaps the most racially diverse country on earth. This was not a biracial society such as the United States at that time, but a very diverse racial and ethnic society.

Early initiations for emigration to Brazil, including those during Van Lede’s efforts were to increase the population in those areas that were thinly populated.<sup>322</sup> Later efforts in the eighteen sixties, seventies and eighties were to “whiten” society.<sup>323</sup> The predominate theory, an early version of Social Darwinism, was that Brazilian society could reduce its mixed black and Indian blood society by importing superior European white men and eventually the society would lose most of its color. Leopold was clearly not involved in this effort but its roots were discernable in these early Brazilian colonial efforts.

There was no discernable scientific or medical advance in the latter part of the nineteenth century that would have assisted in Santa Catarina during this period. There was some problem with disease, such as malaria, but never to the extent encountered in Santo Tomas, and certainly not to the extent that existed on the west coast of Africa.

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<sup>321</sup> Feys, 8-9.

<sup>322</sup> Thomas Skidmore, *Black into White, Race and Nationality in Brazilian Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974.) 23

<sup>323</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

As pointed out in the discussion on Santo Tomas, maps played a significant role in enticing immigrants and creating the aura of empire. The map used and credited by Van Lede was an excellent map of impressive quality (5.1).<sup>324</sup> The map of the village of Itajahi, however, was certainly not of the quality as those produced by Dorn in Santo Tomas which is actually a sketch (5.2).<sup>325</sup> It was actually comparable in its simplicity to the maps produced for Rio Nunez. The effort to influence both king and populace did not exist in Santa Catarina. Maps were simply maps.

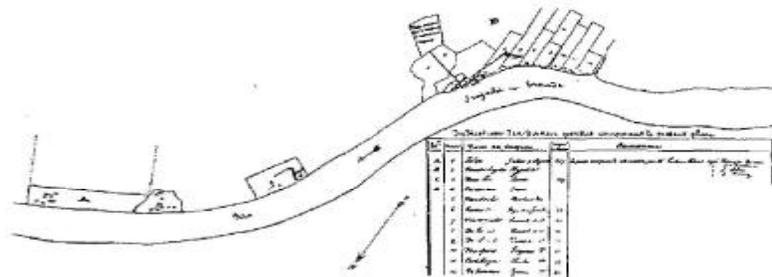
Santa Catarina can then be seen as a reasonable colonial attempt by the commercial sector to increase Belgian trade while at the same time perhaps easing the population problem at home. It did attract the attention of Leopold and but came at a time in Belgian affairs when the whole question of emigration was under review. More than the other three efforts, its failure was perhaps attributable to bad timing.

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<sup>324</sup> Charles Maximilien Louis van Lede, *De La Colonisation Au Brésil. Mémoire Historique, Descriptif, Statistique Et Commercial Sur La Province De Sainte-Catherine*, (Brussels, n p, 1843).

<sup>325</sup> Ficker, 29.





Planta da Colônia Belga, no Itajai Açu, levantada na época da sua fundação. Por ela e pela relação dos nomes dos ocupantes dos respectivos lotes pode-se ter a indicação do local exato destinado a cada família. Como se vê, Gustavo e Augusto Lebon moravam rio abaixo, fora da área da Colônia propriamente dita. O mesmo acontecia com Hippólito Van Der Heyde e com Pierre Van Loo. A parte de Gustavo Lebon, com 247 braças, era compartilhada por quatro outros colonos, inclusive o engenheiro Fontaine.

## 5.2 Map of Ilhota/Itajahi

## CHAPTER 6

### RIO NUNEZ

Any discussion of Belgium and Africa invariably brings to mind the Belgian Congo, its predecessor the Congo Free State, or possibly Rwanda or Burundi<sup>326</sup>. Belgian interest in Africa actually predates the Congo by thirty years. It was centered on the West African coast along the Rio Nunez River in what is now the country of Guinea.

Rio Nunez is widely known within European historical circles not for the attempted Belgian colonial efforts but because of a minor military action on March 24, 1849 along the Rio Nunez River and the ensuing international crisis. The incident was particularly well known in England as a result of the protracted effort of two of its citizens, Joseph Braithwaite and George Martin, to seek compensation from France and Belgium as a result of inventory destroyed in this action.<sup>327</sup> It was far more relevant in Belgian history from two distinctively different perspectives. The first was the small military action that took place on that date. It was only one of two military actions ever undertaken by the Belgian military between 1830 and the beginning of the First World War in 1914. The second reason for the notoriety of Rio Nunez is the fact that it is

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<sup>326</sup>In 1914, despite its stated national policy of neutrality, Belgium was invaded and overrun by Germany in the opening months of the First World War. In 1916 Belgian forces in the Congo invaded the neighboring German colony of *Deutsch-Ostafrika* or German East Africa. In possession of these areas at the end of the war Belgium was eventually given the area then called Ruanda-Urundi under a mandate through the League of Nations in 1924.

<sup>327</sup>For a more than exhaustive study of the Braithwaite and Martin affair see Braithwaite.

often considered a precursor of Belgian interest in central Africa and therefore the Congo. It is of interest here because it represented yet another significant failed colonial effort by Belgium and Leopold I.

Rio Nunez was different from a colonial perspective because its roots were not directly with the imperial and colonial interests of Leopold, instead it was a commercial opportunity by ambitious merchants in Belgium. Unlike the effort at Santo Tomas, it began its effort and became somewhat successful, at least initially, without any royal or governmental help.

There never were any colonists at Rio Nunez; in fact, it is hard to even argue that there was a colony. There were entrepreneurs, perhaps never any more than a dozen individuals at any given time, excluding ship's crew, who attempted to take advantage of the European desire for peanut oil and Belgium's desire to export its industrial output.

What this colonial adventure had in common with other efforts was the need for capital which invariably resulted in requests for financial aid and protection from the government, preferably through Leopold. Rio Nunez was also distinguishable in that there were two transfers to the Belgian government of land that included sovereignty and yet Belgium, more specifically Leopold, did not or was not able to take advantage of those two opportunities. Rio Nunez is a story of Belgian commercial adventurers and the tiny Belgian navy.

A general consensus among historians prior to the 1960s was that the earliest identifiable Belgian contacts along the Rio Nunez<sup>328</sup> were in 1845 when Captain Frederick Knudsen, under contract with the Antwerp merchant, Henri Serigiers, traded along the West African coast.<sup>329</sup> Abraham Cohen, another trader, was then involved in commercial transactions on the west coast of Africa, and his significant influence and impact on the Rio Nunez for Belgium has been extensively researched.<sup>330</sup> Research in the last three or four decades, however, has shown there were previous significant Belgian trading efforts prior to those of Serigiers and Cohen, thus expanding the extent and breadth of Belgian involvement.<sup>331</sup>

These earlier voyages,<sup>332</sup> arranged and funded in their individual capacity by Pierre Vincent and Madame Valcke-Deknuyt for example, show that the rapidly industrializing Belgian economy was already aware of the potential of trade and specifically the peanut oil of the region.<sup>333</sup> From a colonial perspective, however, the voyage of Knudsen in 1846 was far more significant. Knudsen was offered a grant for a

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<sup>328</sup>Rio Nunez refers to both the river and the region adjacent to the river and is correctly written as Rio Núñez. The use of Rio Nunez, however is to keep consistency with the Belgian use and documents.

<sup>329</sup>For purposes of this section Belgium is to be understood as post 1830 and does not consider the actions of either the Netherlands or Belgium as part of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands (1815-30), thus discounting the considerable Dutch contact of the previous three hundred years.

<sup>330</sup>R Massinon, *L'entreprise du Rio-Nunez* (Bujumbura: University Press, 1965) and Charles Maroy, *La Colonie Belge du Rio Nunez et L'expédition Franco-Belge De Boké En 1849* (Anvers: Secrétariat de l'Association des licenciés de St. Ignace, 1930).

<sup>331</sup>Everaert and De Wilde, 315.

<sup>332</sup>*Ibid.*, 317-9.

<sup>333</sup>The need was developing for oil for industrial machinery, but there was a very heavy trade imbalance in favor of the Rio Nunez. Maselis, 148 and Massinon, 8.

colony to be presented to the king of Belgium by King Ali Manso of Sombia.<sup>334</sup> This freely given grant of sovereignty and colonial base was for far less than the later agreement negotiated between the Belgian captain Joseph van Haverbeke and the Nalu<sup>335</sup> King Lamina. There was no apparent reason for the grant except that the king liked Knudsen and therefore wanted to reward his king. The grant finally reached the king in December 1847 just one week before the first mission of J. L. van Haverbeke to the Rio Nunez.<sup>336</sup> There is no record of any reply or even recognition by Leopold of this offer. The likely reasons for this lack of response will be discussed below.

Knudsen's grant, which came two years before the main Belgian effort began in 1848, was in the long run of no colonial or even commercial value in itself since it was not acted upon. It was, however, emblematic of how Rio Nunez was distinguishable from other Belgian colonial attempts, such as those in Guatemala and Brazil. It initially proceeded without any assistance from, or even knowledge of, the government.<sup>337</sup> In many ways it resembled other Belgian "colonies" that were almost individualistic in their inception, execution, and accomplishments, especially certain settlements of Belgian citizens in the United States .<sup>338</sup>

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<sup>334</sup>“We therefore now embrace the opportunity through him, Mr. Knudsen, to offer the same to His Royal Majesty, the king of the Belgians, and should the same meet His Majesty's wishes, We shall feel very glad if he will send out persons to colonize the spot of ground.” AMAE 2024 and Massinon. 6.

<sup>335</sup>Also written as Nalou.

<sup>336</sup>There has been speculation that Sereigiers used this as a carrot to the king in order to obtain use of the Belgian navy and money.

<sup>337</sup>The commercial attempt on the Rio Nunez almost immediately came to the attention of Leopold. Belgian expansion was a priority and Belgium was not that large a country. Any colonial international attempts would have rapidly come to his attention.

<sup>338</sup>Wisconsin, Louisiana, Kansas, and Texas to name a few. See Feys.

Van Haverbeke's voyage which began in December 1847, resulted in the first treaty specifically granting sovereignty rights to the king of Belgium that was negotiated by a government representative. The treaty was signed on March 4, 1848. It is helpful to look at the situation along the Rio Nunez in terms of both the native inhabitants and the European traders, especially Abraham Cohen.<sup>339</sup>

The area around Rio Nunez in West Africa in the middle of the nineteenth century was under the control, at least in theory, of the Fula of Labé, the largest administrative subdivision of the Futa-Djalón, a mountainous district west of the Rio Nunez and the name of the theocratic federation or state of the Futa-Djalón.<sup>340</sup> The area had experienced almost fifty years of turmoil as a result of the fighting between the Alfaya branch and the Soriya branch of the federation. During the Rio Nunez incident, the Fula of Labé ruled over this area with a relatively free hand. They remained important to the Belgian and other European traders by virtue of their ability to close the river to trade and determine the succession of the chiefs of the Landuman and the Nalu ethnic groups along the Rio Nunez River.

Under several charismatic leaders such as Usman dan Fodio and al-Hajj Umar, a series of jihads created the Tukolor Empire and the Sokoto Caliphate in western and central West Africa. The Fula-Djalón state, to the west and north of these empires, were able to rule independently. They ruled by utilizing the native chiefs as surrogates as

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<sup>339</sup>A good overview of the political situation on the Rio Nunez and the adjacent Rio Pongo Rivers can be found in Bruce L. Mouser, "Trade and Politics in the Nunez and Pongo Rivers, 1790-1865" (Ph.D. diss, Indiana University, 1972).

<sup>340</sup>The political makeup of this state up can be found in Jean Suret-Canale, *The Fouta-Djalón Chieftaincy: West African Chiefs: Their Changing Status under Colonial Rule and Independence* (Ife, Nigeria: University of Ife, Institute of African Studies, 1968).

long as they acknowledged their subservient status and paid the *sagalé*, or annual payment of tribute.<sup>341</sup> The confusion that reigned in the Rio Nunez area was partly due to the expanding nature of this rule and the warring tendency of both the Nalu and the Landuman<sup>342</sup> ethnic groups. Additionally, it probably reflected the revolving kingship of the state due to a succession dispute between the Alfaya and Soriya branches which may have been duplicated along the Rio Nunez.<sup>343</sup> There was no effort to convert these groups to Islam as they served a function as a barrier and buffer against the Europeans and required less administrative oversight as non Muslims.

Most European traders of the mid nineteenth century were unaware of the intricate and complex trading network that existed in west central Africa. The Futa-Djalon state was a trade-based society that continued to expand beyond its early roots in the eighteenth century.<sup>344</sup> Added to the concurrent religious wave of the jihadic movements of these two centuries, the Fula became increasingly more powerful as both a trading and Islamic power well into the twentieth century.<sup>345</sup> To the “sophisticated and worldly Europeans” this was a society to dominate or at least control. It was really beyond their capabilities to comprehend that they were dealing with but the periphery of a vast trading empire.

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<sup>341</sup> Ibid., 3-4.

<sup>342</sup> Also spelled Landouman.

<sup>343</sup> Suret-Canale, 3.

<sup>344</sup> A good overview is available in Walter Rodney, *A History of the Upper Guinea Coast, 1545-1800* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970); and Adam Jones, *From Slaves to Palm Kernels; A History of the Galinhas country (WestAfrica), 1730-1890* (Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1983).

<sup>345</sup> See Alusine Jalloh and David E. Skinner, eds. *Islam and Trade in Sierra Leone* (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 1997); and Boubacar Barry, *Senegambia and the Atlantic Slave Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

These main two ethnic groups, the Landuman and the Nalu, in the Nunez area (6.1)<sup>346</sup> at the time of this Belgian effort were often at war with each other and constantly maneuvering for allies and advantages against each other. In 1844 Sarah, king of the Landuman, died leaving two sons, Tongo and Mayoré. Their succession battle over the next ten years provided the backdrop for the treaty that enabled Belgium was able to acquire on the Rio Nunez.<sup>347</sup>

Prior to van Haverbeke's arrival on the Rio Nunez, Lamina, king of the Nalu, felt he had been wronged by the French and Mayoré in a series of actions against Tongo with Nalu support. It is surmised that Lamina ceded the land to the Belgians as a way to register his displeasure with the French by not only ceding the land but introducing additional competition from a different nation to the trading area.<sup>348</sup> There is a sharp difference of opinion as to whether the cessation of land to Belgium was at Lamina's suggestion or van Haverbeke's. The result, however, was a treaty ceding land to Belgium subject to ratification of the treaty and payment of an annual sum of money to the tribe and the king.<sup>349</sup> Having procured a treaty for the placement of a colony, which he was specifically not authorized to negotiate, van Haverbeke returned to Belgium. He left Abraham Cohen behind in the Rio Nunez as an unofficial agent or representative of Belgium.

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<sup>346</sup>Mouser, 233.

<sup>347</sup>Braithwaite, 119-131.

<sup>348</sup>The area was a strip of land along both sides of Rio Nunez from the coast and included the two small towns of Victoria and Rapass, also spelled Ropass. AMAE 2024.

<sup>349</sup>*Traité entre le Lieutenant de Vaisseau Vanhaverbeke, commandant la Goélette de guerre belge Louise marie, agissant au nom de le majesté Léopold 1<sup>er</sup>, Roi des Belges, d'une part, et Lumina chef Suprême des nalous.* AMAE 2024.

Abraham Cohen has been rightly identified in studies of Belgian colonial history<sup>350</sup> as pivotal to the events concerning both the battle of Boko<sup>351</sup> and the larger Belgian presence on the Rio Nunez. Cohen was a Frenchman who had interests in a commercial export and an import business in Marseille before he declared bankruptcy in 1842. He became involved in Belgian commercial affairs upon his arrival in Brussels in 1844. The importance and question of what Cohen's actual position and motives were during this period, in relation to his actions in the region and his possible use by the Belgian government in a surreptitious capacity, has become a subject of great interest in the last ten forty years.<sup>352</sup>

Cohen's first involvement in the Senegambia area<sup>353</sup> took place in 1845 when he and Jacques Sigrist convinced local ship owners in Ghent to finance a ship with a cargo of various Belgian merchandise to the Rio Nunez area. The ship, with Cohen aboard, returned to the area in 1846. This 1846 trip began Cohen's stay in the area that lasted approximately two years. Upon his return after this two-year period, Cohen began to become deeply involved in the attempt to advance Belgian, or at least his own, trading in West Africa. Cohen was involved at one time or another with the main Belgian traders on or financiers of the Nunez such as Henri Serigiers, the brothers J. & L. DeCock, Jean-Louis Decoster, Jacques Sigrist, and Jean Bicaise. Ultimately, however, in retrospect Cohen worked for Cohen.

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<sup>350</sup>Massinon, 4-5.

<sup>351</sup>Also referred to as Debucca or Debokke.

<sup>352</sup>Everaert and De Wilde, 318-24.

<sup>353</sup>This is the area within the watershed of the Senegal and Gambia Rivers, along the West Africa coast. Today it encompasses all or part of the present countries of Senegal, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau and Guinea.

Cohen was also in the forefront of the many commercial requests to the Belgian government for monetary and military assistance based on what was explained as the difficult and dangerous nature of trading on the west coast of Africa. It was fortunate for Cohen that d'Hoffschmidt,<sup>354</sup> the Belgian Foreign Minister from 1848 to 1852, exhibited a far more sympathetic attitude to the colonial adventures than had previous foreign ministers.<sup>355</sup> Cohen's requests were usually for large sums of money, often over one million francs, from the government, in the form of a loan or subsidy. These sums were to be used to set up Belgian factories or trading posts similar to those already constructed in the area by France and England. In almost all cases these requests were rejected, and a much smaller sum, if anything, was tendered<sup>356</sup>. The pressure from Cohen, Sereigiers, and others and perhaps the treaty of Ali Manso were no doubt involved in the rationale behind van Haverbeke's voyage to the Rio Nunez.

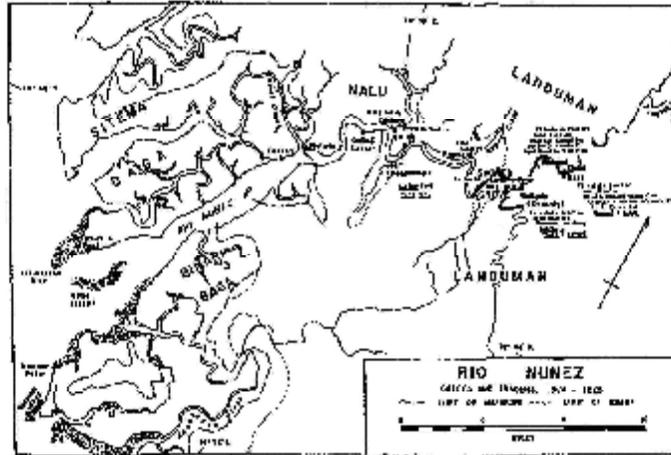
Van Haverbeke's ship, the *Louise Marie*, along with schooner *Emma* with Cohen aboard, dropped anchor in the mouth of the Rio Nunez on February 16, 1848. There has been a great deal of speculation as to what orders were given to van Haverbeke by the foreign minister and/or Leopold outside of his commission. There is

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<sup>354</sup>Cohen had begun his correspondence with the previous foreign minister A. D. Dechamps. It continued under Ernest d'Hoffschmidt de Resteigne. Everaert and De Wilde, 320.

<sup>355</sup>D'Hoffschmidt, through the Interior Minister Charles Rogier, provided funding for the project from the 2,000,000 francs fund for business development, implicitly for interior commercial development in a law enacted on April 18, 1848. The entire fund was exhausted which caused a firestorm of protest from the chambers. Under the constitution, Article 68, the chambers was the only branch of the government that had the power to fund and tax.

<sup>356</sup> Cohen often presented his requests in a manner calculated to entice Leopold and the government." Nos opérations auront pour but principal les ordres et les consignations, nous y donnerons tous nos soins. La création de nouveaux réseaux de chemins de d'importantes usines sur le deux continents." «"Our operations will be aimed at principal orders and consignments, we shall give all our care there. The creation of new networks of important plants on both continents ." Cohen to M. Ministère ( ?) 1 June 1853. AMAE. 2024 Also see Cohen to D'Hoffschmidt, 10 July 1849. AMAE 2024.



6.1 Map of Rio Nunez

some indication that there was a plan to involve Belgium in the trade of the Rio Nunez and if possible search for colonial concessions.<sup>357</sup> Van Haverbeke's orders did not grant him any authority to execute any military, economic, or political treaty. Upon his return, however, he was able to produce the treaty he had concluded with the Nalu chief, Lamina. The treaty granted Belgium land along the banks of the Rio Nunez for approximately ten miles on either side. Belgium had now received two opportunities within two years! This time it looked as if the imperialistic aspirations of Leopold would finally be realized. The treaty was reviewed and approved by Leopold. After

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<sup>357</sup>D'Hoffschmidt to van Haverbeke. January 1848. Braithwaite, 147.

several changes to its contents, van Haverbeke was sent back by the government to the Rio Nunez to complete the treaty.

Upon van Haverbeke's return to the Nunez for the second time with the amended treaty, he found a very a different and fluid situation. There had been another change in leadership and an extremely complicated local situation had evolved between Mayoré, Tongo and the French and British traders. It was this second trip of 1848 by van Haverbeke that resulted in the famous battle of Boké,<sup>358</sup> an almost legendary encounter between what was, in effect, half the Belgian navy, two French naval vessels, and the natives of Rio Nunez.<sup>359</sup>

The battle of Boké and its outcome have been immortalized in many Belgian paintings and representations. The battle itself was actually quite limited and lasted perhaps two days. The casualties on the Belgian side were two dead and perhaps a score wounded plus additional casualties among the French contingent. There were probably more casualties on the native side but no record exists of their numbers. After several days and a series of attacks by superior Belgian and French combatants, the attack failed. The combined force had been unable to take their objective, the town of Boké. A meeting was held between the combatants, representatives of the Landuman and Nalu and the Futa-Djalon state. As a result of that meeting Belgium received on April 5, 1849 a different treaty, which added certain land for a factory and other terms in addition to

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<sup>358</sup> The battle was not inevitable. Mayoré tried to stop the battle before it occurred claiming it was really not a concern of either the French or Belgians" "I do not see what reason you have got to send me such a letter as I have today got from you I have never troubled you or your People and I hope you will never not trouble me any more." Mayoré to the French and Belgian captains, 15 March 1849. AMAE 2024.

<sup>359</sup> March 22-24, 1849. The most in-depth description is in Braithwaite, 102-39.

those of the first treaty. Van Haverbeke agreed to the terms and again returned to Belgium.

Results of the battle and the treaty were not released to the public for months until reports from London reached Brussels and forced the government to reveal the battle and the treaty. This in turn began a parliamentary investigation into the actions in the Rio Nunez and the battle itself, especially the funding that made it all possible. The complex military and political balance that existed on the West African coast, especially between England and resurgent France, created a diplomatic crisis that continued over the next three or four years. The threat of litigation by the two Englishmen, Joseph Braithwaite and George Martin, opened an inquiry by the chambers into the whole colonial and commercial activity of the government. It probably began the process by which the chambers took a hard look at any future government colonial action. The actual information and outcome of litigation was that Braithwaite and Martin received nothing from either Belgium or France despite very strong diplomatic pressure from Lord Palmerston, the British foreign secretary.

What is significant is that van Haverbeke was able to renegotiate the treaty, this time with Tongo, so as to actually increase Belgium's colonial claim. In 1850, however, a treaty was signed by the French, British, Landuman and Nalu that wiped out all other treaties and as a result nullified the treaty with Belgium. The treaty, or rather the accord, stated that France was to receive exclusive treaty rights to all the land and villages along and adjacent to the Rio Nunez and the Rio Pongo rivers. Belgium continued to assert its claim, but due to increasing pressure from the Parliament was forced to later renounce

the treaty, thus ending the Belgian government's colonial intervention on the Rio Nunez.

During this period between the signing of the treaty and the government's final rescission of it, Cohen continued to operate along the Rio Nunez as a trader and apparently in an unofficial capacity as a representative of the Belgian government. Much of the speculation as to Cohen's position related to his seeming authority to negotiate, or at least represent his ability to negotiate, for Belgium.<sup>360</sup> Cohen did so despite the presence of the diplomatic representative of Belgium to the area, L. M. Bols,<sup>361</sup> who had been appointed to the position in 1852 and held it for the next three or four years.<sup>362</sup> Cohen began to associate himself with a local trader by the name of Jean Bicaise, perhaps the best known and influential of the traders in the Rio Nunez area. Cohen's association seems to have enhanced his standing in the area with both the local traders and the merchants in Belgium.

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<sup>360</sup>Cohen seems to have been involved in the attempted purchase by Belgium of Bissau and also arranged to make payments for Belgium on the treaty with the Nalu. Everaert and De Wilde, 322-3.

<sup>361</sup>Bols and Brissart had previously visited the area in 1847 as representatives of the government to report back on commercial opportunities. Maselis 153.

<sup>362</sup>Bols would later write in defense of use the funds for this mission and that of the navy "... You see, Minister, the trade of the Sénégalie is very uncertain. Vulnerable to bad luck, it must be supported and encouraged by armed protection... since our treaties with the Sénégalie have developed, the King's Government has not stopped sending nearly every year a warship. These reports enlarging, the continual presence of a state building becomes indispensable.", "... Vous voyez, M. le Ministre, que le commerce de la Sénégalie est très incertain. Exposé à nombre de mauvaises chances, il doit être rassuré et encouragé par une protection armée... depuis que nos rapports avec la Sénégalie ont pris du développement, le Gouvernement du Roi, appréciant la position exceptionnelle du commerce dans cette partie du monde, n'a pas cessé d'y envoyer presque tous les ans, un navire de guerre en croisière pendant quelques mois. Ces rapports s'agrandissant, la présence continuelle d'un bâtiment d'Etat devient indispensable." Bols to de Brouckère, 27 June 1854. AMAE 2024 and A. Demougeot, "Rives de Sud," Bulletin du Comité d'Etudes Historiques et Scientifiques de l'Afrique Occidentale Française, 21: 277-89, avril juin 1938: available from <http://www.Guinee.net/bibliotheque/archives/bcaf/demougeot/Nunez/chap2.html>; Internet; accessed, 9 September 2006.

Between 1850 and 1855 Cohen continued to request from the Belgian government additional money and recognition of the commercial opportunities. By 1852 the full two million francs authorized for development had been expended and Cohen was simply not able to raise any interest in further government spending, although he was able to raise private capital at various times.

Early in 1848,<sup>363</sup> Cohen had visited Leopold personally to discuss the Rio Nunez. He referred to the king's positive reception to the idea in three letters to d'Hoffschmidt.<sup>364</sup> But with all available funding dissipated and Leopold's decision that the risks of personal intervention were too great,<sup>365</sup> Cohen was not able to raise additional funds from the government. Privately funded trade continued. As a result of the scandal over misuse of funds and the cessation of the annual visits by the Belgian navy, however, trade with the Rio Nunez began a precipitous decline beginning in 1858.

What continued throughout this period, however, was the presence of a ship belonging to the Belgian navy. For a period of eight years one of the two ships of the Belgian navy, the *Louise Marie* and the *Duc de Brabant*, made yearly trips to the Rio Nunez until the final revocation of the treaty in 1855.

The *Louise Marie* made seven of the trips and the *Duc de Brabant*<sup>366</sup> one. Van Haverbeke was the captain for six and Petit, involved in the initial trip to Santo Tomas in 1842, the remaining two. Each of these trips included a physician in the service of the

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<sup>363</sup>Massinon, 16.

<sup>364</sup>Cohen to Leopold, 10 July 1849, 21 September 1851 and 16 February 1852. AMAE 2024 and Massinon, 16.

<sup>365</sup>Ibid., 31.

<sup>366</sup>The *Duc de Brabant* was put back in service in 1852.

Belgian navy. A total of three different physicians made the trip to the Rio Nunez. Each physician wrote a report on the trip. Each, as would have befitted a doctor, emphasized the medical aspects of the journey. These reports may well have been one of the determining factors in Leopold's failure to either respond to the initial treaty offer or put his full backing behind the second treaty and defend his ministers whose actions reflected what they viewed as the wishes of the king.

All the reports reflect some appreciation of the political aspects of the missions but emphasize their medical perspective. The most constant salient observation is related to the ability, or lack thereof, of Europeans to survive for any period of time on the Rio Nunez, or in West Africa in general.

The most detailed of the medical reports came out of the first two trips made in 1847 and 1849 by Dr. Félicien-Joseph Durant. Durant's comments provide a fascinating overview of both trips, detailing the physical descriptions of both the people and the land itself and contain some of the best narratives of life along the West African coast in the 1840s. In terms of his reflections on the natives, one particular point should be noted. Concerning his observations relative to Africans and the relationship of skin color to intelligence, Durant relates:

The Foulahs come from the high mountains of the interior of the country where the big rivers, Senegal, Gambia, have their source. Those are the most beautiful Negroes that one meets on the coast. They are reddish brown, have many Arabic features and resemble them by the shape the shape of the skull and the development of their intelligence. They are superior to

all Negro types. One would be able to call them the Indians of Africa, as one gives the name Indians to the Redskins of America.<sup>367</sup>

It was obvious to the doctor that there are different and obviously hierarchal differences among black Africans. It is here we see some of the first racial attitudes that provided the basis for the racism that drove the later colonial expansions of the late nineteenth century. Relative to health and general climate he is more specific.

Prevailing illnesses: While visiting roadside hospitals and the garrison of Goree, garrison of Goree, places of concentration of the patients furnished at all times of the year by warships and by various stations on the coast, from Senegal to Gabon..... with fevers and serious organic disorders. I found in the establishments of which I have must spoken some men debilitated by the contracted illnesses precisely during the preceding bad season. To the number of these afflictions are added dysentery, hepatitis, intermittent fevers with their complications.

Mortality: Mortality is high among Europeans that reside on the western coast of Africa. However, not having at my disposal any document whatsoever, I cannot give precise figures. I point out here with satisfaction that the Louise-Marie did not lose one man during the whole voyage.<sup>368</sup>

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<sup>367</sup>“Les Foulahs viennent des montagnes élevées de l'intérieur d'où les grands fleuves, le Sénégal, la Gambie, prennent leur source. Ce sont les plus beaux nègres que l'on rencontre sur la côte. Ils sont d'un brun rougeâtre, ont beaucoup de traits des Arabes et se rapprochent de ces derniers par la conformation du crâne et le développement de leur intelligence. Ils sont supérieurs à tous les types nègres. On pourrait les appeler les Indiens d'Afrique, comme on donne aussi le nom d'Indiens aux Peaux-Rouges d'Amérique.” AMAE 2024, and P. Lefevre, "Les Voyages De La Marine Royale Belge ...Au Rio Nunez (À Suivre)," *Revue Belge d'histoire militaire* XXII-7, (1978). 574.

<sup>368</sup>“*Maladies régnantes.* En visitant les hôpitaux de la rade et de la garnison de Corée, lieux de concentration des malades fournis à toutes les époques de l'année par les navires de guerre et par les diverses stations de la côte, depuis le Sénégal jusqu'au Gabon, j'ai pu me convaincre que les affections inhérentes à toutes ces localités, ont une tendance marquée à la malignité et que, développés sous l'influence des émanations marécageuses, combinées avec les grandes chaleurs du jour et le froid humide des nuits, elles résistent avec ténacité aux moyens de traitement, finissant toujours quand elles ne sont pas promptement mortelles par se compliquer de fièvres et de graves désordres organiques. J'ai trouvé dans les établissements dont je viens de parler des hommes délabrés par des maladies contractées pendant la mauvaise saison précédente. Au nombre de ces affections sont la dysenterie, l'hépatite, les fièvres intermittentes avec leur complications.

*Mortalité.* La mortalité est grande parmi les Européens qui résident sur la côte de la Négritie occidentale. Toutefois n'ayant eu à ma disposition aucun document, je ne puis citer des chiffres exacts. Je signale ici avec satisfaction que la Louise-Marie n'a perdu aucun homme pendant tout le voyage.” AMAE 2024 and *Ibid.*, 580.

Durant observed that it was the drinking water which could be at least partially responsible for these conditions. “Drinking water which one can procure in sufficient quantity is everywhere brackish and has a pronounced swamp taste. The sources of good water are only found at the foot of the mountains and still not very abundant to serve for the supplying of ships even at a great cost.”<sup>369</sup> His comment on the colonization potential for Europeans sums up the real dangers of the region but also gives reasons why individuals might choose to take chances in such a climate and seems to justify colonial attempts if made by the right people.

While examining from their different sides the facts that are the object of this report, it is easy to perceive that a great sum of unfavorable circumstances opposes the stay (residence) and acclimatization of the white man on the west coast of Africa. This coast is, however, much frequented by Europeans. The reason for this contradiction is easy to give; greed of lucrative speculation leads to contempt of obstacles and forces the care for the health to second place in the order of priorities. It is that which takes place here and which legitimizes the efforts made by France and England to occupy some points and there to found settlements. Indeed, all localities on this coast are advantageous sources offered to commerce by their multiplied ramifications with a vast extent of country, populous and fertile in natural and agricultural products, which include first and foremost, various gums, wax, and ivory.<sup>370</sup>

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<sup>369</sup>“Les eaux potables, que l'on peut se procurer en quantité suffisante, sont partout saumâtres et d'un goût de marais. Les sources de bonne eau ne se rencontrent qu'au pied des montagnes et encore sont-elles trop peu abondantes pour pouvoir servir à l'approvisionnement des navires, fût-ce même à grands frais.” AMAE 2024 and Ibid., 571.

<sup>370</sup>“En examinant sous leurs différentes faces les faits qui sont l'objet de ce rapport, il est facile de s'apercevoir qu'une grande somme de circonstances défavorables s'opposent au séjour et à l'acclimatement des blancs sur la côte occidentale d'Afrique. Cette côte est cependant beaucoup fréquentée par les Européens. La raison de cette contradiction est facile à donner : l'avidité des spéculations lucratives conduit au mépris des obstacles et force à reléguer les soins de conservation de la santé dans l'ordre des intérêts secondaires. C'est ce qui a lieu ici et qui légitime les efforts que font la France et l'Angleterre pour occuper quelques points et y fonder des établissements. En effet, toutes les localités de cette côte sont des sources avantageuses offertes au commerce par leurs ramifications multipliées avec une vaste étendue de pays, peuplé et fertile en productions naturelles et agricoles, productions qui comprennent en première ligne les gommés, la cire, l'ivoire, l'or.” AMAE 2024 and Ibid., 581.

The second report made between 1848 and 1849 included additional information relative to the battle at Boké, but again it was the medical observations related to the possibility of European habitation that took precedence. Durant noted that within a mere few weeks of the ship's arrival at the Rio Nunez, the crew was overtaken by illness.

Except some light cases of illness, the medical condition of the crew remained satisfactory during the whole crossing, including the first three weeks after our arrival on the coast. This period of time passed, the diseases began to appear: several men, affected by the illness of acclimatization or burning ever, entered successively into treatment. From this number I lost a man named Talemans Philippe, a sailor 3rd class, deceased March 10. Eight of these men, whose convalescence took a long time, the sickness having passed through the different phases of serious fevers, ending by a bout of fevers like that which takes place constantly here with them, the frequent and tenacious relapses led to a deep constitutional ruin from which resulted, for some, a disposition to stomach aches from plant foods, insomnia, visceral nervous pains, cramps This temporary period of the invasion of illness was due largely to the rapid development of the extraordinary heat that reigned immediately after our arrival at Ropass, has not altered for one instant the perfect state of mind of the whole crew. The French war corvettes, the Research and the Prudent both have moored in the mean time at the lower end of the river at Victoria, counted only a very few patients, the majority of these affected by simple, intermittent fevers.<sup>371</sup>

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<sup>371</sup>“Sauf quelques cas de maladies légères, l'état sanitaire de l'équipage est resté satisfaisant pendant toute la traversée d'aller, y compris les trois premières semaines de notre arrivée sur la côte. Ce laps de temps écoulé, les affections ont commencé à se montrer : plusieurs hommes, atteints de la maladie d'acclimatation ou de fièvre ardente, sont entrés successivement sous traitement. De ce nombre j'ai perdu le nommé Talemans Philippe, matelot de 3<sup>e</sup> classe, décédé le 10 mars. Chez huit de ces hommes, dont la convalescence s'est laissée longtemps attendre, la maladie, après avoir passé par les différentes phases des fièvres graves, s'est terminée par des fièvres d'accès, comme cela a presque constamment lieu ici, mais, chez eux, les récidives fréquentes et tenaces ont entraîné un délabrement constitutionnel profond d'où il est résulté pour quelques-uns une disposition aux coliques végétales : insomnie, douleurs nerveuses viscérales, crampes. Cette période passagère d'invasion de maladies, due en grande partie au développement trop rapide des chaleurs extraordinaires qui ont régné immédiatement après notre arrivée à Ropass, n'a pas un instant altéré le moral parfait de tout l'équipage. Les corvettes de guerre françaises la “Recherche” et la “Prudente”, toutes deux mouillées sur ces entrefaites au bas de la rivière devant Victoria, ne comptaient que fort peu de

The third trip to the Nunez took place in 1850 with the physician Charles C elarier onboard. Like his predecessor, he saw great difficulty in Belgium's future use of Rio Nunez even as a commercial venture.

All the most disadvantageous conditions one might think of can be found together in the land adjacent to the Rio Nunez. This is especially so in the area around Debocca, where the bed of the river, narrow and snaky, is densely compacted between two very heavily wooded banks which comprise an insurmountable barrier to the gentle winds of the open sea...It is this that causes a rejection of any idea to undertake at some point on this coast, the formation by Europeans of an agricultural colonization center. Attempts that one would make towards this goal would only serve to condemn some poor wretches sent to this inhospitable place to an unavoidable death. The formation of a commercial establishment would be far from presenting the same dangers and would be able to have some chances of success. The rivers of the Rio Nunez by virtue of the importance and the variety of their products, by the easiness of communications that they offer with the central market of Africa, with the different points of the coast, could become for Belgium a source of income as well as an important outlet. But again, in this case the care of the maintenance of those of our nation that agreed to go into this fatal climate to serve as pioneers to Belgian trade, would call for all the government's concern. We take for granted the proposition that Belgium judges it appropriate to establish in the Rio Nunez either a commercial counter or military stations. In both cases, it would be good not to send to occupy and especially to found these establishments anything but the absolutely minimum necessary number of Belgians. The first work to clear the area could be performed by natives under the direction of some capable men, appointed to this position by the government. Would one not also be able to use for rest of the work, which Blacks would be unfit, some of the numerous convicts that clutter our prisons? If the government judged it necessary to protect our trade on the river by the establishment of military posts, it would be easy to recruit among the natives, of the islands of Cape Vert, the necessary soldiers to form the garrison of these posts. This method of recruiting would have the double advantage of procuring for us men already acclimated to the climate and sparing the health of our nationals. It would be sufficient of put at the head of these posts a small number of Belgians to maintain our influence on the river. In general,

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malades, la plupart atteints de fi evres intermittentes simples." AMAE 2024 and Lefevre, "Les Voyages De La Marine Royale Belge ...Au Rio Nunez (Suite)." 677.

men of a weak constitution should be separated out. Those that one would send into the Rio Nunez...<sup>372</sup>

In other words, Belgium would only be able to operate a commercial operation by proxy or at least with an absolute minimum of Belgians.

If the first purpose of the yearly naval visitation was to show the flag, it is obvious that the secondary purpose of the trips was to determine if the Rio Nunez was in fact a viable option for a commercial adventure or possibly a colonial one. It was clear, at least according to the medical opinions, that with the state of Western medicine at the time, there was little to be done that could make the area viable except for a few very hardy individuals, or those born to the climate.

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<sup>372</sup>“Toutes les conditions les plus désavantageuses se trouvent pour ainsi dire réunies dans la contrée arrosée par le Rio Nunez. C'est ce qu'on peut dire surtout des environs de Debocca, où le lit du fleuve, étroit et sinueux, est profondément encaissé entre deux rives très boisées qui opposent aux brises du large une barrière insurmontable.... C'est ce qui doit faire rejeter bien loin toute idée d'entreprendre sur quelque point de cette côte que ce soit, la formation par les Européens d'un centre de colonisation agricole. Les tentatives qu'on pourrait faire dans ce but ne serviraient qu'à vouer les malheureux qu'on enverrait sur ce sol inhospitalier à une mort inévitable. La formation d'un établissement commercial serait loin de présenter les mêmes dangers et pourrait avoir des chances de succès. Les rives du- Rio Nunez par l'importance et la variété de leurs produits, par la facilité des communications qu'elles offrent tant avec le marché intérieur de l'Afrique qu'avec les différents points de la côte, pourraient devenir pour la Belgique une source de revenus en même temps qu'un débouché important. Mais dans ce cas encore, le soin de la conservation de ceux de nos nationaux qui consentiraient à aller sous ce climat funeste servir de pionniers au commerce belge, appellerait toute la sollicitude du gouvernement. Admettons l'hypothèse que la Belgique juge convenable d'établir dans le Rio Nunez soit un comptoir commercial, soit des postes militaires. Dans les deux cas, il serait bon de n'envoyer pour occuper et surtout pour fonder ces établissements que le nombre de Belges absolument nécessaire. Les premiers travaux d'assainissement pourraient être exécutés par des indigènes sous la direction de quelques hommes capables, désignés à cet effet par le gouvernement. Ne pourrait-on pas du reste utiliser pour l'achèvement des travaux auxquels les Noirs seraient impropres, quelques-uns des nombreux condamnés qui encombrant nos maisons de force ? Si le gouvernement jugeait nécessaire de protéger notre commerce dans la rivière par rétablissements de postes militaires, il serait facile de recruter soit parmi les indigènes, soit aux îles du Cap Vert, les soldats nécessaires pour former la garnison de ces postes. Ce mode de recrutement aurait le double avantage de nous procurer des hommes déjà faits aux intempéries du climat et d'épargner la santé de nos nationaux. Il suffirait de mettre à la tête de ces postes un petit nombre de Belges pour maintenir notre influence dans la rivière. En général, les hommes d'une santé délicate devraient être écartés avec soin. Ceux qu'on enverrait dans le Rio Nunez...” AMAE 2024 and Ibid., 678.

There is no way to know if Leopold reviewed these reports, but it is highly likely he was made aware of this situation. The continuing ambiguity of the status of the Belgian treaty in view of the later French and British treaty and the consistently negative medical opinions seems to have doomed this attempted projection of Belgian sovereignty, especially on these legal and medical grounds. The increasingly hostile attitude of the chambers and the constitutional crisis<sup>373</sup> over the power to fund increased the complexity of any resolution in favor of colonization or any government backed colonial adventure.

The continued presence during this period of the one or the other of the two ships of the Belgian navy underscored the earlier observation of Cohen, Serigiers, and Bols that a military presence and army or police force would be necessary to accomplish a permanent presence in the Nunez. The necessity of the same two ships constantly voyaging to both Guatemala and the Rio Nunez underscored the warning of Palmerston and the British cabinet<sup>374</sup> that Belgium simply did not have the ability to monitor and protect a colony, let alone in another context, take a country (Nicaragua) under a protectorate or control a transoceanic canal.

Once again Belgium, and to a lesser extent Leopold, were denied its colonial aspirations. Why did the Rio Nunez effort fail when there were two treaties giving it sovereignty? Several reasons have been advanced as to why Leopold did not take advantage of this obviously overly generous grant by the African King Ali Manso and

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<sup>373</sup>The foreign minister and the king had the power to sign treaties and make foreign policy but the power to fund was strictly with the chambers. At the minimum the shifting of funds between departments without parliamentary approval was a violation of the Article 68 of the Constitution.

the later grant by Lamina in 1848. The standard explanation<sup>375</sup> is that the bad publicity and increasingly desperate situation that existed in the colony of Santo Tomas began to make Leopold extremely leery of further colonial efforts. Three reports during this period also were published which summarized the failure of that colonial effort.<sup>376</sup>

This explanation does not seem to take into consideration the other side of Leopold's foreign policy. Leopold has been called the Nestor or Statesman of Europe.<sup>377</sup> Leopold prided himself on his abilities as a statesman. The years between 1848 and 1852 were some of the most important in Belgian and European history. It must be remembered that Leopold was a German prince prior to his becoming the king of the Belgians. There was a strong effort in the late 1840s and early 50s for a united German state.<sup>378</sup> Unlike Stockmar, Leopold did not favor the unification of Germany under Prussia.<sup>379</sup> This opposition earned him the hatred of Germany's first prime

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<sup>374</sup>Schwemmer, 301.

<sup>375</sup>This is perhaps implied but not obvious. See Massinon, 41-3.

<sup>376</sup>Edouard Blondeel van Cuelebrouk, *Colonie De Santo-Tomas: Suite De L'enquêt, Te*, Belgium. Chambre Des Représentants. Annales Et Doc., Sess. 1845-46-47; No. 34; (Bruxelles: s.n., 1846); and Martial Cloquet, *Rapport De M. Cloquet Sur La Situation De La Colonie De Santo-Tomas Au 1er Janvier 1851* (Bruxelles: Imprimerie de Deltombe, 1851).

<sup>377</sup>Leopold had worked hard to build this reputation. "...without doubt, Your majesty will contribute powerfully to attain this salutary objective, if he is willing, with your discretion and intelligence, to defend to England the ideas which my minister Boul has exposed to you in detail..." Emperor Francis Joseph to Leopold, October 1853, in Howard J. Pollman, "An Evaluation of the Influence of Leopold I of Belgium Upon European Politics, 1831-1865" (Ph.D. diss, University of Southern California, 1955). 209.

<sup>378</sup>After his departure from Britain Stockmar was made Ambassador from Coburg to the German parliament and became deeply involved with the effort to form a united Germany. He was not able to see this by the time of his death in 1863.

<sup>379</sup>Although a German prince, Leopold thought that Prussia would so dominate the nation as to leave little room for opportunities for princes like himself. Additionally, his decision to become King of the Belgians had never been accepted by many in the various German royal houses. "They could not and would not understand how a German Prince belonging to one of the oldest families, could allow himself to be chosen King on the pretext of an open revolution." Duke of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha Ernst II, Percy Andrae, and tr, *Memoirs of Ernest II, Duke of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha* (London: Remington & Co., 1888), 37.

minister Otto von Bismarck. It also damaged his reputation as a neutral. Leopold was far more engaged in internal European affairs to ever deeply involve himself in his colonial and often imperialistic efforts.

Additionally, as early as November 1847<sup>380</sup> he began to see the first rumblings of the Revolutions of 1848 that changed, often violently, the leadership of all the heads of Europe except three, of which Belgium was one. Leopold always saw himself as the arbiter, the neutral party attempting to bring peace and order to Europe. The Revolutions of 1848 profoundly shook him. Whatever grandeur he may have seen in empire and colonies, stability at home and in Europe were primary to his sense of order.<sup>381</sup>

Clearly related to this seemingly unresponsive reaction to these colonial opportunities was the death of his wife on October 11, 1850. This was at the height of the confusion in Rio Nunez, and thereafter Leopold began his slow but steady withdrawal from public activity. Leopold's marriage was apparently a good one by European royal standards, despite the fact that he had become involved in an affair with Arcadie Clairet of Viescourt, who bore him a son the previous year, the first of two. His wife had been indispensable in many personal, diplomatic, and social ways that his

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<sup>380</sup>“The sedition mongers are not numerous, but they frighten the peaceful majority, who, although it can be really strong, feels a veritable panic before this agitating force in the shadows? It is in this fear that lies the principal danger, and it would be in the veritable interest of the welfare of Europe that the Powers could show that the necessary force to support and defend the right is not still lacking to them” Leopold to Prince Metternich, December 1847, Pollman 148 and “...certainly all those who possess something and who have at heart to see the legal situation subsist, ought to feel that the moment has come to defend itself against the complete dissolution of society in Europe, which dissolution is to lead to most frightful anarchy....may all the measures that you take be crowned with success, that is my heartiest desire...” Leopold to Prince Metternich, 28 February 1848, Pollman, 149.

mistress could not replace.<sup>382</sup> Although she was aware of the affair, the queen actually blamed herself for Leopold's transgressions.<sup>383</sup> Leopold's mind may simply not have been on colonies on the Rio Nunez. Rio Nunez appears to have required too personal effort and commitment from a king who began to choose his fights more carefully.<sup>384</sup> Later during the Rio Nunez crisis he became involved in the preliminaries of the Crimean War that not only distracted him on a national level but threatened the reputation of both himself and Victoria's husband Albert, his nephew. The continuing fear of the English people of this outside influence provoked a strong reaction by Leopold<sup>385</sup> over their supposed German influence over Queen Victoria, but also further damaged his reputation.

The quest for Rio Nunez does show that the cabinet was beginning to take a stronger, more aggressive role in government. D'Hoffschmidt's agreement with Charles

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<sup>381</sup>He had shown his ability to view the broader picture before in the decision to abandon the Texas colonial effort.

<sup>382</sup>"She had failed to judge her public. Louise had won the gratitude and affection of Belgium by her quiet nobility her gentle charity; and her personal misfortunes had only increased the people's devotion." Richardson, 182.

<sup>383</sup>"What more could I ask on earth than to be your friend, to be your only friend? All my happiness I owe to you all that is lacking from my happiness is my fault, alone, and I blame only myself for all that troubles me. If I am no longer young, if I have none of the gifts or graces that might have made your home a happy one, if I have been unable to bring any pleasure to your life, I must attribute it to my ill fortune. And so, if I cannot but regret, I only regret what I cannot do for you. It has been the thorn in my happiness that I could not help you; but alas, the feeling of all that is lacking in me, of all that has been wanting, and will always be wanting only increases my adoration and gratitude." Louise Marie to Leopold, 1849, *Ibid.*, 181.

<sup>384</sup>"Leopold was forced to admit his failure. He had been powerless to prevent the war, unable to fight in it, he had naturally been excluded from the peace conference. Young men with young ideas were coming on the scene and taking power from a king grown old." *Ibid.*, 192.

<sup>385</sup>"...abuse is somewhat the staff of life in England everything, everybody is to be abused; it is a pity, as nothing more unproductive as this everlasting abuse can be imagined. As nothing ever gave the slightest opening to this abuse, it is hoped that it will be soon got over the meeting of Parliament will now do good in this respect. As far as your few continental relatives are concerned, I don't think they will be able to fix anything upon your faithful servant. I have done in England at all times good services.... Successes of vanity, I am never fishing for in England, nor anywhere else. The only influence I may

Rogier to relocate funds and make them available for this project was a far more aggressive stance than the cabinet had taken before. Additionally, the breakup of the union party which began after 1842, and was completed by the 1850 election, gave the government a more radical shift as the Catholic Party and the Liberal Party took increasingly more strident positions as each rotated in and out of office. The advantage the cabinet had enjoyed up to this point was that the powers listed in the constitution had not been fixed. With the increasing acrimony in the chambers, the cabinet, seemingly reflecting Leopold's views at least on colonial expansion, was willing to risk a somewhat questionable transfer. This seemed reasonable because Rio Nunez was at least backed by current Belgian commercial activity that was profitable, and there had been not one but two treaties, one of which was legitimate on its face giving a legal basis for Belgian colonial claims.

The scrutiny received as a result of the battle of Boké and the treaty, and the poor way it was handled by the cabinet, however, seems to have emboldened the chambers in face of Leopold's previous and continuing disaster in Santo Tomas.<sup>386</sup> The breakup of the union party was in effect the end of the Belgian honeymoon. The actions

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exercise is to prevent mischief where I can, which occasionally succeeds: if war can be avoided, and the same ends obtained, it is natural that they should be tried first..." Leopold to Victoria, Pollman, 212.

<sup>386</sup>A member of the chambers remarked in 1848 upon the terms of the treaty, "It appears that the Government decided to make the acquirement of a land situated on the western coast of Africa, to the 15° degree that is under tropics. I will so really ask one has the intention to send unhappy Belgians to look for the death on this pestilential", "Il paraît que le Gouvernement s'est décidé à faire l'acquisition d'un terrain situé sur la côte occidentale d'Afrique, au 15° degré c'est-à-dire sous les tropiques. Je demanderai si réellement on a l'intention d'envoyer de malheureux Belges chercher la mort sur cette terre pestilentielle." Demougeot.

of d'Hoffschmidt, Rogier, and d'Hoffschmidt's successor de Brouckère<sup>387</sup> could now be portrayed as intentional attempts at subverting the constitution. The press, after having a field day with the Santo Tomas project, now seemed even more aggressive, especially in view of the level of discord that resulted from the Revolutions of 1848. The renewed idea of freedom of speech after the 1848 revolutions added a new level of ferocity to the daily press. Eventually even the foreign ministry had to agree that the treaty, which was probably invalid, should be terminated. The new foreign minister Ch. Vilain XIII announced:

Since the signing of the treaty of March 4, 1848 the situation has changed. Gorée was erected as an open harbor and a treaty with England opened the British possessions. The convention of 1848 has no longer, therefore, its original purpose to the same degree. It appears, besides the custom granted to Lamina, to be a permanent cause for friction between this chief and his neighbors, so that instead of assisting the transition of business, the contention has more than once the effect of hindering it while banishing tourists. With these considerations, the King's Government took the position of denouncing the arrangement of March 4, 1848, and he put in charge of this mission our consul at Gorée.<sup>388</sup>

The days of a compliant and docile chambers in the shadow of the Cabinet and the king had ended.

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<sup>387</sup>Initially at least the foreign ministers were able to hold off parliamentary attacks. De Brouckère stated " One can say according to the gotten results that the country doesn't have to regret this moderate sacrifice. Our trade to the western coast of Africa follows a satisfactory march ...", "On peut dire d'après les résultats obtenus que le pays n'a pas à regretter ce modique sacrifice. Notre commerce à la côte occidentale d'Afrique suit une marche satisfaisante..." Demougeot.

<sup>388</sup>“Depuis la signature du traité du 4 mars 1848 la situation s'est modifiée. Gorée a été, érigé en port franc et un traité avec l'Angleterre a ouvert les possessions britanniques. La convention de 1848 n'a donc plus au même degré sa première raison d'être. Il paraît d'ailleurs que la coutume accordée à Lamina est une cause permanente de discordance entre ce chef et ses voisins, de sorte qu'au lieu de seconder le mouvement des affaires, la convention a eu plus d'une fois pour effet de l'entraver en éloignant les caravanes. Devant ces considérations le Gouvernement du Roi a pris le parti de dénoncer l'arrangement du 4 mars 1848 et il a chargé de cette mission notre consul à Gorée.” Ibid.

As was the case with Santo Tomas, there was certainly sufficient reason to look toward the political situation along the Rio Nunez as a contributing factor to failure. The issue of the Ali Manso treaty is so isolated and unexplainable that it is impossible to discern motives or sincerity other than what was expressed in the document itself. Since it was neither responded to nor acted upon, there is no need for further inquiry.

The situation along the Rio Nunez both contributed to the opportunity and prevented any real expectation of success. The very nature of the treaty as a reaction to local politics did not give a great deal of depth to the stability of the claim. The revised treaty was likewise a product of a military action that temporarily skewed the parties so as to again render the stability of the claim on weak grounds. The problem was that, despite the new treaty, Belgium was left with a revised treaty by a deposed leader that had been undercut by a later treaty under a different leader which likely had no probative value. The Belgian government had wandered into a political situation of profound confusion and paid the price.

The people of Belgium do not seem to have played any direct part in the decision regarding the Rio Nunez matter or its later failure.<sup>389</sup> The economic condition of the country began to improve considerably in the 1850s and beyond. Additionally, there do not seem to have been any real plans for colonial settlements similar to that of Santo Tomas or even the one considered for the Republic of Texas. The very nature of the rampant diseases and generally unhealthy nature of the southwest African coast militated against any concentration of Europeans at that time. The purpose of the naval

missions does seem, at least in part, to have been to determine if any European presence of at least a commercial nature was viable. The answer was an overwhelming no, except for stays of a very short duration by dedicated, if not foolish and greedy, men.

The initial introduction to Rio Nunez began with the statement that this was a different colonial attempt in that it was one initiated and eventually ended by the commercial interests of Belgium's merchants and entrepreneurs. This had clearly been the case. Whether there was government backing or involvement, clandestine or otherwise, it was the merchants of Belgium that took the lead. They were always willing and able to accept any and all governmental aid, monetary or otherwise, but business proceeded whether it came or not. They had been all too correct in their assessment that a military or police presence was necessary, but the political atmosphere began to strongly cloud up against public funds to aid private investment outside the country. This was even more so regarding the use of the navy. Despite the termination of the treaty, the government did agree to pay additional sums to the Nalus in exchange for a continuation of the current trading rights and privileges<sup>390</sup> as best as it could in view of

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<sup>389</sup>The successful "battle" was however highly celebrated in Belgium as a great victory and Van Haverbeke received the "Order of Leopold" and a handmade sword by the king's personal sword maker.

<sup>390</sup>The agreement to end the treaty included the following:  
"It has been agreed that:

1. Belgians who will settle the country of the Nalus will only pay to the chief a yearly royalty of fifty francs in merchandise per hundred years of occupied land;
2. They will have the ability to use the necessary woods for their use;
3. The chief of the Nalus, in his name and that of his successors, commit himself to protect by all of his means Belgians, as well as their property and goods;
4. Not to require them, under no pretext, of other royalties than the one stipulated above;
5. To require neither harbor dues nor pipeline fees for any Belgian ship that will anchor in the river;
6. Not to grant to any nation whatsoever a benefit that would not be also granted implicitly and equally to Belgium."

"Il a été convenu que :

the cessation of the yearly appearance of the navy.<sup>391</sup> The government, in effect, had returned the situation along the Rio Nunez to the condition that had existed before it chose to become involved.

The idea of a religious aspect to Rio Nunez never came up because a colony as such was probably never envisioned. The religion of the merchants was no doubt money. The expanding Futa-Djalon state was a strongly Muslim entity where religion and empire went hand in hand. Any major colonial settlements by Christian Europeans would have been regarded as creating *Dar al harb* and not *Dar al Islam*.<sup>392</sup>

The world of Darwin and its bastardized offshoot, Social Darwinism, had not yet shown its face at this time.<sup>393</sup> But the residual racism of slavery was still a potent force, and slavery by definition required a racial hierarchy. The comments by Dr. Durant assumed a hierarchy of races and inferred, if not stated outright, that black Africans were at the bottom. The overt superiority expressed later in the nineteenth century does not seem to be evident at this time. Lastly, the interests of the traders and entrepreneurs

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Les Belges qui s'établiront dans le pays des Nalous ne paieront au chef qu'une redevance annuelle de dix gourdes (cinquante francs) en marchandises par cent yards de terrain occupé;  
Ils auront la faculté de disposer des bois nécessaires à leur usage;  
Le chef des Nalous, tant en son nom qu'en celui de ceux qui pourraient lui succéder, s'engage à protéger de tous ses moyens les Belges, ainsi que leurs propriétés et marchandises ;  
A n'exiger d'eux, sous aucun prétexte, d'autre redevance que celle stipulée ci-dessus ;  
A n'exiger aucun droit d'ancrage, d'aiguade, ni autre des navires belges qui se rendront dans le fleuve ;  
A n'accorder à aucune nation de faveur qui ne serait implicitement et aussitôt également accordée à la Belgique." AMAE 2024 and Demougeot.

<sup>391</sup>The rather free use made of the navy, especially in the Santo Tomas and Rio Nunez affairs were probably strongly responsible for the change in the name from the "Marine Royale", Royal Navy to "Marine d'Etat" ship of state in 1864. From that point on Belgium only had a coast guard and merchant marine.

<sup>392</sup>*Dar al harb*, بئرحلا راد Arabic for "house of war" against the unbeliever and *dar al islam* راد مالسإلا "house of submission" those who believe the prophet (Mohammed) and the Quran and worship *Allah*.

<sup>393</sup>There were still slaves being taken at this time but the blockade by Britain and other countries had all but eliminated any real slave trade on the Atlantic coast of Africa.

was to trade with the natives, not dominate or conquer them. This was purely a business venture, not a crusade or exercise in social responsibility.

The obvious use of the military, especially the navy at the battle of Boké, in Rio Nunez set it apart from all other Belgian efforts. Leopold had been warned by Palmerston that Belgium did not have the military depth to maintain any significant overseas presence. Captain van Haverbeke's use of force at Boké was how any self-respecting European power would have reacted, and they would have all understood van Haverbeke's actions. The problem was that van Haverbeke was on the only ship on the Belgian navy.<sup>394</sup> The earlier requests by Cohen and others had made it clear that the nature of trading along the Rio Nunez and surrounding areas made a military or police presence mandatory. Leopold had listened and sent the *Louise Marie* but it simply could not provide anything other than moral support and display of the flag. This too must have become obvious to Leopold, if not the cabinet and certainly the chambers judging by later events.

Both ships, when they were in service, were required to be everywhere all the time. When not in the Rio Nunez, they were in Guatemala. Later they were used in China, Algeria, and almost everywhere Leopold sought to found a colony. There was simply too much ground for a two-ship navy, let alone the occasional one-ship navy. Not only were there insufficient funds to build a larger navy, but Belgium was, by virtue of its creation, a neutral nation. Neutral nations, in the eyes of the nineteenth century, did not need navies except for harbor defense. The service rendered by these

vessels is highly commendable. The records of the ships' doctors speak of a highly organized and disciplined crew. But they were still only one crew at a time for too many dreams and colonial desires.

Related to the use of the navy and the reports of the ships' physicians was the sheer inability of almost any Europeans to survive, or at least function for any extended period of time in tropical Africa. The use of quinine to ward off malaria was only beginning to be understood and would not be fully serviceable for another fifteen years. The observations relative to seasonal disease, humid conditions, and the polluted water were useful insights that still did not, however, understand the malarial cycle of the mosquito. Despite an excellent medical team with insightful although not useful

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<sup>394</sup>The *Duc de Brabant*, the other ship in the Belgian navy, had been decommissioned temporarily in 1848 due to a fiscal crisis.



observations, the primitive medicine of the time was simply too backward to be effective.

Rio Nunez is also significant in another way. The use of the Belgian military, alongside that of the French, in an action that not only damaged the goods of British citizens but challenged its colonial power, raised the temperature and ire of Britain and especially Palmerston. Leopold had sought advance clearance from Palmerston, as well as France, before it became involved in the Rio Nunez. There was no negative response, and in fact the foreign office had encouraged commercial expansion as it would improve the overall situation in that part of Africa.<sup>395</sup> The Battle of Boké, however, and the subsequent action by Braithwaite and Martin had created a *cause célèbre* in England and eventually Belgium and France. Lord Palmerston's personal advocacy of the claims of these merchants created a severe strain on Belgian-English relations.<sup>396</sup> It was only the deteriorating relations between Palmerston and Queen Victoria that prevented a worst case scenario. Palmerston's attitude toward the queen and other actions resulted in his firing in 1851, to the great joy of both Leopold and Victoria. Although it would eventually result in Palmerston's return as foreign minister and later prime minister, it sufficiently removed the pressure on Leopold and the matter eventually faded away. Here Leopold clearly used his connections with Victoria and Palmerston, but again, to no avail, at least in relation to this colonial endeavor.

The Belgian involvement in Rio Nunez once again showed the scientific and cartographic weakness in Leopold's quest for colonies. There were apparently no

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<sup>395</sup>Braithwaite, 121-2.

Belgian maps available to van Haverbeke, but there was a series of maps by the French captain and cartographer Charles der Kerhallet.<sup>397</sup> We know that at least one map (6.2) of the Rio Nunez was given to Leopold.<sup>398</sup> This map had probably been provided to van Haverbeke, but we simply do not know. It is a bare, unadulterated map of the coast and river system produced by der Kerhallet in 1844. There is a drawing (6.3), of the “line of battle” and the surrounding countryside in the archives of the foreign office, but it is more of an artistic rendering than a map.<sup>399</sup> There are other contemporary maps, mostly French and to a lesser extent British, but they do not appear to have been utilized by Belgium.

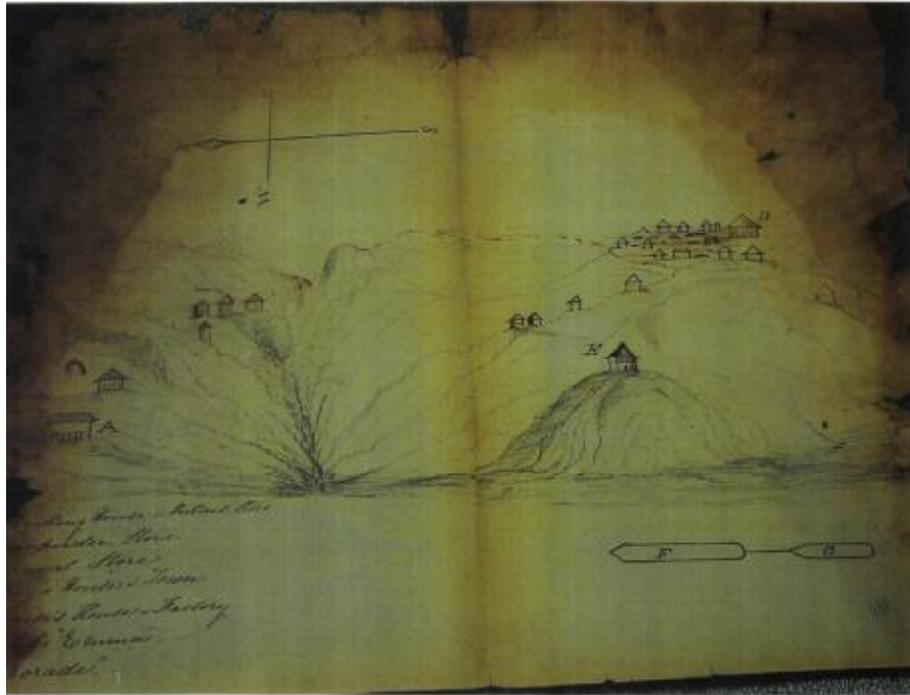
It would appear that that Rio Nunez did not become a Belgian colony or commercial outpost of any significance because Leopold did not support it to any great extent and the Belgian chambers simply would not tolerate any further colonial expeditions at taxpayer expense. Belgian interest in Africa faded for the next twenty years, until Leopold II began his quest for empire.

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<sup>396</sup>Ibid., 45-55.

<sup>397</sup> There were also British maps of the Nunez region, as would be expected from a naval power such as Britain. See John Arrowsmith, “Map of the West Coast of Africa” (1843), 545039, AFR. D.238, RGS.

<sup>398</sup>Everaert and De Wilde, 323, Fig. 2.



6.3 Boké Sketch

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<sup>399</sup>This was a sketch provided the British Foreign office, and then sent to the Belgian Foreign office. Forster & Smith to Palmerston, 8 August 1849. AMAE 2024

## CHAPTER 7

### THE LONG AND FATEFUL SHADOW

But Leopold was past all pleasures now. He was failing fast. ... Late in August, on her return from Germany, Victoria paid her final visit to him. On October 18<sup>th</sup>, Palmerston died, begging his grandson, Ashley, to read him the sixteenth clause in the Belgian Treaty; the clause that guaranteed the independence and neutrality of Belgium. Leopold remarked that since his most stubborn enemy had gone, he was sure to follow soon.<sup>400</sup>

On December 10, 1865, Leopold I, first king of the Belgians, died. At his side was the Duc de Brabant, soon to be Leopold II, the next king of the Belgians. Between them lay a generation and a past that would result in a different kingdom under Leopold II. Upon Leopold I's accession to the throne in 1830, Belgium claimed a territory of approximately eighteen thousand square miles and no colonial empire. Upon his death in 1865, Belgium not only claimed less territory as a nation, twelve thousand square miles as a result of the treaty with the United Kingdom of Holland, but despite more than fifty attempts, there were no colonies. Upon his death in 1909, Leopold II, the former Duc de Brabant, ruled over a nation of twelve thousand square miles and a colonial empire of over nine hundred thousand square miles. Something had changed in the way Belgium had sought colony and empire. Leopold II had learned something from Leopold I.

The examination of the four colonial efforts herein under Leopold I provided some insight into what changed and what did not change in the pursuit of empire. It also offers a strong tool for analyzing the rise of the New Imperialism of the late nineteenth century and the “Scramble for Africa” in which Belgium played such a seminal role.

Chapter II gave an overview of the predominant theories underlying the rise of the New Imperialism. They were generally political, economic, religious, social, and scientific. It was also stated that imperialism was the extension of nationalism overseas. The distinction was also made between imperialism and colonialism, as the latter involves a determined effort to transplant nationals of the mother country to the colony on a permanent basis. The end of the reign of Leopold I encompassed the beginning of the age of the New Imperialism. It preceded the “Scramble for Africa” at the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 by almost twenty years.

Did the thirty-five year reign of Leopold I, planted firmly in the aftereffects of the Napoleonic wars and the Peace of Vienna which produced neither colony nor empire, somehow validate or anticipate the purported roots of the New Imperialism? It seems that the examination of these four colonial attempts, even allowing for the small sampling, leads to a qualified yes. Does it add to a better understanding of Leopold II and the Congo Free State? Also a qualified yes.

The main political rationale given for European expansion in Africa, and to a lesser extent Asia, was the rising tide of nationalism that swept Europe during the middle and late nineteenth century. Nationalism meant creating the one out of the many:

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<sup>400</sup> Richardson, 214.

a nation of cultural, linguistic, religious, and political uniformity that identified one as British, French, and closer in terms of experience to Belgium, German or Italian.

Belgium as a nation was only created forty years before Italy and Germany. Its national experience and myth had to be invented. The national myth, which made a Belgian a Belgian, had to be created and disseminated to all Belgians. But there was a sense of “Germany” and “Italy” hundreds of years before they became nations. Pirenne’s previously mentioned hypothesis notwithstanding,<sup>401</sup> Belgium had been part of successive empires and nations for hundreds of years. More than any other European country in the nineteenth century, Belgium had need of an identity.

The question as to what would provide this identity divided Leopold from the cabinet and the chambers. The two houses of the chambers would successively cooperate for the first twenty years of the country’s existence under the banner of the Union Party with just such a goal in mind. Leopold, however, was not entirely devoid of a sense of what a nation should be. The problem was that to Leopold the model for both constitutional monarchy and nationalism was Britain, and Britain was an empire.

Stockmar’s comments on Leopold’s dedication to all things British both during and after his marriage to Charlotte surely attest to this. It can be argued that Leopold’s dedication to his niece Victoria in the almost ten thousand letters that passed between them was a way to keep both himself and Belgium informed with Belgium’s main protector and to maintain the close family relationship with Victoria, and later Albert. But it can also be argued that this was Leopold’s way of keeping in touch with the

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<sup>401</sup>See Stengers and Gubin, 20-6.

Britain he had always envisioned being part of as the prince consort. The problem was that Britain, especially as Palmerston and the average British citizen viewed it, did not include Leopold.

In this sense Leopold wanted empire whereas the government wanted trade, and if necessary, colonies with which to improve this trade. Leopold was an imperialist first, a colonialist second. The government, if it was anything at all, was colonialist. This can be seen in Leopold's attempts to gain sovereignty over not only part of Guatemala but Nicaragua also, even if it was done surreptitiously and out of the sight of the chambers. The political motivation that marked later European imperialism was certainly lacking in the government but not the king. In this way Belgium's colonial attempts were different than Europe's. Leopold I's intense personal interest in colonialism, if not imperialism, separated him from almost all later imperialists with the possible exception of Bismarck, who also viewed colonialism as part of the badge of nationhood. Although it is possible to imagine the Conference for Berlin in 1885 as having convened and accomplished its goals without Leopold, it certainly would not have been as definitive or final without his direction. Bismarck, who did not disdain Leopold II as he had his father, helped Germany achieve imperial status, at least partially as a result of the influence of Leopold II.

Leopold II had learned how to avoid the messy complications of constitutional government that had plagued his father. He sought empire in his personal capacity, not as king of the Belgians. This was a truly brilliant answer to the confinements of constitutional monarchy. Leopold II could do this because he was one of the richest

men in Europe at that time; unencumbered by his father's funding issues, he simply bought his own empire, the Congo Free State.

Leopold's unique relationships with Victoria, Stockmar, and Palmerston were certainly assets. The problem was that each was able, for different reasons, to maintain his trust and loyalty and yet, with the possible exception of Palmerston, not provide any real help from the colonial perspective. The term "colonial" is relevant because Leopold was diplomatic enough to never overtly expose his imperialistic tendencies to either Victoria or Palmerston, although they were no doubt aware of his motives in a general sense.

Victoria, although certainly deeply dedicated to and respectful of her uncle in view of his immense influence in her formative years, was quite simply the Queen of England first, Albert's wife second, and Leopold's niece third. The Queen of England, from her first response to Leopold's suggestion after her coronation that she seek his advice and counsel, immediately informed her uncle that she was quite capable of thinking on her own. He was her deepest confidant after Albert, but not in ways that would compromise her strong sense of duty. Leopold never seems to have attempted to use her influence in these overseas matters. He seemed to realize that it would have achieved nothing. It was Leopold who wanted empire and Victoria who had one—the largest the world has yet to see.

Palmerston, on the other hand, was constantly aware of Leopold and his "entrepreneurial" ways. Much of Palmerston's criticism of Leopold revolved around what he considered Leopold's overreaching. The Nicaraguan project and the colonial

attempt in Rio Nunez are good examples. Palmerston was immensely proud of his contribution to Belgian existence and the choice of Leopold as king. His relationship with Leopold was better than Leopold's relationship with him. Palmerston never really became concerned with Leopold's overseas ventures unless they came in competition with what Palmerston considered were British vital interests. It was certainly in Britain's best interests to keep Belgium healthy and neutral against Palmerston's fear of a resurgent France. Leopold clearly used his relationship with Palmerston to avoid mistakes in terms of colonial adventures. This was the likely purpose of keeping Sylvain van de Weyer in London for almost thirty years. Neither individual wanted to lose his input into the other's movements. In Leopold's imperialistic efforts the relationship acted more as a censor than as a conscience. Palmerston often let Leopold know of his displeasures but rarely, if ever, did this result in overt British action or condemnation. Leopold's actions were acceptable if he could simply show what Palmerston considered a legitimate colonial or commercial adventure with potential for Belgian success. Palmerston was probably the reason Leopold and Belgium did not get in over their heads in colonial adventures such as a canal project or protectorate in Central America.

Leopold's relationship with Stockmar seems to have been the least utilized and effective of Leopold's contacts in Britain. There are probably three reasons for this. The first is that Stockmar, despite his pledge of loyalty to Leopold, clearly began to favor his loyalty to Victoria, and especially Albert, over Leopold. Secondly, Stockmar was clearly more interested in the German unification question than the situation in either

Britain or Belgium. Lastly, Leopold began to exchange his relationship and confidence in Stockmar for that of Jules Van Praet, his Minister of the Household. Van Praet, however, was in Brussels and not in Britain where he would have produced more useful political intelligence. Aside from Palmerston, Leopold's connections therefore were not able to aid in his imperialistic quests.

Political impetus for imperialism or colonialism, however, requires a satisfactory concept and ability. In other words, there must be a consensus of opinion to seek expansion and an ability to successfully plant one's flag, whether for a colony or otherwise. The New Imperialism was centered in Africa and to a lesser extent Asia. Africa, because it was new ground for exploitation, at least as far as Europe was concerned, and Asia, because the old imperial order in China was beginning to crumble. For Belgium, especially during the period from 1840 to 1855, these areas were inaccessible for successful settlement due to disease in the case of Africa and to a lesser extent Central America, and because of greater national unity in places such as China at that time.

Belgium's method was not military, other than the battle of Boké on the Rio Nunez, but diplomatic or commercial. Leopold sought out states that were either desirous of immigration, such as Guatemala, Brazil, or Texas, or were politically weak or disorganized, such as Rio Nunez. In some cases, such as Nicaragua and Guatemala, both situations existed. In the cases of Guatemala, Brazil, and Texas, Belgium invited. In the case of Rio Nunez it became involved by virtue of happenstance. None of the countries besides Brazil, however, enjoyed stability for very long. Belgium was forced

to deal with a constant stream of political change which resulted in its scattered and unfocused responses. The Belgian efforts were sporadic and inconsistent. The overseas responses were a shadowy world of changing players and scripts. The two different perspectives simply never met.

The rationale most often proposed, especially by Marxists and economic historians, was the economic one. This postulated a capitalist system unable to sustain the phenomenal growth of the First Industrial Revolution. The Second Industrial Revolution needed to look outside Europe in order to expand markets, obtain new sources of raw materials, and invest excess capital. It is here that the conditions of Belgium come closest to those described. Belgium in 1830 was the most industrialized nation in the world, second only to Britain. It was the industrial might of Belgium that gave Napoleon and his armies a materials edge for most of the last ten years of his military campaigns. Initially, the problem was that with the end of the Napoleonic wars in 1815, Belgium lost its main market, France. Secondly, with the split with the United Kingdom of the Netherlands in 1830, meant that Belgium it lost its access to markets after 1830 with the embargo by the United Kingdom of the Netherlands of Dutch ports, which were the only real outlet for Belgian industrial products. What Belgium experienced in the 1830s and 1840s was what France and Germany found in the 1860s and 1870s with their need for markets and raw materials.

This industrial depression of Belgian industry in Brabant and Wallonia, combined with the disruption to agricultural Flanders, continued for almost the first twenty years of its history. The conditions cried out for new markets, resources, and

investment. This also created a need for the emigration of some of its citizens as both Belgium and the Netherlands had the greatest population density in Europe. Clearly capitalism and its expanding nature were behind this prescient phase of Belgian history. Industrially Belgium was far ahead of its time, to its distinct disadvantage.

The difficulty lay in its inexperience as a capitalistic nation. It simply did not know how to go about creating overseas markets and opportunities, with the possible exception of Rio Nunez, which came at the end of this period. Additionally, especially in the case of Rio Nunez, the country did not possess the ability to capitalize on its early successes along the Rio Nunez because of a lack of commercial backing and the inability of the Belgian government to provide the necessary power to support this colonial project.

The fundamental failure of the *Compagnie belge de Colonization* and the *Compagnie belge-brésilienne de Colonisation* to adequately finance these ventures in Guatemala and Brazil, respectively, doomed them from the start. The Rio Nunez effort, after its initial success, failed from both an inconsistent governmental response and a fear by the backers and merchants in Belgium of additional risk. The Belgian economy was simply not sophisticated enough to overcome these overseas obstacles.

Additionally, the various entrepreneurs and agents attempting to either lure Belgian investment and colonists or become involved in this process from a Belgian perspective overestimated Leopold's ability to produce results or influence the chambers and the Cabinet. Again, there was insufficient past history to rely on. It is not always best to be first.

The Belgian people responded to these various attempts in lukewarm or hostile terms. Most immigration was to the cities of Belgium, not the coast of Guatemala. On the other hand, the unemployment and general disruption of the economic life of many Belgians did create motivation to emigrate. The irony of this was that the most successful emigrations were without substantial governmental involvement and in areas that offered no real commercial or colonial options such as Wisconsin, Louisiana, and Texas in the United States. The opposition of the chambers to the use of government funds on overseas adventures at the expense of investment at home during this time of economic strife was certainly understandable.

Religion and missionary zeal simply did not play any role in Belgian efforts. The two most involved colonial establishments discussed, Santo Tomas and Santa Catarina, were in Catholic countries, as was Belgium. There would have been little success for Catholic missionary activity in either Texas or Rio Nunez due to what would have been strong and vociferous opposition by the Protestant and Muslim residents, respectively. Lastly, it is necessary to remember that despite his acceptance of and acquiescence to Catholicism as the predominant religion in Belgium, Leopold was a Protestant with little interest in conversion of any nature.

The issue of racial superiority that so permeated late nineteenth century Europe was certainly not absent from the first half of the nineteenth century. It was simply disorganized and general in its outlook. It took Herbert Spencer's reworking of Charles Darwin, to produce a workable, if not distorted, view of survival of the fittest and its related hierarchy of race. No effort by Belgium or Leopold, however, reflected this

attitude or the impulse to advance European superiority. Belgians saw themselves as a hard working people even among Europeans.

The need for a strong military and specifically a viable navy is one of the strongest examples to illustrate why the efforts of Leopold failed. Palmerston's words concerning Belgium's inability to adequately protect and regulate any claim to Nicaragua surely echoed in Leopold's mind as underlining the constant need for the two- if not one-ship Belgian navy to constantly cruise to Guatemala, Rio Nunez, China, Algeria, and the like. The nature of conquest, even economic, required the ability to protect and impress. The Belgian navy, although quite professional considering its size and longevity, simply was not enough. In fact, its constant use, especially in view of its perceived unconstitutional pursuits in Rio Nunez, contributed to its extinction. Like the European nations later in the New Imperialism Belgium used its military in colonial ventures as Pirson in Texas, Petit and De Puydt in Santo Tomas, Van Lede (national service aside) in Santa Catarina, and van Haverbeke on the Rio Nunez attested.

In terms of scientific and medical abilities to expand imperialism, the experiences in Guatemala and Rio Nunez attest to the need for sophisticated scientific and medical expertise in the New Imperialism. The devastating climate and ubiquitous presence of malaria and other tropical diseases absolutely doomed the Rio Nunez effort and essentially crippled the Santo Tomas colony. The military and technical advances of the late nineteenth century such as the repeating rifle, steel navy, railroad, and the telegraph were necessary but would have been of no use without the medical advances made. Belgium possessed none of these advances during the period in question. It was

almost impossible for a white man to survive in Rio Nunez or West Africa for any extended period of time; the odds were almost as bad in Santo Tomas.

The question of the use or abuse of maps and cartography is not one that is usually addressed in terms of colonial or imperialistic functions. It is clear that until there were current maps available there was little possibility for true exploration as a lead-in to colonization and imperialism. This, however, pertained mostly to Africa. Maps of South and Central America and of Asia had been in existence for centuries. It was Africa beyond the coast that was *terra incognita*. In terms of Belgian cartography there had not been any previous need for such mapping. Both as part of the Spanish and Austrian Netherlands and as half of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands, what would become Belgium had relied on Dutch maps and Dutch ships. With the final break with the Netherlands in 1830 and the continuing embargo against its products and port access, Belgium was forced, at least initially, to acquire cartographic knowledge anywhere it could.

Pirson's use of a hand drawn outline of the British cartographer Arrowsmith's map of Texas is a good example. Additionally, maps of the Rio Nunez were given to Leopold by the French. The maps used by Van Lede in Brazil were not Belgian but were up to date, as the Brazilian coast had been the subject of commerce for hundreds of years

Santo Tomas in Guatemala, however, saw the beginning of Belgian cartography. The maps made for Leopold by Nicolas Dally were equal to the best available. The quality of the maps by Dorn were detailed and exact, if a bit crude. But the real

significance of the maps of Santo Tomas was their apparent use as propaganda. The images produced gave stability and order to a world where none existed. This use seems to differentiate Belgium in this respect. The maps by Dally were also used to give Leopold, for whom they were produced and to whom they were dedicated to by the *Compagnie*, propaganda in terms of the colony's stability and order as well as the grandeur of a cartographic representation of a Belgian colony to Leopold.

Why then did the colonial efforts of Belgium and the imperialistic dreams of Leopold fail? The people, institutions, and economy of Belgium simply had no colonial memory. Leopold had a colonial and imperialistic impulse, but it was a British one, which only existed because Britain had been a colonial power for over three hundred years. Belgium did not possess the economic, political, and military capabilities to create and maintain an empire. Belgium was a minor player on the world colonial stage. It, or more specifically Leopold, was playing outside its league. Leopold's death ended his imperialistic dreams and the colonial interest of the people and government of Belgium. However, Leopold I's endeavors only whetted the appetite of Leopold II.

There is no doubt that Leopold II has become the arch villain of European colonialism as a result of, The King Incorporated by Neal Ascherson and especially Adam Hochschild in King Leopold's Ghost. Despite the criticism that rained down upon him both during his life and thereafter as a result of his actions in the Congo Free State, there is one certain fact. Leopold II was overwhelmingly successful in the creation of a personal empire in an unprecedented way. What did Leopold II do that Leopold I did wrong?

We are told that the personal relationship between father and son was distant and cold. Leopold was too busy being king to really spend time or affection on his oldest son, or any of his children for that matter. But a prince is a prince with the coldest of fathers. He inherited his father's strong belief in territorial aggrandizement as a badge of success. At the early age of eighteen his father, the vigilante master of the Coburg stud farm, married the then Duc de Brabant to seventeen-year-old Marie Henriette Anne von Habsburg-Lothringen, Archduchess of Austria, the daughter of Joseph, Archduke of Austria. They had four children, but the marriage was very unhappy, and Leopold II (like his father) had two illegitimate children. But he had a personal empire of his own.

If Leopold I could not convince the cabinet and the chambers that colonies were good for Belgium, Leopold II simply bypassed both and obtained the Congo Free State as his personal reserve. Additionally, this avoided all those years of what can only be described as internecine warfare between king, chambers, and cabinet. If Leopold I could not convince the government to fund his overseas projects, Leopold II as one of the richest people in late nineteenth century Europe, bought it with his own money.

The economic climate in Belgium in the last twenty years of the nineteenth century was that of a booming major industrial power ranking perhaps sixth in the world. There would be no need for labor in the Congo Free State; the forcible, if not slave-like, use of the native population provided the needed work force. The lack of a real commercial interest in the Congo Free State meant simply that Leopold II created and ran his own private industrial operation.

The lack of a large army and navy was countered by the creation of the *Force Publique*, a private police force and court in the field where justice and fear were dispensed at will. The Belgian merchant marine was not a navy, but Leopold needed no protection from other European powers, since they were also involved in pacifying their native populations in Africa as a result of the Berlin Conference and the “Scramble for Africa.”

Leopold I’s religious tendencies were not a driving force for him. However, the need for basic education of the native work force attracted the attentions of the Catholic Church and some Protestant missionaries, who assumed the task of educating the Congolese under Leopold II. The scientific and medical revolution provided Leopold II with the means, by virtue of superior weaponry and technology, to keep the population under control. The now widespread use of quinine no longer made Africa the white man’s graveyard. The failures of the father had not been lost on the son.

As previously stated, in 1839 Charles Drouet had laid out five questions that, in his view, should be addressed before Belgium considered colonial expansion. They were:

1. When and how is a colony useful?
2. When and how is a useful colony more of a burden than it is worth?
3. Is Belgium in a position to undertake colonial development?
4. What is the best colonial system?
5. If all of the above questions are answered satisfactorily, where does one find a suitable area?

Texas would not have met criteria number one. Only Santa Catarina met number two, the government simply paid no attention. None of the colonial attempts in Santo Tomas, Texas, Santa Catarina, or Rio Nunez met number three. Belgium could never really decide what the best colonial system was for any of the four. The choices left to Belgium and Leopold were in many cases what was left over from the major colonial efforts of the other powers in Europe. The pickings were indeed slim. The Dark Continent was at that time simply inaccessible.

The Congo Free State, however, was not only useful but immensely profitable. It only became a burden after thirty years, when much of its easy wealth had been extracted. Leopold II bypassed Belgium and thus rendered the second point moot. The status of the Congo Free State as a personal reserve of Leopold bypassed both issues three and four. The question of location was perfect, it was between the other European African colonies and was Leopold's by agreement.

Most likely, neither Leopold I nor Leopold II read Drouet's work. Leopold II, however, had done his homework, watched the failures of his father, and succeeded beyond his wildest dreams. It was the Congolese under Leopold II who suffered under the long and fateful shadow of Leopold I.

This study of the overall colonial attempts of Leopold I has attempted to bring greater focus to this area of nineteenth century colonialism. On the other hand, it has done so with a broad stroke requiring much additional work in both these areas and focusing on the other colonial efforts of Belgium. It is hoped that it has perhaps

expanded on the conditions that existed before Leopold II so that study and scholarship in this area, especially of a broader nature, will advance.

Much of the historical record on Belgium's role in nineteenth century colonialism reflects a fairly confined, orderly review and analysis of the official record and its closely related documents. This is changing. It is hoped that this effort here, although also mostly based on the official records, by its broader view reflects a very small part of the much larger historical effort in Belgium today. Leopold II may have been the subject of a deeper study of Belgian colonialism in the Congo but it may have broadened the inquiry to all of Belgian colonial activity, and by definition the larger world of European imperialism.

The forced examination of Belgium and Leopold's past and Belgian colonialism and imperialism has in many ways recast the way Belgium and its historians view this facet of Belgium's past. Guy Vanthemsche, of the University of Brussels, in a 2006 paper entitled "*The Historiography of Belgian Colonialism in the Congo*,"<sup>402</sup> explained some of the shortcomings and advances Belgian colonial history has and must take. His words are relevant beyond the Congo. In discussing a work by two Belgian historians, Hein Vanhee and Geert Castryck, Vanthemsche wrote:

A few years ago, these two authors produced a stimulating essay on the state of the art and the future perspectives of colonial historiography in Belgium, introducing a special issue of the Belgian review of contemporary history, consisting of several articles on Belgian colonial history. This is certainly the symptom of the fact that something is indeed changing in the Belgian historical world. But in comparison to other former imperial countries, Belgian colonial

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<sup>402</sup> Guy Vanthemsche, "*The Historiography of Belgian Colonialism in the Congo*," in *Europe and the World in European Historiography*, ed. Lévai, Csaba. (Pisa: Pisa University Press, 2006), 119.

historiography is lagging behind. The heavy institutional and political weight attached to the Leopoldian heritage had something to do with this. Much remains to be done, but luckily, new perspectives and approaches (anthropology, gender studies, cultural studies) undoubtedly will fertilize historical work on colonial Congo. The new generation of Belgian historians has never known colonialism. They do not want to “prove” anything and do not have any special feelings of guilt, nostalgia or justification towards what happened in the Congo under Belgian rule. In their eyes, there is only one thing left in eulogy and in national pride: these old fetters, which have influenced so deeply the beginnings of colonial historiography, have themselves become objects of scientific enquiry. Understanding and explaining colonialism, a complex phenomenon of societal contact: this is the huge task that lays ahead. If their new approach and the resulting new insights percolate through to public opinion, politicians and school children, these historians will not have wasted their time.<sup>403</sup>

If Vanthemsche is right, than perhaps we will be better able to know how long and fateful the shadow of Leopold I influenced Leopold II and Belgian colonialism.

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<sup>403</sup>Lévai, 106-7.

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