

Leopold II of Belgium

Leopold II	
	
King of the Belgians	
Reign	17 December 1865 – 17 December 1909 (44 years)
Predecessor	Leopold I
Successor	Albert I
Spouse	Marie Henriette of Austria
Issue	Louise Marie, Princess of Kohary Prince Leopold, Duke of Brabant Stéphanie, Crown Princess of Austria Clémentine, Princess Napoléon
House	House of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha
Father	Leopold I
Mother	Louise-Marie of France
Born	9 April 1835 Brussels, Belgium
Died	17 December 1909 (aged 74) Laeken/Laken, Belgium

Leopold II (French: *Léopold Louis Philippe Marie Victor*, Dutch: *Leopold Lodewijk Filips Maria Victor*) (9 April 1835 – 17 December 1909) was the second king of the Belgians. Born in Brussels the second (but eldest surviving) son of Leopold I and Louise-Marie of Orléans, he succeeded his father to the throne on 17 December 1865 and remained king until his death.

Leopold is chiefly remembered as the founder and sole owner of the Congo Free State, a private project undertaken by the King. He used Henry Morton Stanley to help him lay claim to the Congo, an area now known as the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Powers at Berlin Conference agreed to set up the Free State in 1885, on condition that the inhabitants were to be brought into the modern world and that all nations be allowed to trade freely. From the beginning, however, Leopold essentially ignored these conditions and ran the Congo brutally, by proxy through a mercenary force, for his own personal gain. He extracted a personal fortune from the Congo, initially by the collection of ivory, and after a rise in the price of rubber in the 1890s by forcing the native population to collect sap from rubber plants. His harsh regime was directly or indirectly responsible for the death of millions of

people. The Congo became one of the most infamous international scandals of the early 20th century, and Leopold was ultimately forced to relinquish control of it to the government of Belgium.

Biography

Leopold II married Marie Henriette, a teenage archduchess of Austria, in Brussels on 22 August 1853. Leopold was too ill to attend his own wedding, and sent his brother-in-law, Archduke Charles, to stand in for him. Unfortunately for the sexually naïve Marie Henriette, who had gone to her wedding bed armed only with instructions to submit to her husband's wishes, Leopold sufficiently recovered to attend the honeymoon.

Leopold II also engaged in a religious ceremony with Blanche Zélia Joséphine Delacroix, aka Caroline Lacroix, a prostitute, on 12/14 December 1909, with no validity under Belgian law, at the Pavilion of Palms, Royal Palace of Laken, in Brussels, five days before his death. The priest of Laeken Cooreman performed the ceremony.^{[1] [2]}

He was the 975th Knight of the Order of the Golden Fleece in Austria, the 748th Knight of the Order of the Garter in 1866 and the 69th and 321st Grand Cross of the Order of the Tower and Sword.

On 15 November 1902, Italian anarchist Gennaro Rubino attempted to assassinate Leopold, who was riding in a royal cortege from a ceremony in memory of his recently-deceased wife, Marie Henriette. After Leopold's carriage passed, Rubino fired three shots at the King; the shots missed Leopold and Rubino was immediately arrested.

In Belgian domestic politics, Leopold emphasized military defense as the basis of neutrality, but he was unable to obtain a universal conscription law until on his death bed. He died in Laeken on 17 December 1909, and was interred in the royal vault at the Church of Our Lady of Laeken in Brussels.

He was succeeded as King of the Belgians by his nephew Albert, son of his brother Philippe.

He was the brother of Empress Carlota of Mexico and first cousin of Queen Victoria of the United Kingdom.

Issue

Leopold II had four children with his queen, Marie Henriette:

- Louise-Marie Amélie, born in Brussels on February 18, 1858, and died at Wiesbaden on March 1, 1924. She married Prince Philipp of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha.
- Léopold Ferdinand Elie Victor Albert Marie, Count of Hainaut (as eldest son of the heir apparent), later Duke of Brabant (as heir apparent), born at Laeken/Laken on June 12, 1859, and died at Laken on January 22, 1869, from pneumonia, after falling into a pond.
- Stéphanie Clotilde Louise Herminie Marie Charlotte, born at Laken on 11 May 1864, and died at the Archabbey of Pannonhalma in Győr-Moson-Sopron, Hungary, on 23 August 1945. She married (1) Crown Prince Rudolf of Austria and then (2) Elemér Edmund Graf Lónyay de Nagy-Lónya et Vásáros-Namény (created, in 1917, Prince Lónyay de Nagy-Lónya et Vásáros-Namény).
- Clémentine, born at Laken on 30 July 1872, and died at Nice on 8 March 1955. She married Prince Napoléon Victor Jérôme Frédéric Bonaparte (1862–1926), head of the Bonaparte family.

Leopold II was also the father of two illegitimate sons through Caroline Lacroix, later adopted in 1910 by Lacroix's second husband, Antoine Durrieux:^[2]

- Lucien Philippe Marie Antoine (9 February 1906 – 1984), duke of Tervuren^[2]
- Philippe Henri Marie François (16 October 1907 – 21 August 1914), count of Ravenstein^[2]



Leopold and Marie Henriette

Private colonialism

Leopold fervently believed that overseas colonies were the key to a country's greatness, and he worked tirelessly to acquire colonial territory for Belgium. Neither the Belgian people nor the Belgian government were interested, however, and Leopold eventually began trying to acquire a colony in his private capacity as an ordinary citizen. The Belgian government lent him money for this venture.



A statue of Leopold in Mons, Belgium

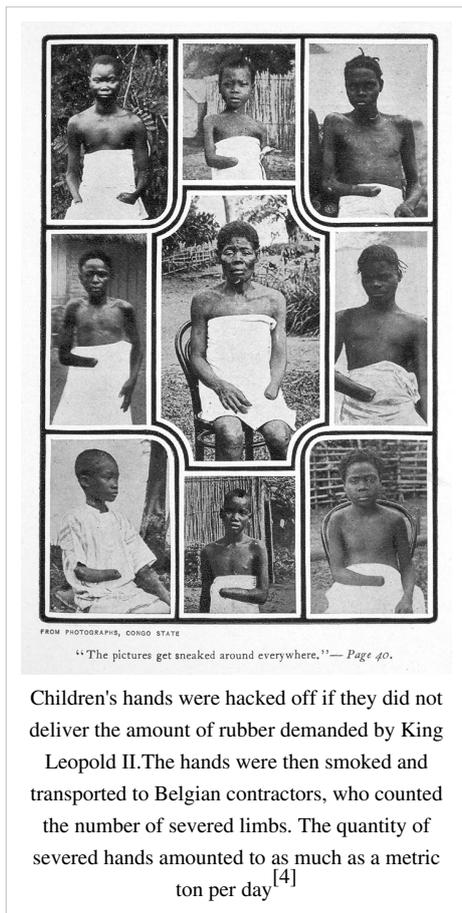
After a number of unsuccessful schemes for colonies in Africa or Asia, in 1876 he organized a private holding company disguised as an international scientific and philanthropic association, which he called the International African Society.

In 1878, under the auspices of the holding company, he hired the famous explorer Henry Morton Stanley to establish a colony in the Congo region.^[3] Much diplomatic maneuvering resulted in the Berlin Conference of 1884–85, at which representatives of fourteen European countries and the United States recognized Leopold as sovereign of most of the area he and Stanley had laid claim to. On 5 February 1885, the result was the Congo Free State (later becoming, successively, the Belgian Congo, the Republic of the Congo, Zaire, and now the Democratic Republic of the Congo or DRC — not to be confused with Republic of the Congo formerly owned by France), an area 76 times larger than Belgium, which Leopold was free to rule as a personal domain through his private army, the Force Publique.

The first economic focus of the colony was ivory, but this did not yield the expected levels of revenue. When the global demand for rubber exploded, attention shifted to the labor-intensive collection of sap from rubber plants. Abandoning the promises of the Berlin Conference in the late 1890s, the Free State government restricted foreign access and extorted forced labor from the natives. The abuses suffered were horrific, especially in the rubber industry, and included the effective enslavement of the native population, savage beatings, widespread killing, and frequent mutilation when the unrealistic quotas were not met. Missionary John Harris of Baringa, for example, was so shocked by what he had come across that he wrote to Leopold's chief agent in the Congo saying: "I have just returned from a journey inland to the village of Insongo Mboyo. The abject misery and utter abandon is positively indescribable. I was so moved, Your Excellency, by the people's stories that I took the liberty of promising them that in future you will only kill them for crimes they commit."



A result of Leopold's colonialism, children had their hands amputated when they did not meet demands for the Belgians.^[4]



Estimates of the death toll range from two million to fifteen million.^[5]
^[6] ^[7] Determining precisely how many people died is next to impossible as accurate records were not kept. Louis and Stengers state that population figures at the start of Leopold's control are only "wild guesses", while E.D. Morel's attempt and others at coming to a figure for population losses were "but figments of the imagination".^[8]

Adam Hochschild devotes a chapter of his book, *King Leopold's Ghost*, to the problem of estimating the death toll. He cites several recent lines of investigation, by anthropologist Jan Vansina and others, examining local sources from police records, religious records, oral traditions, genealogies, personal diaries, and "many others", which generally agree with the assessment of the 1919 Belgian government commission: roughly half the population perished during the Free State period. Since the first official census by the Belgian authorities in 1924 put the population at about 10 million, that implies a rough estimate of 10 million dead.^[9]

Smallpox and sleeping sickness also devastated the disrupted population.^[10] By 1896 the sleeping sickness had killed up to 5,000 Africans in the village of Lukolela on the Congo River. The mortality figures were collected through the efforts of Roger Casement, who found, for example, only 600 survivors of the disease in Lukolela in 1903.^[11]

Reports of outrageous exploitation and widespread human rights abuses led to international outcry in the early 1900s. The campaign to examine Leopold's regime, led by British diplomat Roger Casement and former shipping clerk E. D. Morel under the auspices of the Congo Reform Association, became the first mass human rights movement.^[12] Supporters included American writer Mark Twain, who wrote a stinging political satire entitled *King Leopold's Soliloquy*, in which the King supposedly argues that bringing Christianity to the country outweighs a little starvation. Rubber gatherers were tortured, maimed and slaughtered until the turn of the century, when the Western world forced Brussels to call a halt.^[13] Arthur Conan Doyle also blasted the 'rubber regime' in his 1908 work 'The Crime of the Congo', written to aid the work of the Congo Reform Association. Doyle contrasted Leopold's rule to the British rule of Nigeria, arguing decency required that those who ruled primitive peoples to be concerned first with their uplift, not how much could be extracted from them. Doyle's work is the most complete contemporary account of the Congo scandal. It should be noted that, as Hochschild describes in *King Leopold's Ghost*, many of Leopold's policies were adopted from Dutch practices in the East Indies, and similar methods were employed to some degree by Germany, France, and Portugal where natural rubber occurred in their colonies.

Finally, in 1908, the Belgian parliament compelled the King to cede the Congo Free State to Belgium.

Leopold II is still a controversial figure in the Democratic Republic of Congo. His statue in the capital, Kinshasa, was removed after independence. Congolese culture minister Christoph Muzungu decided to reinstate the statue in 2005, pointing out the sense of liberating progress that had marked the beginning of the Free State and arguing that people should see the positive aspects of the king as well as the negative; but just hours after the six-metre (20 ft) statue was erected in the middle of a roundabout near Kinshasa's central station, it was taken down again without explanation. The Congo continues, however, to use a variation of the Free State flag, which it adopted after dropping the name and flag of Zaire.

Leopold and the Belgians

Though extremely disliked by his subjects at the end of his reign — his funeral cortege was booed — Leopold II is remembered today by many Belgians as the "Builder King" (*Koning-Bouwer* in Dutch, *le Roi-Bâtisseur* in French)

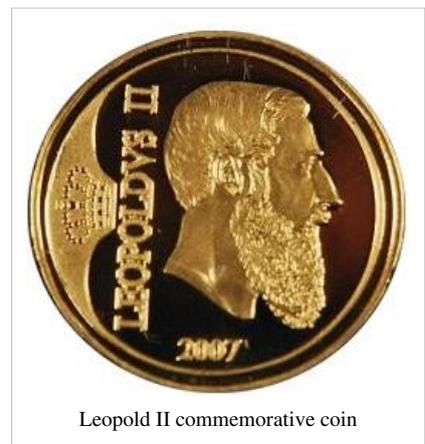
because he commissioned a great number of buildings and urban projects, mainly in Brussels, Ostend and Antwerp.

These buildings include the Royal Glasshouses in the grounds of the Palace at Laken, the Japanese Tower, the Chinese Pavilion, the *Musée du Congo* (now called the Royal Museum for Central Africa), and their surrounding park in Tervuren, the *Cinquantenaire* in Brussels, and the 1895-1905 Antwerpen-Centraal railway station. He also built an important country estate in Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat on the French Riviera, including the *Villa des Cèdres*, which is now a botanical garden. These were all built using the profits from the Congo. In 1900, he created the Royal Trust, by which means he donated most of his property to the Belgian nation.

After the King transferred his private colony to Belgium, there was, as Adam Hochschild puts it in *King Leopold's Ghost*, a "Great Forgetting". Hochschild records that, on his visit to the colonial Royal Museum for Central Africa in the 1990s, there was no mention of the atrocities committed in the Congo Free State, despite the museum's large collection of colonial objects. Another example of this "Great Forgetting" may be found on the boardwalk of Blankenberge, a popular coastal resort, where a monument shows a colonialist bringing "civilization" to the black child at his feet. In 2004, an activist group cut off the hand of a Congolese bronze figure, one of a multi-figure group in a 1931 sculptural monument to Leopold II on the beach in Ostend, to protest the Congo atrocities.



Leopold II with the coat of arms of the Belgian Congo in Ghent, Belgium



Leopold II commemorative coin

Monarchical styles of King Leopold II of the Belgians	
	
Reference style	His Majesty
Spoken style	Your Majesty
Alternative style	Sire

See also

- Leopold II was selected as a main motif for the recent 12.50 euro Leopold II commemorative coin minted in 2007. The obverse shows his portrait facing right.
- Kings of Belgium family tree
- Crown Council of Belgium
- Émile Banning

Bibliography

- Ascherson, Neal: *The King Incorporated*, Allen & Unwin, 1963. ISBN 1-86207-290-6 (1999 Granta edition).
- Hochschild, Adam: *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa*, Mariner Books, 1998. ISBN 0-330-49233-0.
- Petringa, Maria: *Brazza, A Life for Africa*, 2006. ISBN 978-1-4259-1198-0
- Wm. Roger Louis and Jean Stengers: *E.D. Morel's History of the Congo Reform Movement*, Clarendon Press Oxford, 1968.
- Ó Síocháin, Séamas and Michael O'Sullivan, eds: *The Eyes of Another Race: Roger Casement's Congo Report and 1903 Diary*. University College Dublin Press, 2004. ISBN 1-900-62199-1.
- Ó Síocháin, Séamas: *Roger Casement: Imperialist, Rebel, Revolutionary*. Dublin: Lilliput Press, 2008.

External links

- Official biography from the Belgian Royal Family website ^[14]
- "The Political Economy of Power" ^[15] Interview with political scientist Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, with an extended discussion of Leopold II halfway through
- Interview with King Leopold II ^[16] Publishers' Press, 1906
- Mass crimes against humanity in the Congo Free State ^[17]
- *Congo: White king, red rubber, black death* ^[18] A 2003 documentary by Peter Bate on Leopold II and the Congo

References

- [1] <http://pages.prodigy.net/ptheroff/gotha/belgium.html>
 - [2] "Le Petit Gotha"
 - [3] Hochschild, Adam: *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa*, Mariner Books, 1998. pp. 62. ISBN 0-330-49233-0.
 - [4] Forbath, Peter (1977). *The River Congo: The Discovery, Exploration and Exploitation of the World's Most Dramatic Rivers*. Harper & Row. pp. 374. ISBN 0061224901.
 - [5] *The River Congo: The Discovery, Exploration and Exploitation of the World's Most Dramatic Rivers,* Harper & Row, (1977). ISBN Forbath, Peter, 278
 - [6] Fredric Wertham *A Sign For Cain: An Exploration of Human Violence* (1968), Adam Hochschild *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (1998; new edition, 2006)
 - [7] "War statistics" (<http://users.erols.com/mwhite28/warstat2.htm>). .
 - [8] Wm. Roger Louis and Jean Stengers: *E.D. Morel's History of the Congo Reform Movement* p.252-7
 - [9] Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*, Chapter 15, "A Reckoning".
 - [10] The 'Leopold II' concession system exported to French Congo with as example the Mpoko Company (<http://www.flwi.ugent.be/btng-rbhc/pdf/BTNG-RBHC>, 36, 2006, 3-4, pp 323-372.pdf)
 - [11] "Le rapport Casement annoté par A. Schorochoff" (<http://www.urome.be/fr2/reflexions/casemrepo.pdf>) (PDF). Posted at the website for the Royal Union for Overseas Colonies, <http://www.urome.be>. .
 - [12] "Africa" (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3516965.stm>). *News* (BBC). 24 February 2004. . Retrieved 7 May 2010.
 - [13] "Time" (<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,866343-2,00.html>). 16 May 1955. . Retrieved 7 May 2010.
 - [14] <http://www.monarchie.be/history/leopold-ii>
 - [15] http://www.econtalk.org/archives/2006/08/the_political_e.html
 - [16] <http://congostate.blogspot.com/2006/01/interview-with-king-leopold-ii.html>
 - [17] <http://www.religioustolerance.org/genocong.htm>
 - [18] <http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbcfour/documentaries/storyville/congo.shtml>
-

Article Sources and Contributors

Leopold II of Belgium *Source:* <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?oldid=383019474> *Contributors:* 172, A67, AAA!, Abe (or Abraham), Aciram, Adam sk, Ahoerstermeier, Ajhodd, Al3xil, Aldis90, Alecciampitti, Ancheta Wis, Antandrus, Aram33, Arizzio, Ary29, Astorg, Astorknlam, Atomicdor, AusTerrapin, B-west, Babblor, Belligero, Bheuninckx, Birutorul, Black Falcon, BmaninOK, Bobblewik, BrainyBabe, Bssc, Burn, Burord, C.Kent87, CSWarren, Calvin 1998, Caponer, Capricorn42, Carllossuarez46, Catherine Huebscher, CattleGirl, Charles, CharlotteWebb, Chenopodiaceous, Chicheley, Chiwara, Chris Horvath, ConstantinetheGreat, Craigy144, Crassus, Crohnie, D6, DW, DWC LR, Dan Koehl, Danicalove79, Darklilac, David de Cooman, DharunRavi, Dionysos1, DocWatson42, Dolchew, Domino theory, Downwards, Duncharris, Dysepsion, Dysprosia, E Wing, Edcolins, Editorofthewiki, Edward321, Elonka, Eloquence, Elphion, Erwin (SUL), Eumolpo, Falcon8765, Fangz, Filiep, FlamingTurd, Fodber, Francis Schonken, Francs2000, Freakofnurture, FreplySpang, Frymaster, Fuzheado, FvdP, Fynire, G.-M. Cupertino, Gabbe, Gakmo, Ganchelkas, Gatoclass, Gergis, GlassFET, GoodDay, Grace Note, Grandpafootsoldier, Grin, Grover cleveland, Gryffindor, Guppie, HOT L Baltimore, Hadal, Hall Monitor, Hankle3, Hcheney, Heclot, Hede2000, Hektor, Hmains, Honkyhonky2003, HustonJMarble, IWhisky, Infrogmation, Ipoellet, Iroj, Itai, Ivo von Rosenqvist, J.J., J04n, Jagged, Japanese Searobin, Jguk, Jirka62, Jmanigold, JoJan, John K, John0101ddd, Joolz, José Fontaine, Jpbowen, Jros83, Jtdirl, Jvkea2, K2wiki, Kairos, Kaldari, Karl Stas, KathrynLybarger, Kingturtle, Kintetsubuffalo, KuatofKDY, Känsterle, Lamadude, Laurenjf, Legarcia, Le baron, Leandro, Leonard^Bloom, LilHelpa, Lir, Lockley, Looxix, Lord Emsworth, Lord Pistachio, Lucky 6.9, MMAFighter155, Makemi, Mamathomas, Manxruler, Mark J, MartinHarper, Massimo Macconi, Mattbr, MenelikXI, Mhacdebandia, Michalis Famelis, Microcell, Miguel.mateo, Mijnheer, MikailMoolla, Minaker, Minesweeper, MinnesotanConfederacy, Mkmeconn, Modify, Montrealais, MookieZ, Morhange, Ms2ger, Musser, Myanw, NB-NB, NWill, Naddy, Nancy, Natobxl, Neile, Neverquick, Nicholas Fahy, NormanEinstein, Numbo3, Nunh-huh, O Fenian, Odie5533, Ohconfucius, OllieFury, Paliano, Patrick, Patxi Iurra, Paul Benjamin Austin, Pavel Vozenilek, Penrithguy, Pentium1000, Perspicacite, Peruvianllama, Peter Isotalo, Pevernagie, Phil Bridger, Phlebas, Pinwheel, Polylerus, Pontauxchats, Profoss, Prsgoddes187, Pvosta, Qwerty, RGTraynor, Radon210, Rangeley, RedWolf, Reywas92, Rich Farmbrough, Richard75, Rjwilmsi, Roadrunner, RobertG, Roisterer, Ruby2010, Rungbachduong, Saarländer, Sannse, SarekOfVulcan, Saucybetty, Saxifrage, ScottJ, SeNeKa, Sean09876, Shaul1, Shirulashem, Silverhorse, Skygazing, Slawojarek, Snoyes, Someone else, SpLoT, Srnec, Stankovic, Supernanny, Surtsicna, Surv1v411st, TBadger, Takeaway, Tannin, Tbharding, Teay4012, Techman224, Tedernst, The Anome, The Invisible Man, The Quill, The Rhymesmith, The6969, TheOuthouseMouse, Tibbyr, Tide rolls, Tkarpinski, Tlloc44, Tresiden, Troutsneeze, Ukabia, Uncle Milty, Vanished User 1004, Viajero, Viriditas, Wapcaplet, White Cat, WikHead, Will Beback, Wmahan, Xdamr, Xn4, YeshuaDavid, Zantastik, 495 anonymous edits

Image Sources, Licenses and Contributors

Image:Leopold ii garter knight.jpg *Source:* http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:Leopold_ii_garter_knight.jpg *License:* Public Domain *Contributors:* User:Carolus

Image:Maria Hendrika of Austria and Leopod of Belgium.jpg *Source:* http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:Maria_Hendrika_of_Austria_and_Leopod_of_Belgium.jpg *License:* Public Domain *Contributors:* Carolus, Lykos

Image:Mons - Léopold II - VTdJ.JPG *Source:* http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:Mons_-_Léopold_II_-_VTdJ.JPG *License:* unknown *Contributors:* Lykos, Renardeau, 2 anonymous edits

Image:Amputated Congolese youth.jpg *Source:* http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:Amputated_Congolese_youth.jpg *License:* Public Domain *Contributors:* Unknown

Image:MutilatedChildrenFromCongo.jpg *Source:* <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:MutilatedChildrenFromCongo.jpg> *License:* Public Domain *Contributors:* Denis Barthel, Takeaway, Trockennasenneff, 2 anonymous edits

Image:Leopold II gent.jpg *Source:* http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:Leopold_II_gent.jpg *License:* Public Domain *Contributors:* B-west

Image:2007 Belgium 1250 Euro Leopold II front.JPG *Source:* http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:2007_Belgium_1250_Euro_Leopold_II_front.JPG *License:* unknown *Contributors:* Miguel.mateo, 1 anonymous edits

Image:Coats of arms of Belgium Government.svg *Source:* http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:Coats_of_arms_of_Belgium_Government.svg *License:* Public Domain *Contributors:* User:Tonyjeff

License