

29. The Beginnings of European Colonialism in Africa

The North African Muslims even today think of the Europeans (which they assume to be Christians) as those who came to Africa in the nineteenth century largely just to develop the land for their own benefit.

The French occupied Egypt from 1798 to 1801.

In 1879 Tunisia was placed under French Protectorate.

In 1896 Sudan was conquered by Britain.

In 1904 Northern Morocco became a “Zone of Influence” of Spain.

In 1912 Algeria was placed under French Protectorate.

In 1930 Libya was finally conquered by Italy.

The explorations of David Livingstone and the publicity given him by Henry Morton Stanley created in Europe a great interest in knowing more about the deeper parts of the African continent that were previously unknown to them.ⁱ King Leopold II of Belgium had long dreamed of creating a Belgian colony somewhere, and the Stanley’s publicity of Africa seemed to give him the appropriate moment he had long sought.ⁱⁱ Leopold masterminded the African International Association for the Congo, and those under his command made every effort to explore, map, and get land and commercial concessions from African chiefs along the Congo River.ⁱⁱⁱ

The Berlin Conference

The Berlin Conference of 1884-85 was called for by Portugal and organized by Otto von Bismarck, the first Chancellor of Germany.^{iv} It ended the period of European powers seeking to make independent treaties with African chiefs and began the period of viewing the African continent as “land up for grabs.” It delineated the boundaries of the “Congo Free State” and permitted the Belgian King to later be named “sovereign” of this vast territory under certain stipulations, one of which was complete religious toleration. Unfortunately, this stipulation was not always fully respected.^v This seems to have officially begun the European “Scramble for Africa.” The treaty officially ended slavery, both European and Islamic, but the practice continued in reality for some time.^{vi}

The Congo Free State

Leopold sunk his personal fortune into developing what he viewed as his personal colony. He, in turn, sought a return on his investment by exploiting the land’s natural resources like ivory and rubber. Many of his agents were scoundrels whose earnings were based on the amounts of ivory and rubber sent back to Belgium. They, in turn, used non-Congolese African troops to enforce their authority. Missionaries often complained and took the part of the natives. They, in particular, opposed terrible penalties for not bringing in enough rubber, like being shot, having their hands cut off or their villages burnt or their

women chained together as hostages, as well as excessive taxation and a permissive attitude toward the slave raiders.^{vii} Their reports caused an outcry in Europe. In response Leopold set up a sham “Commission for the Protection of Natives” and invited three Protestant and three Catholic missions to participate, along with representatives of the States. The missions were nearly a thousand miles apart and without means of communication, and they received no recompense for meetings, making it virtually impossible to even meet together to discuss the situation.^{viii} This began a period of tension between the Belgian State and missions. In one case, missionaries Morrison and Shepherd were calling all the way from Luebo to Boma, a distance of about 500 miles, for supposedly slandering one of the rubber companies. They were eventually acquitted, but not without great cost and inconvenience to the missionaries. Missionaries were prime sources of eyewitness information and contributed significantly to the eventual change from Congo as Leopold’s personal colony to it becoming a national colony.

ⁱ John R. Crawford, Ph.D., *Protestant Missions in Congo 1878-1969*, (Kinshasa: LECO, 1969), p. 1.

ⁱⁱ John R. Crawford, Ph.D., *Protestant Missions in Congo 1878-1969*, (Kinshasa: LECO, 1969), p. 1.

ⁱⁱⁱ John R. Crawford, Ph.D., *Protestant Missions in Congo 1878-1969*, (Kinshasa: LECO, 1969), p. 2.

^{iv} Wikipedia, accessed October 14, 2015.

^v John R. Crawford, Ph.D., *Protestant Missions in Congo 1878-1969*, (Kinshasa: LECO, 1969), p. 2, referencing Godbey. A.H. *Stanley in Africa* (Chicago, Standard Publishing Company, 1889).

^{vi} John R. Crawford, Ph.D., *Protestant Missions in Congo 1878-1969*, (Kinshasa: LECO, 1969), p. 9.

^{vii} John R. Crawford, Ph.D., *Protestant Missions in Congo 1878-1969*, (Kinshasa: LECO, 1969), p. 8-9.

^{viii} John R. Crawford, Ph.D., *Protestant Missions in Congo 1878-1969*, (Kinshasa: LECO, 1969), p. 9.