Kimbangism in chapter 7) to the detriment of other vital data (e.g. there is little in chapter 7 about other types of movement such as Kitawala or Holy Water). Generally speaking the account is comprehensive, but few new insights or original viewpoints are offered. The facts and interpretations are derived from data published in book, article or report form, and from conversations with a large number of Congolese and Europeans. The author is keenly aware of the difficulties of his task, and particularly of his deficiencies in the non-historical fields (p. 363). The latter are clearly apparent from the bibliographical note (pp. 265–272) in which we search in vain for some key ethnographic works on the Congo (e.g. Hulstaert, Vansina, de Heusch, Laman, Schebesta) and for some other significant studies (e.g. Lux, Eeck, Caprasse on cities; Abel, Ceulemans on Islam).

The title itself points to the main argument of the work: that Belgium inherited from King Leopold II ‘a colony possessed of a certain structure’ (large size, sparse population, eroded traditional societies; a territory which had not been properly administered; a series of decrees; a system of direct economic exploitation, etc.) and that Belgium had no relevant tradition of policy nor positive aims. Whereas many of the data produced in order to substantiate the first part of this argument are basically sound (although one could think of many significant conditioning factors other than those suggested in chapter 2), it is astonishing to notice this radical dismissal of positive aims. Some of these aims, connected with the œuvre de civilisation, are set out, e.g., in the first parts of the Codes et lois du Congo Belge together with the vital distinction between politique coloniale and politique indigène.

The book then deals with considerations such as ‘why Belgium took over the Congo, what she sought to do there, and what the impact of her presence was’. To a large extent the author has been successful in unravelling the first two aspects. Concerning the impact of Belgium’s presence on the traditional societies, the attempts at assessment are precise and honest, but a full understanding and interpretation of the situations of change and ‘destructuration’ is rarely reached. Mainly this seems to be for two reasons. First, because the author has at his disposal an insufficient or inadequate set of data about the structure of traditional societies in the Congo (many statements in chapter 2 indicate this). Second, because the author has apparently not been able to see the local colonial administrative machinery at work, a fact which would have permitted him to introduce many more refined nuances (to
the credit or to the discredit of this machinery). Whatever the case may be, there are few books which give a comprehensive historical perspective on a particular form of colonial rule, such as this one does. It is therefore to be commended as a useful document on the operation of the colonial machinery in the Congo.

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