

King Leopold II according to Belgium

KING LEOPOLD II

1835

On 9 April, birth in Brussels of Leopold, Louis, Philippe, Marie, Victor, son of [Leopold I](#) and Louise-Marie.

1853

Prince Leopold entered the Senate, of which he was a member by right. On 22 August, he married Marie-Henriette of Habsburg-Lorraine, Arch-Duchess of Austria. They had four children: Louise-Marie (1858-1924), Leopold (1859-1869), Stephanie (1864-1945), Clementine (1872-1955).

1865

On 17 December, Leopold took the constitutional oath.

1876

On 12 December, the King Palace convened an international conference in Brussels of scientists, geographers and explorers, focusing on the discovery of the centre of Africa. This resulted in the setting up (1877) of an "association for the civilisation and exploration of Central Africa".

1878

Leopold II set up, with the cooperation of the British explorer Stanley, the Study Committee on the Upper Congo, converted in 1879 into the International Association of the Congo.

1885

The Berlin Conference recognised the independent state of the Congo, of which Leopold II became the Sovereign. That same year, the Belgian Parliament authorizes the King to be the Head of State of Congo.

1890

In July, the Brussels International Conference condemned slavery and triggered the start of the anti-slavery campaign in Africa, at the instigation of the King.

1902

On 19 September, Queen Marie-Henriette died in Spa.

1904

Following the excesses committed by the Europeans in Africa, Leopold's reputation and his overseas venture were questioned. The King set up an International Commission of Inquiry, which recognised the merits of the royal action in Congo, while pointing out abuses and shortcomings.

1908

The law of 18 October made the independent State of the Congo a Belgian colony.

1909

On 14 December, the King signed the law on compulsory military service. He died three days later.



Figure 1. Captured from the Belgian Monarchy Website on May 24th, 2018.



Figure 3. Monument in Arlon (Belgium). "I have undertaken the work in Congo in the interest of civilisation and for the good of Belgium."

King Leopold II

The second King of the Belgians was born in 1835 and succeeded his father at the age of 30, in 1865. He had four children (three girls and a boy, who unfortunately died at the age of 9) with his wife Marie-Henriette, Archduchess of Austria. He is sometimes called the King-BUILDER: for example, he built the Royal Greenhouses of Laeken, a huge tropical botanical garden in a "city of glass and steel". He also commissioned the Cinquantenaire in Brussels and Tervuren Park. King Leopold II was passionate about discoveries. He died in 1909.

Figure 2. Screen capture from the "For Kids" section of the Belgian Monarchy website. Captured May 24th, 2018.

The Royal Museum for Central Africa

Captured from their website in November 2015

ROYAL MUSEUM
FOR CENTRAL
AFRICA

Afrika
TERVUREN



Statue of King Leopold II in Brussels

History

Leopold II and his colony

In the late 19th century, Leopold II fulfilled his dream: he obtained a colony for Belgium. He then set himself the task of convincing the Belgian people of Congo's potential...

Leopold II and the colony's origin



The Museum's history begins with King Leopold II. He was convinced that his small country, which industrialized rapidly between 1865 and 1880, required a colony to support its industrial expansion.

Leopold II employed **Henry Morton Stanley**, who had found Livingstone in 1872 and sailed the entire course of the Congo River in 1874-1877. The UK showed no interest in Stanley, but Leopold II recruited him to further explore Central Africa on his behalf. Stanley's service to the king helped lead to the recognition of the Congo Free State at the 1884-1885 Berlin Conference

A Colonial Palace showcase

To promote Belgium's work of 'development and civilization' in Congo, and the latter's economic potential, Leopold II hoped to build some form of museum or 'showcase'.

The original plan consisted of adding a colonial wing to the Natural History Museum and to the 50th Anniversary Park, both in Brussels. When these plans were not carried out quickly enough, the king opted for an exhibition at his royal estate in Tervuren, an area he had known very well as a young prince and Duke of Brabant.

> read more: [From Congo Museum to RMCA](#)

History

From Congo Museum to RMCA

1897 : International Exhibition



In 1897, King Leopold II took advantage of the Brussels International Exhibition to promote the Congo in Tervuren.

Import and export products, ethnographic objects and stuffed animals were exhibited in the Art Nouveau-style Colonial Palace, built especially for the occasion.

Several Congolese villages were erected in the park, alongside many other attractions. Typical freshwater fish of Congo were exhibited in a subterranean passageway. The exhibition was a huge success, attracting more than 1.2 million visitors over six months.

1898 : The Congo Museum

The 1897 International Exhibition piqued scientific interest in the people and animals of Central Africa, thus King Leopold II decided to build on his promotion of Congo.

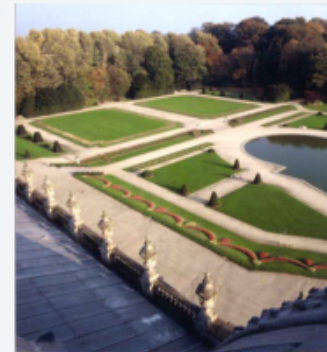
The Congo Museum was established in 1898 as a permanent museum and scientific institution responsible for mounting exhibitions for the Belgian public and encouraging the study of Central Africa.



Little Versailles: the eventual museum building

Owing to rapidly expanding natural science collections, the Colonial Palace soon ran out of space. In 1901, Leopold II set out to make Tervuren his 'little Versailles', comprised of an African museum, a Chinese and Japanese Pavilion, a world school, a conference centre, French gardens and more, all in Tervuren Park, linked to the centre of Brussels via the beautiful divided lanes of Tervuren Avenue.

For his new museum, the king opted for the French neoclassical palace style of Frenchman Charles Girault, who designed Le Petit Palais in Paris. The first stone was laid in 1904. The striking staircase, domed rotunda and marble halls were intended to add prestige to the still young Belgian state. Construction continued until 1909.



1910 : Museum of Belgian Congo

When King Leopold II died in 1909, Congo Free State became Belgian Congo and the Belgian government suspended all construction in Tervuren. The Museum of Belgian Congo was officially inaugurated by King Albert I despite the lack in some rooms of Girault's planned murals.