

The maps in *Le Mouvement Géographique* - a magazine created 150 years ago - as unique witnesses of the Western imperialism

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Abstract:

Between 1884 and 1922, the periodical '*Le Mouvement géographique*', which is fully entitled : '*Le Mouvement Géographique: journal populaire des sciences géographiques illustré de cartes, plans et gravures*', has been published in Belgium by the '*Institut National de Géographie*', an institution which, despite its name, has nothing to do with a national mapping agency but clearly constitutes a private initiative. Historians consider it as an important source regarding the history of the Belgian expansionism and colonialism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

The aim of the fortnightly magazine '*Le Mouvement Géographique*' was to popularize the geographical knowledge and inform the general public on what was happening in the world, especially in the framework of the world conquest. It was a mouthpiece of the imperial ideas of the West-European countries and was as thus involved in the propaganda in favour of Leopold II's projects in Africa. The main objective of '*Le Mouvement Géographique*' seemed to encourage Belgians to embark on the colonial adventure.

In the beginning, the magazine was published biweekly, largely illustrated with black-white maps representing territorial claims, new discoveries, fluxes of materials, etc. A new era started for '*Le Mouvement Géographique*' in 1890. The magazine became property of the '*Compagnie du Congo pour le Commerce et l'Industrie*'. From then onwards, the magazine took an increasing interest in the projects of Belgian companies in the Congo. The number of the commercial announcements also rose, as well as maps showing the development of transport facilities.

In the 1890s it was around fifteen maps a year, but in the post-WWI period it averaged just the same number of maps for double the number of issues. The map subjects covered also changed. At the end of the 19th century, there was a great deal of interest in the routes taken by expeditions and the new regions explored, maps describing relations between the Congo and the regions under Muslim influence (in the framework of fighting against slavery), the distribution of factories in different regions of Congo, hydrographic maps and sketches of geological cross sections, but also maps of general culture, such as e.g. the discoveries of Columbus, the Antique Greek world, etc.

In the post-war period, detailed attention was paid to communication routes in Congo (by the waterways and railways) and the events linked to or impacted by the First World War in Africa (e.g. regions under Belgian mandate or limitrophe to it).

Colour maps are more common in the early period than later. They were produced in a limited number of printing colours (2-4) without screening and are either in separate overprints on the already separately printed text page or on separate inserted sheets.

The maps on Congo are demonstrating the advancement of the knowledge concerning the inner parts of the country – often illustrated by regional sketch maps on a scale of 1 : 1,000,000 to 1 : 2,000,000 - and also indicate for example the advancement of the railway coverage in Congo (and Africa) or the detailed information on the Congo River.

All volumes of the Belgian geographical journal '*Le Mouvement Géographique*', published between 1884 and 1922, have recently been digitized with the support of the Royal Academy for Overseas Sciences, the Royal Museum for Central Africa and Ghent University and are freely available on the web at <https://lib.ugent.be/catalog/ser01:000276422>