

Guy Vanthemsche, Roger De Peuter, *A Concise History of Belgium*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2023, 378 p.

Written by two specialists in Belgian history and professors in Brussels University, *A concise history of Belgium* published under Cambridge University Press in 2023 comes to fill a gap in the contemporary scholarship and to provide a professional synthesis on an important topic. In the same time, it fulfils the list of publications of the authors, that have also released previously relevant books in the field (see for example: Guy Vanthemsche, *Belgium and the Congo, 1885–1980*, translated by Alice Cameron and Stephen Windross, assisted by Kate Connelly (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

Segmented into ten big chapters and accompanied by a list of figures (p. XII-XIV), one of maps (p. XIV-XVI), acknowledgements (p. XVIII), notes on the text (p. XVIII), an introduction (p. 1-15), a general conclusion (p. 347-356), an appendix (p. 357-360), a list of suggestions of further readings (p. 361-369) and an index (p. 370-378), the work accomplishes, as expected, all the methodological requests of the field. After presenting, in the introductory part, the landmarks of the history of the investigated nations the authors rise questions like the ones related with the particularities of the national identity in the Belgian area:

„A flag; an anthem; a well-defined and internationally recognized territory; a set of stable political institutions governed by local politicians; a single legal system – Belgium seemingly possessed all the ingredients of a genuine nation-state. However, this young and thriving bourgeois regime, analyzed in Chapter 8, was inevitably confronted with a nagging problem, that of its so-called national identity. What did it mean, exactly, to be a „Belgian”? What differentiated this European citizen from other inhabitants of the Old Continent? Was it religion? From the seventeenth centuries, the authorities, intellectuals, and the Church itself, all presented Catholicism as a defining element of the Southern Netherlands, transformed into a bastion of the counter-reformation” (p. 6).

While the archaeological aspects and the next ones until the Gallo-Roman society and the 5th century a. e. constitutes the topic of the first chapter (p. 1-42), the second one is dedicated to the Frankish Kingdoms (p. 43-72). In the 3rd part of the demarch the author speaks about the origins of the Medieval Principalities (p. 73-106), and they continue the discourse in the next one, dedicated to the Burgundy-Habsburg Period (p. 107-139). Later in the 5th chapter (p. 140-177), the author speaks about the Spanish Netherlands and the way how this period was related with from the social, cultural

and religious point of view. The 6th one (p. 179-202) is related with the Austrian Netherlands and it is continued by one related with the formation of the new Nation-State (p. 203-248). The 8th part of the book deals with the period between 1831 and 1880 (p. 249-279), that coincides with the consolidation of the bourgeois regime, while the 9th one comes to speak about the period between 1880 and 1945 (p. 280-310). When speaking about the formation of the modern nation and the constitutional aspects that have accomplished it, the authors underline the fact that:

„The members of the National Congress created one of the most advanced Liberal political systems of the era (only the United States of America had gone so far). The central committee of the Provisional Government had begun to draft the new constitution, but the Congress did most of the work and approved its final version. The very fact that people’s representatives gathered to draft a constitution was already, quite uncommon.” (p. 237).

Later, in the last chapter of the book, dedicated to the period following 1945 (p. 311-346), the way how the state developed both from the economical, social, cultural, of the domestic politics, or the construction of the federal state is emphasized based on a rich bibliography.

Bringing into attention an interesting topic, namely the history of Belgium, Guy Vanthemsche and Roger De Peuter’s book entitled: *A Concise History of Belgium* published at Cambridge University Press in 2023 is not only a synthesis relevant for the historical scholarship, but also an useful tool for any researcher who wants to find more about the European history in different periods of time.

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