

Raphaël Cahen, Jérôme de Brouwer, Frederik Dhondt, and Maxime Jottrand (eds.), *Les professeurs allemands en Belgique: circulation des savoirs juridiques et enseignement du droit (1817-1914)*. Steden & Landen 114 (Brussels: ASP, 2022, 172 pp., ISBN 9789461172983).

While the essays in this bilingual (French and English) edited volume primarily focus on the role of German professors of law at Belgian universities in the nineteenth century, they also contribute to a better understanding of at least two broader themes. The first is the construction of a brand new Belgian university system in the nineteenth century. Until 1797, the University of Leuven had been the country's only university. By the mid-nineteenth century, there were state universities in Ghent and Liège, a catholic university in Leuven and a liberal university in the capital. The second broader theme is the international impact of an ideal of higher education that is often associated with nineteenth-century Germany. This ideal was characterised by an ethos that emphasised research and critical thinking over the immediate practical usefulness of university studies.

The choice to focus on Belgian universities adds a valuable perspective to the study of the wider reception of these German ideals. The sudden and quick expansion of the Belgian university system in the nineteenth century resulted in an inevitable dependence on foreign scholars. What is more, Belgium's position between France and Germany – both geographically and intellectually – forced policy makers and university administrators to reflect on the (dis)advantages of scholarship in both countries. The choice to focus on jurists adds another interesting perspective, because faculties of law were relatively late in adapting educational innovations like the seminar (an originally German format) and because the association between law and the nation state does not self-evidently invite the contributions of foreign scholars. A major strength of this volume therefore lies in providing case studies that contribute to a broader history of the reception of German scholarship in the long nineteenth century.

The book has five main chapters that are framed between an introduction and concluding remarks. The chapters differ widely in their approaches. The first two main contributions provide a broad historical context. The chapter by Jean-Louis Halpérin expands the book's time frame and geographical focus by tracing the changing patterns of mobility among European legal scholars between the eleventh and the nineteenth century. Pieter Dhondt adds to this broad perspective by investigating appointees from all nationalities at all faculties of all Belgian universities in the nineteenth century. This helps the reader to understand the significance of

the appointment of German scholars at faculties of law in the light of the universities' pursuit to find a balance between the number of Belgian and foreign appointees. It also shows the different ideas among policy makers and university administrators about the desirability to align themselves either with French or with German academic traditions.

The next two contributions are detailed looks at the careers of two German legal scholars: Christoph-Eric Mecke investigates Leopold August Warnkönig and Wolfgang Forster discusses Heinrich Ahrens. Both men arrived with different histories and ambitions. Warnkönig was a politically moderate young scholar who was keen to spread the light of German scholarship in what he considered to be an intellectually backward state. During his years in Liège, Leuven and Ghent, he developed into a well-respected specialist on the medieval history of Flanders. Ahrens was politically more radical and taught in Brussels because his political views had made his position in Göttingen untenable. To great international acclaim, he popularised the somewhat obscure legal philosophy of the philosopher Karl Krause, who conceived of law as an instance of the relation between the human and the absolute. Despite their different backgrounds and interests, Warnkönig and Ahrens both made major contributions to the teaching of the history and philosophy of law in Belgium. Though their work was in line with scholarly development in their country of origin, the authors leave the question of their representativity of the group of German professors unanswered.

The final contribution before the conclusion looks at the nineteenth-century relation between Belgian and German higher education from a different perspective. Maxime Jottrand explores the impact of the travel grants awarded by the Belgian government between the 1830s and the First World War. While France and Germany were by far the most popular destinations, students evaluated them very differently. Many seemed disappointed by the dry and practice-oriented lectures in Paris, and most grantees appreciated the more theoretical approach of, and the intellectual interaction with, the German professors.

Most authors of *Les professeurs allemand en Belgique* do not deal exclusively with German professors in Belgium. The contributions of Halpérin and Dhondt, for example, are not solely dedicated to German scholars and Jottrand focuses on Belgian students rather than on German professors. Only the biographical essays about Warnkönig and Ahrens are fully in line with the title of the volume. All chapters do, however, contribute in a meaningful way to a better understanding of the issues touched upon in the book's sub-title: *circulation des savoirs juridique et enseignement du droit (1817-1914)*. Yet, this does not mean that the topic of the circulation of legal scholarship and teaching practices between Germany and Belgium is exhausted by this collection.

In the conclusion, co-editor Jérôme de Brouwer is the first to suggest some further potential avenues of research, such as more detailed explorations of the lives and careers of those German jurists in Belgium to whom no separate chapter is dedicated in his book. He also rightfully asserts that it would be worthwhile to investigate other ways in which developments at German universities and faculties of law may have shaped Belgian academia. After all, the German professors highlighted in this book were certainly not the only possible channel for the transnational circulation of ideas and practices.

In addition, a more complex transnational approach that goes beyond the relationship between Belgium and Germany could be fruitful. One way in which this could be done, would be the comparative approach that runs throughout Dhondt's contribution. His comparisons between Belgian policies and practices and the experiences in other European states, such as Russia, Italy, the Netherlands, and the Austrian empire, allow for a better understanding of what was (and what was not) unique about Belgium's recruitment of foreign scholars. Another way to better understand the position of German scholarship in Belgium is through even more consistent attention to the position of French legal traditions in Belgium. The chapter of Jottrand illustrates how openness towards Germany and France was shaped by specific educational expectations: the intellectual prominence of particular German professors and the captivating way in which law was practiced in Paris appealed to students for different reasons. A juxtaposition of the lives and accomplishments of German and French scholars in Belgium might therefore be invaluable in providing an even more complete picture of their contributions to the Belgian political, legal, and educational landscape.

These suggestions for further research are not meant to downplay the merits of *Les professeurs allemands*. The book contributes to our understanding of the spread of German ideals and practices of higher education both by highlighting the specific challenges that come with building a university system in a newly-established state and by illustrating the similarities and differences between the careers of individual German jurists in Belgium. It also contributes to our understanding of the challenges of the creation and maintenance of Belgium's university system in the nineteenth century by highlighting what foreign jurists contributed and how teaching in Belgium allowed these German scholars to make a professional career that they might not have had if they would have stayed at home.

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