

Eckert.Dossiers No. 1

Nicolas Beaupré

Part 5:
European war, cultures, and societies
World War I

Beaupré, Nicolas. „Part 5: European war, cultures, and societies: World War I.“ In *Europe and the World*, hg. v. Corine Defrance, Reiner Marcowitz und Ulrich Pfeil. Eckert.Dossiers 1 (2009). <http://www.edumeres.net/urn/urn:nbn:de:0220-2009-0001-069>.

edumeres.net



This document was published under the creative-commons license:
Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivate Works3.0 Unported;
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/deed.en>

Nicolas Beaupré

Part 5: European war, cultures, and societies

World War I

World War I occupies forty-five pages (p. 186–231) in the Franco-German manual[1]. This part is itself divided into two chapters (11 and 12) entitled «1914–1918: From European War to World War» (p. 188–209) and «Will the War Ever End?» (p. 210–230). In addition to the narrative proper and the documents and maps usual in school textbooks, these chapters include eight sections on special topics, a two-page spread with exercises, and another two-page spread on how to write a composition on a specified historical subject (The causes of the First World War). In the part devoted to colonial rule, there is a two-page spread on the role of colonies in World War I. The shadow cast by the war is also very present in chapter 19, which deals with Europe between 1815 and 1945 (especially p. 362–367). The part devoted to World War I was written by Anne Duménil, who currently teaches at the Lycée français in Munich. She has also had experience in university-level teaching and research as an associate professor of contemporary history at the University of Picardy-Jules Verne in Amiens. A French-trained historian, she is nonetheless a specialist on German history during World War I, having written a dissertation on *The German Soldier during World War I. The Military Institution and the Experience of Combat* (2002). More recently, she co-edited the *Larousse de la Grande Guerre* (2007) with Bruno Cabanes. The General Structure of Part 5 and the Organization of its Chapters

The first striking innovation is the division of the part on the war into two chapters. This division, which is classically chronological, puts on the same level – and this is a good thing – the war itself and its consequences, each dealt with in a separate chapter. Too often, the consequences of the war are relegated to a conclusion. Here they are given as much attention as the war itself. This choice is in accord with recent changes in the questions historians ask and with shifts in what interests them about the war.[2] In both Germany and France, and more broadly in Europe, and even beyond the question of memory that has so long fascinated historians, at this point the social, political, and cultural effects of war on both the victors and the vanquished are among the most intensively researched areas.[3] Thus the notion of «cultural demobilization»[4] proposed by the historian John Horne is one of the ideas (p. 226) that the student should keep in mind in order to understand the long and complex postwar period. A special section on conflicts after 1918, especially in Eastern Europe, also allows students to question the classical chronological scheme whose limits are set by the dates 1914 and 1918. This focus on recent interpretations of the war, which is very discernible in the general structure of the part devoted to World War I, is also reflected in the choice of subjects proposed in the eight two-page spreads on specific topics, in the narrative itself, in the choice of documents, and in the international and comparative perspective adopted. Sections on Specific Subjects: An Anthropological View of the War

The sections on specific subjects reflect an

anthropological view characteristic of contemporary historians of the war. In addition to more traditional and political subjects such as the Union sacrée, the German revolution, or the Treaty of Versailles, there are sections that allow students to examine the violence of the fighting, the war culture, mourning, and the role of civilians in the war, a subject the author has already dealt with in a volume of documentary photographs intended for use by secondary school teachers.[5] These subjects are precisely those that particularly interest historians such as Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau[6] (combat and mourning) and Annette Becker[7] (civilians). The sections on specific subjects also reflect the comparative perspective that has recently been adopted by historical writing about World War I. Apart from the section on the German revolution, all of them are comparative. The first, devoted to the Burgfrieden and the Union sacrée, is a model of Franco-German comparison that allows students to understand the beginning of the war as «a struggle involving the survival of nations and their civilizations.» The Franco-German comparison that structures the other special sections is almost always accompanied by a counterpoint (an illustration, document, etc.) coming from another country that prevents the textbook from falling back into a worn-out view of World War I as a conflict involving only France and Germany. The narrative proper and the documents that illustrate it provide further safeguards against this danger. A Brief Chronological Narrative set in a European Perspective Compared with the illustrations, documents, maps, commentaries on documents and sections on special subjects, the chronological historical narrative occupies far less space (eight pages, not counting the chapter introductions), and this is no doubt more in accord with the current tendency of French textbooks than of German ones. This brevity, probably imposed on the author, has forced her to focus her remarks on the essential points. The narrative thus serves as a skeleton for a very full and varied discussion that mixes political, military, and social history. While the influence of contemporary historical writing dealing with war cultures makes itself felt, the organization of the subsections is more classical, probably to give students the essential chronological framework. This framework is resolutely European, and not strictly Franco-German. On the other hand, the globalization of the conflict – certainly less general than during the Second World War – is probably given too little space. Although the role of the colonies in World War I is discussed in the preceding chapter, that of the United States, which was so important from 1917 to 1919 in both the military and the diplomatic domains, should probably have been more fully developed. However, a few documents (especially p. 201) partly compensate for this shortcoming.

The Main Strength: A Rich, Varied Iconography with Good Captions

As a corollary to the options mentioned above, the two chapters are very abundantly illustrated by a broad range of documents of various kinds. This variety and the choice of documents are truly strong points in these chapters, and beyond them, in the textbook itself. Alongside the photographs, postcards, posters, and soldiers' testimonies and letters that are commonly used in school textbooks and that are also present in this book, we find more unusual documents that also reflect the influence of contemporary museums – notably the Historial de la Grande Guerre in Picardy – on the way we look at the war and on the broadening of the notion of historical sources that it

suggests. For example, there are very evocative objects such as an exploded artillery shell nose (p. 198), a railway restaurant door bearing a poem in English painted on it by a German soldier and intended for the enemy (p. 203), patriotic Christmas decorations, a child's drawing (p. 202), and the identity card demanded even of children by the German occupation authorities (p. 204). Even the most classical documents such as posters, texts, and photographs are of high quality and often very unusual, such as a 1915 letter from an anonymous German soldier describing his experience of violence (p. 199) and the propaganda posters on pages 221 and 223 for the 1920 plebiscites or for enlistment in the Freikorps. Let us also add here that the diptychs illustrating the beginning of each chapter are magnificent—for example, chapter 11, where we see German soldiers mobilized in 1914 wearing dress uniforms and staring at the camera, juxtaposed with a German soldier in 1918 wearing his steel helmet and turning his back on the camera as he looks out over a battlefield. All these documents – in the broad sense – convey a discourse that is consistent with the author's objective: they show very clearly not only the movement toward total war, but also – and this is emphasized in the narrative as well – the depth of these societies' investment in the war and the difficulties it entailed for the postwar years.

[translated by Steven Rendall]

[1] The present analysis was made on the basis of the French edition of the manual.

[2] Cf. Gerhard Hirschfeld, Gerd Krumeich, Irina Renz (ed.), *Enzyklopädie Erster Weltkrieg*, Paderborn 2003; Jean-Jacques Becker, Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau (ed.), *Encyclopédie de la Grande Guerre*, Paris 2004.

[3] See for example Bruno Cabanes *La victoire endeuillée. La sortie de guerre des soldats français (1918–1920)*, Paris 2004; Gerd Krumeich (ed.), *Versailles 1919. Ziele – Wirkung – Wahrnehmung*, Essen 2001.

[4] Cf. John Horne, *Kulturelle Demobilmachung 1919–1939. Ein sinnvoller historischer Begriff?*, in: Wolfgang Hardtwig (éd.), *Politische Kulturgeschichte der Zwischenkriegszeit 1918–1939*, Göttingen 2005, p. 129–150; John Horne (dir.), *14–18 Aujourd'hui-Today-Heute. Dossier : Démobilisations culturelles après la Grande Guerre*, 5/2002.

[5] Anne Duménil, *La guerre au XXe siècle (vol. 2). L'expérience des civils*, Paris 2005.

[6] Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, *Cinq deuils de guerre*, Paris 2001; Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, *Combattre*, Paris 2008; Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, Annette Becker, *14–18. Retrouver la guerre*, Paris 2000.

[7] Annette Becker, *Oubliés de la Grande Guerre; Humanitaire et culture de guerre, populations occupées, déportés civils, prisonniers de guerre*. Paris 1998.