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Nicolas Beaupré, *Les Grandes Guerres 1914-1945*. Paris: Éditions Belin, 2012. 1152 pp. Maps, tables, figures, notes, bibliography, and index. €56.00 (pb). ISBN 978-2-7011-3387-4.

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This work is the penultimate volume of Belin's thirteen-volume *Histoire de France* series, the aim of which is for a new generation of French historians to explain French history in a work of synthesis incorporating recent historiographical developments. Nicolas Beaupré, a specialist in First World War and interwar cultural and Franco-German history,[1] deals with just three decades of French history, comprising one of the most tumultuous periods for which a vast historiography exists. Indeed, the literature on the First World War alone is so large that it would be impossible for any scholar to read everything in one lifetime.[2] As such, the task Beaupré has engaged in here is extremely challenging. Editor Henry Rousso outlines as another aim in his preface the need to avoid succumbing "à la vision d'un pays qui aurait pu plongé, après les joies éphémères de la victoire de 1918, dans une décadence inéluctable" (p. 6). Echoing the words of de Gaulle's 18 September 1941 broadcast, with which Rousso's preface opens, this reaffirmation of France's dynamism and diversity in the interwar period is visible throughout the text, inevitably accompanied by a confirmation of the most famous line of that same broadcast, de Gaulle's placement of the Second World War within "cette guerre de trente ans."

The lengthy book contains sixteen chapters, each with between two to four sub-chapters. It begins by succinctly setting the scene of France just before the outbreak of the First World War, painting a picture of a secure, modernising Republic, whose only real setback was its low birth rate. This France, Beaupré argues, was drawn against her will into the worldwide conflagration of 1914-1918, although entry into the war was accepted as inevitable. Drawing on the work of Jean-Jacques Becker,[3] Beaupré deconstructs the myth of "la fleur au fusil," of widespread enthusiasm for the war, noting that the *Union Sacrée* among politicians was far from representative of popular opinion. The focus then shifts to the beginning of fighting, detailing the military situation (notably the "race to the sea" and the Battle of the Marne) and the underlying violence of the first months of mobile war, especially the reality of atrocities against civilians, as studied by John Horne and Alan Kramer.[4]

The multiplicity of front experiences are dealt with in the next section, providing an excellent summary of the historiographical developments of the last few decades, whether the focus on soldiers' letters home,[5] Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau's emphasis on the level and nature of violence experienced by combatants,[6] or studies of prisoners of war.[7] The renewed historical interest in "refus de guerre"—especially the mutinies of 1917—is also explained with aplomb. The latest research is woven together in a narrative imparting the reader with a sense of the enormous and unprecedented scale of destruction and trauma experienced by Frenchmen on the Western Front.

Beyond the trenches, "Deux autres fronts" are examined. First, life in the ten *départements* occupied by the Germans is explored briefly. Beaupré communicates well the harshness of this occupation, in addition to the patriotic response of many among the occupied French, although perhaps the latter is over-exaggerated somewhat—for instance, Beaupré notes that "de nombreux journaux aux tirages plus ou moins importants sont en effet édités clandestinement et en appelant à la résistance et au patriotisme,

tout en dénonçant les exactions et les mensonges de l'occupant. On peut ainsi mentionner *L'Oiseau de France*, *La Voix de la Patrie*, *Le journal des occupés innocués*, *La Patience...*" (p. 117). What is not mentioned is that these were all the same publication, with an estimated circulation of 250 copies a month, mainly in Lille, Roubaix and Tourcoing.[8] Similarly, in keeping with the latest historiographical shift of focus,[9] there could be slightly more on *rapprochements* and Franco-German relations--although it would be misrepresentative to speak of "collaboration" or to focus too heavily on this.

On the home front, however, "L'exceptionnel devient normal." Political institutions were suspended, the circulation of people and information minutely controlled, foreigners under suspicion. Despite this, governments still fell, the *Union Sacrée* was tested (such as when the Socialists quit government in September 1917), and from late 1914, theatres, cinemas and cabarets re-opened. Combatants disliked what they perceived as a return to normality, but in reality the war was felt acutely on the home front, with increasing prices and penury, longer working hours, and the introduction of rationing in 1917. Further, a large section (500,000) of the occupied population was repatriated; these *rapatriés* often faced hostility or ambivalence from compatriots. Yet combatants still perceived the home front as full of profiteers or civilians who could never understand their experience.

The final aspect of the First World War examined is the process of totalization, much studied in recent years. Starting with Alan Kramer's notion of a "dynamic of destruction,"[10] Beaupré outlines the material-technological mobilization (the "Batailles de matériel"), vital to the Battles of the Somme and Verdun. John Horne's notion of "mobilization" and "remobilization"[11] provide a lens through which to understand how the French overcame the burdens (financial, physical, and psychological) they faced in total war, such as the strikes and mutinies of 1917. Clemenceau's ascension to power in 1917 and his iron-fisted rule were responsible, Beaupré argues, for renewed confidence, cultural remobilization in support of the war from above and below, and ultimately the ability of France to emerge victorious.

The core of the book is the focus on the interwar period, to which more chapters are devoted than those on both wars combined. The in-depth studies of France between 1918 and 1939 demonstrate with great skill the legacy of the First World War as part of the thirty-year war, as well as the uncertainties of this era. The period is approached via multiple angles: reconstruction, the experiences of different social groups, cultures, foreign policy, the French colonial empire, French political life in the 1920s, and the crises of the 1930s.

Reconstruction was multifaceted, including the vast process of mourning and monument-building--outlined in a section with the punchy title "Penser la guerre pour panser la perte," based upon important developments in this field by Jay Winter and Antoine Prost.[12] Beaupré's summary of the difficult task of material and economic reconstruction, as well as the "impossible" demographic reconstruction (p. 263), is impressively detailed, underlining that the open wounds of the war were slow to turn into scars.

Chapter six, "Expériences et groupes sociaux," provides a compelling snapshot of interwar society. Changes to peasant life, such as the rural exodus or "Green fascism," did not in fact represent a "période de rupture brutale," as traditional rural behaviours still dominated, and the Depression and Second World War reinforced the importance of agricultural production (pp. 292-293). Workers, on the other hand, benefited little from the economic prosperity of the 1920s, in no small part due to the new divisions on the left (notably the creation of the PCF in 1921) and subsequently among trade unions (the Socialist CGT and the Communist CGTU). The middle classes, "encore plus difficiles à définir socialement que les ouvriers ou les paysans" (p. 307), were fractured and their experiences kaleidoscopic. *Rentiers* suffered from the postwar inflation, whereas architects or engineers often did well enough to buy cars, the new symbol of prosperity. Yet most among the middle classes experienced a certain malaise by the 1930s, and "[i]ll fallut l'électrochoc du Front populaire pour voir les classes moyennes tenter de s'organiser au-delà des divisions catégorielles" (p. 312).

Beyond classes, Beaupré examines the massively important role of war veterans and their various associations, especially regarding local politics and future proto-fascist political developments (such as *Croix de Feu*). An insightful account of the position of women highlights that the First World War did not emancipate the female population, who remained minors from a legal point-of-view, although some advances were made, such as the female *Bac* of 1919, equality with men in teaching from 1924, and larger numbers of women in education. Foreigners also comprised a separate social group. Foreign workers had doubled from 1 to 2 million in the First World War, and reached 2.7 million by 1931, with Italians being the most numerous. Life for such immigrants was difficult, and became even more so in the xenophobic environment of the 1930s, when naturalisation policy became more restrictive, forcing many to leave. The interwar period thus saw certain social groups prosper and others suffer, forging group identities that would come to a head during the Second World War.

Beaupré's analysis of "Les cultures de l'après-guerre" is excellent. The reader is informed how the slow and incomplete demobilisation of scientists and academics was offset by faster and more complete literary demobilisation: in 1919 there was a call for a return to "pure," non-war-based literature in the *Nouvelle Revue Française*, whereas the 1920s saw intellectual pacifism develop, and the 1930s marked a renewed political polarisation, especially between left and right (such as the Comité de Vigilance des Intellectuels Antifascistes). The *avant garde* movement flourished in all its forms, although Beaupré believes that for many of its artists, the First World War was less its apogee and more its swansong. Still, in the interwar period, the École de Paris meant that France's capital was the world's capital for art. At the other end of the spectrum, mass culture exploded, with the continuing popularity of magazines and radio coupled with the unstoppable rise of the cinema. Religious groups did their best to exploit mass culture, with various Christian youth movements such as the JOC or JAC emulating the popular Scout movement.

French foreign policy is examined with a particular focus on Franco-German diplomacy and relations, one of Beaupré's specialities.^[13] The author insists that France was still a world power in the 1930s, although foreign policy was initially based around the twin goals of reinforcing France's position in Europe and stopping German rearmament. France was obstinate about the application of the Treaty of Versailles, ensuring French security and continual reparations payments. Such policies are contextualised via an especially compelling study of the French occupation of the Ruhr and Rhineland, which ties into Beaupré's overall argument that the period can also be understood as an "ère des occupations" (p. 1053)—although the argument could have been made more explicit throughout the main body. Despite Briandism, pacifism (which, we are reminded, was not mutually exclusive with nationalism), and other attempts at *rapprochement* with Germany, Hitler's rise to power ensured that the dream of peace would never be realised, and his flattering words led the French "À tout sacrifier, jusqu'à l'honneur" (p. 569).

In a slightly weaker and oddly-placed chapter, Beaupré explains that the important contribution of the colonies to the victory of 1918—both financially, in immigrant manpower, and in the numbers of colonial soldiers—did not translate into improvements for colonial peoples. Indeed, the *mission civilisatrice* was continued with little change and considerable pomp and ceremony across the expanded empire which had absorbed former German possessions. Despite lofty, republican rhetoric, this largely meant economic exploitation and continued inequality. This was, as Beaupré states in a subtitle, "L'étrange apogée de l'empire colonial français."

Beaupré provides considerably detailed explanations of the tumultuous political landscape in the 1920s and 1930s, from the *Bloc National* to the *Front populaire*. The 1920s in particular often get sidestepped in literature on the interwar period, so chapter ten is especially welcome, whereas in the following chapter Beaupré intelligently outlines the debates surrounding the nature of French fascism, concluding that the "fascist threat" of the mid-1930s was not really a threat and not necessarily fascist (p. 714). The specificities of the Depression's effects on France are also presented clearly, as is the changing

international situation preceding the outbreak of war. All this fits neatly within standard accounts of and debates surrounding the interwar period.[14]

Chapter twelve (“La France Défaite”) covers all the key points one would expect, from the *drôle de guerre* to the Fall of France.[15] One interesting contention by Beaupré, drawn from recent German scholarship, is that there was no pre-planned *Blitzkrieg*, rather a reactive German pincer strategy retrospectively understood as *Blitzkrieg*. Whatever the labelling, the rapid defeat and subsequent German dismemberment of French territory, Beaupré outlines, led those in power to make three initial choices: the establishment of a new regime (classified as “une dictature personnelle et charismatique”); the choice of violence and exclusion, with a police state attacking “L’anti-France”; and the choice of collaboration, which was the most important factor affecting the perception of the regime. Beaupré also highlights other modes of thought, such as *Maréchalisme*, *Pétainisme*, *attentisme*, or accommodation, thus including the nuances in historical analysis of recent years.[16] A sub-section on the culture of defeat outlines the way the Occupation affected artistic expression, with authors, film directors, playwrights, or artists also having to make choices—some of whom engaged in collaborationist or anti-Semitic works, with others leaning towards resistance, and most trying to walk the fine line between the two.

The Occupation and Liberation proper are dealt with in the final chronological chapter, which provides information on daily life under the occupation, the German command structure in France, the Holocaust, the *Milice*, the *épuration*, and resistances. Beaupré takes a non-Gaullist approach, even ending with the line: “Les apparences étaient sauvées” (p. 987). Both chapters on the Second World War cover important events, concepts, and debates present within the wider literature on this topic.[17]

The final chapters comprise one of the *Histoire de France*’s highlights, *L’Atelier de l’historien*. Beaupré’s contribution constitutes, as he admits, an inevitably limited set of essays, as confronting every historiographical approach or issue across this greatly-studied period would be impossible. The *atelier* thus offers the reader an insight into a few select, key debates, approaches, and methodologies. All are interesting even if the cohesive thread running through them is not always evident. Beaupré begins by reflecting on some important sources for the period. The first is a forte of the *Historial de la Grande Guerre* (of which Beaupré is a member of the *Comité directeur*): the use of historical objects, partly comprising what Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau calls “historical anthropology.”[18] Next there is a synopsis of the role of the witness in First-World-War historiography, focusing on Jean Norton-Cru and Léon Werth. The following summary of the IHTP-CRNS project, which digitised Vichy prefect reports, could do with expansion, at least providing the reader with a better idea of quite what the reports contain or how they have been used.

The *atelier* also turns to history itself, with Beaupré providing an excellent potted history of Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch’s work and lives, notably the creation of the *Annales* and its emphasis on a move beyond the positivist emphasis on purely political history. The intertwining of personal and intellectual history, historiography, and testimony of contemporaries is well done. The last chapter charts the way in which events of the past few decades have affected the historiography of the period studied. The end of the Cold War and the opening of Soviet archives led to a new critical empiricism which placed the occupation of France in 1940-1945 within the wider context of the conflict, highlighting its marginal nature. The Yugoslav conflict was partly responsible for the renewed interest in the violence of war. Further, there has been a splitting up of history in general into numerous sub-fields, which had an even greater fracturing effect on histories of the period 1914-1945, which tend to examine at least three discrete periods (the First World War, the interwar period, and the Second World War).

The role of historians in public memory is examined via a summary of the *Commission Mattéoli*, whose report in 2000 argued for compensation for Jewish victims of Nazi spoliation in France. For Beaupré, the *Commission* represents an advance in methodology, as it involved historians, archivists and others working together. Yet scholars have not always engaged so positively with each other, as Beaupré

highlights in his discussion of the disputes between the *Historial* school (who champion the idea of consent and *culture de guerre* in the First World War) and other scholars who reject these notions (notably the *Collectif de Recherche International et de Débat sur la Guerre de 1914-1918*).^[19] Indeed, historians falling into the latter camp will no doubt find much to criticise in the early chapters of *Les Grandes Guerres*, as they have done concerning Beaupré's previous work and that of other *Historial* scholars.^[20]

The book concludes with an interesting essay on how to write a national history in a time when transnational history is king, ultimately arguing for a reflexive national history as part of a *histoire croisée*, which Beaupré's states he has attempted here. In many ways, he has succeeded, with international developments and especially Franco-German relations expertly woven throughout this history of France (so much so that the reader could perceive the book as a history of France and Germany).

Like other volumes in the series, *Les Grandes Guerres* is beautifully illustrated and presented. Most of the wonderful illustrations—posters, paintings, maps, and photographs—are well explained via accompanying text, although occasionally these descriptions merely repeat what is said in the main body. Other times they provide fascinating and thought-provoking insights, such as the deconstruction of William Orpen's 1921 painting of the signing of the Treaty of Versailles. There are also boxes containing large quotations throughout, some of which seem less relevant than others (like the transcript of Goebbels's February 1943 "total war" speech). None are accompanied by an explanation, but usually they are well-chosen primary sources which reinforce the main argument implicitly. The tables, charts and diagrams are useful, such as the diagram explaining the extent of the *Front Populaire's* 1936 electoral victory. A very good chronology and mini-biographies of key personalities of the era precede a relatively brief bibliography which seems a little too selective, although Beaupré has here limited himself to French titles (a limitation not present in the main body).

The book is not without its flaws, albeit minor. It is unclear quite who the book is aimed at—its length may dissuade those outside of academia, and much of the general argument suggests a certain degree of pre-existing knowledge (for example, on p. 704, Stavisky is mentioned, but no explanation of who he was is provided). On the other hand, the lack of footnotes potentially diminishes its use for historians, which is a particular shame given Beaupré's masterly grasp of the historiography. Admittedly, this is a presentational choice imposed across all volumes of the *Histoire de France*. Still, when an important scholar is mentioned within the text but not in the select bibliography—which happens numerous times, for instance the work of Philippe Nivet on the First World War (cited on p. 111)—the reader is left frustrated and wanting more. Occasionally a similar sentiment is felt regarding the main body itself, with certain sections (such as the chapter on the Occupation of the Second World War) feeling slightly lacking in detail, whereas others seem to have too much, although this is both subjective and inevitable when dealing with sub-topics about which entire bodies of literature exist. However, an extra line or two would often have been beneficial, such as a discussion of the speculation as to *why* Laval insisted on deporting Jewish children. Further, some chapters seem slightly out of place in their current order, for instance the chapter on post/interwar culture would make more sense coming before the chapter on interwar society. Similarly, sub-chapter delineations could be improved in some cases. A few editing mistakes are also present: most notably are the absence of a speech by Beneš on p. 520 and the dating of Jean Zay's *Souvenirs* as 1842 (p. 865), as well as a handful of spelling mistakes elsewhere—although such errors are understandable given the length of this work.

Ultimately, however, Beaupré has delivered an impressive work that provides an excellent summary of French history from 1914 to 1945, whether social, economic, political, cultural, or diplomatic. Although the overarching narrative and argument contain little that is original in and of itself, the book's strength is the way in which it ties together scholarly developments of the past few decades across discrete fields,

including international and national history, in an intelligent and highly readable manner. In this sense, it is a solid contribution to the historiography.

NOTES

[1] His Ph.D. thesis became Nicolas Beaupré, *Écrire en guerre, écrire la guerre (France, Allemagne 1914-1920)* (Paris: CNRS éditions, 2006). However, he has previously co-edited works on the period 1914-1945: Nicolas Beaupré, Anne Duménil and Christian Ingrao, eds., *1914-1945: L'ère de la guerre* (Paris: A. Vénot, 2004), 2 vol.

[2] Jay Winter and Antoine Prost, *The Great War in History: Debates and Controversies, 1914 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005; originally Paris: Seuil, 2004), p. 1.

[3] Jean-Jacques Becker, *Les Français dans la Grande Guerre* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1980).

[4] John Horne and Alan Kramer, *German Atrocities, 1914: A History of Denial* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001).

[5] Antoine Prost, ed., *Écrit du front: Lettres de Maurice Pensuet, 1915-1917* (Paris: Tallendier, 2010).

[6] Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, *Les armes et la chair: trois objets de mort en 14-18* (Paris: Armand Collin, 2009).

[7] Heather Jones, *Violence against Prisoners of War in the First World War: Britain, France and Germany, 1914-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

[8] L'Abbé Auguste Leman (Professeur aux Facultés catholiques de Lille), *Pages actuelles, 1914-1919: Lille sous l'occupation allemande: les héros du journalisme* (Paris: Bloud & Gay, 1919).

[9] Jean-Yves Le Naour, *Misères et tourmentes de la chair durant la Grande Guerre: Les mœurs sexuelles des Français, 1914-1918* (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 2002); Philippe Nivet, *La France occupée 1914-1918* (Paris: Armand Collin, 2011); James E. Connolly, "Mauvaise Conduite: Complicity and Respectability in the Occupied Nord, 1914-1918," *First World War Studies* 4/1 (March 2013): 7-21.

[10] Alan Kramer, *Dynamic of Destruction: Culture and Mass Killing in the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[11] John Horne, "Introduction: mobilizing for 'total war', 1914-1918," in John Horne, ed., *State, Society and Mobilization in Europe during the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 1-17.

[12] Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Antoine Prost, *Republican Identities in War and Peace: Representations of France in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, trans. Jay Winter with Helen McPhail (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[13] Nicolas Beaupré, *Le Rhin. Une géohistoire* (Paris: La documentation française, 2005); Nicolas Beaupré, *Le Traumatisme de la Grande Guerre 1918-1932/33 (Histoire franco-allemande vol. 8)* (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 2012).

[14] See, for example, Robert Paxton, *French Peasant Fascism: Henry Dorgères' Greenshirts and the Crises of French Agriculture, 1929-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Kevin Passmore, "The French Third Republic: Stalemate Society or cradle of fascism," *French History* 7(1993):814-851; Julian Jackson, *The Popular Front in France: Defending Democracy, 1934-1938* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); early chapters of Julian Jackson, *France: The Dark Years, 1940-44* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). See also textbooks touching upon this era, such as Roderick Kedward, *La vie en bleu: France and the French since 1900* (London: Allen Lane, 2005) and Richard Vinen, *France 1934-1970* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 1996).

[15] Julian Jackson, *The Fall of France: The Nazi Invasion of 1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Jean-Pierre Azéma, *1940: L'année noire* (Paris: Seuil, 1990).

[16] Jackson, *Dark Years*; Philippe Burrin, *La France à l'heure allemande, 1940-1944* (Paris: Seuil, 1997); Richard Vinen, *The Unfree French: Life under the Occupation* (London: Penguin, 2007); John F. Sweets, *Choices in Vichy France: The French Under the Nazi Occupation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Robert Paxton, *La France de Vichy* (Paris: Seuil, 1973).

[17] Burrin, *La France*; Vinen, *Unfree French*; Jackson, *Dark Years*; Sweets, *Choices*; Paxton, *La France*; Robert Paxton and Michael Marrus, *Vichy et les Juifs* (Paris: Editions Calmann-Lévy, 1981); Fabrice Virgili, *La France "virile": Les femmes tondues à la Libération* (Paris: Payot, 2004).

[18] Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, *Combattre: Une anthropologie historique de la guerre moderne (XIXe-XXIe siècle)* (Paris: Seuil, 2008).

[19] http://www.crid1418.org/espace_scientifique/textes/culture_de_guerre.htm (accessed 13 June 2013).

[20] See http://www.crid1418.org/bibliographie/commentaires/beaupre_rousseau.html or http://www.crid1418.org/bibliographie/commentaires/retrouver_wilfert.html (accessed 13 June 2013).

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