



Summer 14

The last days of the old world

The Ministry of Defence and the Bibliothèque nationale de France commemorate the First World War, with an exhibition focusing on the very moment when the conflict sparked off. Why and how, in a few weeks, was Europe thrown into a state of unrest after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria? Focusing on the series of decisions that led to the declaration of war, the exhibition sketches the 1914 Europe and highlights the causes of an unprecedented conflict in the history of mankind, both because of the appalling number of victims – about 10 million persons killed and 21 million wounded – and of the upheavals that it caused worldwide.

28 June 1914: Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria is assassinated in Sarajevo by a Serbian nationalist of Bosnia. Another political assassination, not very different from the former ones, particularly on the borders of Austria-Hungary. Just a bolt from the blue... Despite this tragic event, the summer goes on as usual. Peasants work in the fields and workers in factories. Children look forward to the end of the school year. A lucky few treat themselves to holidays in Deauville or on the Riviera.

Yet, on July the 23rd, Austria presents Serbia with an ultimatum. Politicians, diplomats and public opinion do not worry about what they see as a regional crisis that will be solved, like former tensions, with a peace conference. In Paris, the press is more interested in the Caillaux case. The Kaiser takes part in sea races. However, there are farsighted minds who get alarmed: Jean Jaurès talks about something 'oscillating on the verge of ruin'. More and more worrying news follow one another...

A week later, on July the 30rd, Russia mobilizes its troops. The war machine sets off and will be impossible to stop. Alliances between countries take Europe to a war expected to be harsh but short... To Stefan Zweig, this is the time of 'ecstasy and cries of joy while walking to death' even if populations, rather grave and resigned, do not necessarily all want to go and fight. As early as August, the extremely violent reality of the conflict comes out: Europe discovers the industrial war on its own soil.

The chronological presentation of the exhibition focuses on the period between July the 23rd and August the 4th, 1914; during this short period of time, a series of diplomatic, political and military decisions lead to the general conflagration.

Seven thematic sessions allow to go deeper into the chronology and better understand peoples' attitudes and how societies worked on the eve of the conflict. The exhibition starts with an overview of States and their political leaders. Europe has just enjoyed a long period of peace leading to an unprecedented economic growth, a first period of globalization. Olympic games, Nobel price and universal exhibitions are as many symbols of cultural cosmopolitanism in the 1900's. However, persistent tensions both in Europe (Alsace-Lorraine, Balkans...) and colonies (Moroccan crises...) disclose the flimsiness of the diplomatic ba-

lance. Among the intellectuals, the advocates of peace, socialists, Christians or jurists, clash with ardent nationalists and advocates of a regenerative war. The question does not arise in the same terms among the population: soldiers are popular figures, very active in everyday life; conscription is compulsory. In staff head-quarters, one prepares for a potential conflict: one should be prepared in terms of strategy but also in the field of weapons, logistics and officers' training. Mobilization in August 1944 shows how useful was this preparation.

The individual points of view of about ten famous figures, including Marie Curie, Stefan Zweig or Albert Einstein, also allow to understand the effects of the crisis: some of them feel dangers emerging whereas others, like J. R. Tolkien, remain indifferent...

The end of the exhibition focuses on the first concrete consequences of the war, a real shock on the front line and in the rear. Europe suddenly founders in an incredibly violent world counting thousands of civilian and military victims from the month of August.

Various documents are presented: newspapers, letters, books, archives, photographs, prints and objects. They were taken from the BnF's collections but also from the collections of the Ministry of Defence, co-producer of the exhibition. Pieces from the Musée de la Grande Guerre in Meaux, the Bibliothèque historique de la Ville de Paris and from the collections of about thirty lenders are also presented.

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25th March 2014 - 3rd August 2014

Grande Galerie - BnF | François-Mitterrand, Quai François-Mauriac, Paris XIII^e

From Tuesday to Saturday 10 a.m.-7 p.m.

on Sundays 13 a.m.-7 p.m.

Closed on Mondays and public holidays

Admission: €7, concession: €5

FNAC booking number

tel: 0892 684 694 (0.34 euros TTC/mn), www.fnac.com

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Laurent Veyssièrre, Head of the Delegation of cultural heritage, Ministry of Defence

Associate curators :

Thomas Cazentre, Department of Prints and photographs, BnF

François Lagrange, Army Museum

Jean-Philippe Lamy, Directorate of Memory, Heritage and Archives, Ministry of Defence

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1. Assassinat de l'archiduc héritier d'Autriche et de sa femme à Sarajevo, *Le Petit Journal*, supplément illustré du 12 juillet 1914, BnF, dpt.Droit, économie, politique
2. Armée de Terre et Armée de Mer. Ordre de mobilisation générale, dimanche 2 août 1914, BnF, dpt.des Estampes et de la photographie
3. *L'Humanité*, journal du 1er août 1914, BnF, dpt.des Estampes et de la photographie