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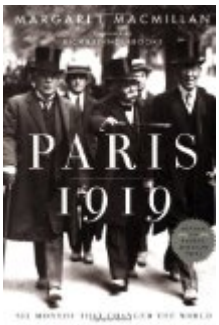
**Margaret MacMillan.** *Paris 1919: Six Months That Changed the World.* New York: Random House, 2002. xxxi + 570 pp. $35.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-375-50826-4.




**Reviewed by** Sally Marks

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The World ... Made Fit?

Under its original title of *Peacemakers* (2001), Margaret MacMillan's detailed one-volume study of the peace settlement after World War I won three prizes in Britain. However, as is made clear by excellent maps and photographs as well as a foreword by American diplomat Richard Holbrooke, both titles are misnomers. MacMillan does not confine herself to the statesmen and diplomats, to Paris, or to the first six months of 1919. Instead, she provides generous amounts of background material and sometimes extensive "aftermaths" on given issues (often to the end of the century). She deals with most of Europe and much of Asia as well as Africa and North America occasionally, and addresses the full sweep of events from the 1918 Armistice until the 1923 treaty of Lausanne.

MacMillan, who teaches at the University of Toronto and is a great-granddaughter of David Lloyd George, writes extremely well in often evocative prose. She has a sharp eye for enlivening tidbits, often relevant, and relishes rumors, usually undifferentiated. She makes the most of confrontations, which were numerous in Paris, and her thumbnail sketches of participants are always incisive and frequently judicious. The book is accessible, colorful, often charming, and fun to read.

Though she offers almost no opinions or non-territorial discussion on the other treaties, MacMillan punctures a number of long-standing myths about the Versailles treaty with Germany. She declares firmly that a real defeat was not brought home to the German people, that the power of the peacemakers was limited, that they were not responsible for the fragmentation of Europe which predated their labors, and that the blockade did not starve Germany. More importantly, neither the Versailles treaty nor France was vindictive, reparations were not crushing, the treaty was not enforced with any consistency, and it did not seriously restrict German power, for Germany (where East Prussia had been separated from other portions for most of its history) had an improved strategic position under it. Most especially, while acknowledging that the peacemakers made mistakes, particularly outside Europe, she

rightly asserts that the Versailles treaty was not primarily responsible for either the next twenty years or for World War II. These views have been discussed for a generation in the scholarly literature. Yet the old propaganda-driven myths persist in popular literature, the press, and the minds of educated non-experts. In her determined effort to slay these dragons, MacMillan has done a great service.

Whether she succeeds will depend on what audience her book reaches. However, what audience she aims at is not entirely clear. Though it is much better researched, broader in scope, and different in its conclusions, *Paris 1919* often seems to follow in the tradition of the volumes of Richard Watt and Charles Mee.[1] But there are difficulties which may make it difficult for non-experts to fully understand the book. Chiefly these have to do with organization and omissions or lack of emphasis.

As MacMillan notes, the Paris peace conference was disorganized, both in the early pleas of small powers before the Council of Ten and in the later sessions of the Council of Four, which darted from topic to topic. MacMillan chose to follow this disorganization and present issues more chronologically than topically. Thus she starts with the League of Nations and related issues (mandates), as is conventional, but does not discuss the tense battle over a racial equality clause in the League Covenant until a chapter on Japan (220 pages later), presumably because the question reached crisis proportions in April, though it had arisen earlier.

Similar problems arise in territorial questions. As Serbia and Rumania appeared early before the Council of Ten, the first three territorial chapters deal with Yugoslavia, Rumania, and Bulgaria, though none of these were addressed in the first treaty completed, that of Versailles. In a pattern often repeated, MacMillan devotes eleven pages in the Yugoslavian chapter to background; provides a scant four pages for some of Serbia's territorial claims, the views of the powers, a digression, and a brisk enumeration of the upshot without any indication of how or why these results were achieved; and concludes with a paragraph on the long-term aftermath without noting that the resultant Yugoslavia was a heavily handicapped patchwork of non-compatible peoples, legal systems, and railways. The question of the Banat is left to the next chapter on Rumania. More importantly, the intensely contentious issue over the port of Fiume (Rijeka), claimed by Italy but the only feasible Yugoslav commercial port, is not mentioned until much later in a chapter on Italy, who departed the conference over this issue. That departure moved the remaining Council of Three to authorize a fateful Greek occupation of Smyrna (Izmir) in Anatolia, but the reader waits another 130 pages to learn of it. Diplomatic historians expert in the peace conference know the trail from Fiume to Smyrna and beyond, but others may get lost along the way.

Macmillan writes so well that she is able to glide smoothly from one aspect of a topic to another, but she often does so in a spiral pattern which rarely comes full circle or to a conclusion. In the section on Germany, the question of the Saar Basin is addressed three times; the Rhineland is also mentioned repeatedly because the Council of Four reverted to these topics more than once. As it never discussed the balance of power or Germany's role in Europe, MacMillan also does not. That the intent was to curb Germany's ability to disturb the peace of Europe is not made entirely clear. The first of the four German chapters, entitled "Punishment and Prevention," deals with the Armistice and the blockade, raising a number of questions and declaring that the objectives were "[p]unishment, payment, prevention" (p. 161); it also discusses the fate of the Kaiser and alleged war criminals, without defining or addressing prevention. The next chapter deals with the Danish border, the Saar, the Rhineland (but not Belgian territorial claims, which are addressed later), and the military claus-

es as well as the rift between Woodrow Wilson and Edward House, but the naval clauses and the fate of the German fleet are left hanging.

In a chapter on reparations, by sifting through recent scholarship, Macmillan tackles the question chiefly from Lloyd George's shifting points of view, and avoids a conclusion as well as some key reasons needed for clarity, such as why the Belgian case to be paid war costs was stronger than that of France. In the last German chapter, the Saar and Rhineland are settled, with the Fontainebleau Memorandum in their midst. Macmillan concludes that Georges Clemenceau did well for France, but otherwise offers no summation or assessment here, as elsewhere. Four readings of the German section have produced no clear impression of a viewpoint or picture of what the terms added up to, perhaps partly because some questions were still unsettled at the end of April and partly because MacMillan reserves her brief views until after the Middle Eastern section of the book.

After the German section, MacMillan reverts to Eastern Europe, followed by the concerns of Italy, Japan, and China. A five-chapter section then addresses the Middle Eastern settlement, starting with the Greek claims, which were presented fairly late on to the Council of Ten. A chapter entitled "The End of the Ottomans" discusses Turkish and Armenian circumstances in late 1918, but not the end of the Ottomans. Arab independence comes next, followed by the Palestine question, which is largely addressed from an Anglo-Zionist point of view, chiefly that of Chaim Weizmann. A final Middle Eastern chapter contains the Smyrna episode at last; Ataturk; the fall of the Ottomans, along with that of the Kurds and Armenians; and the treaties of Sevres and Lausanne in 1923. Then MacMillan reverts to May and June 1919 for the presentation of the Versailles treaty to the Germans, their reaction, reconsiderations, and the final signing in the Hall of Mirrors, plus a bit of aftermath. The brief conclusion, aside from the brisk assessment of the Versailles treaty, chiefly contains more elements of the aftermath, such as Wilson's illness.

It is often said that the Paris peace settlement has the largest literature of any historical event other than the birth of Christ. Macmillan has read thoroughly in it, chiefly the English language works, and has additionally done archival research. At the Public Record Office, she used Cabinet records but not the massive Foreign Office files on the conference. She visited Washington but evidently not the National Archives, home of the records of the American Commission to Negotiate Peace. She used the French Foreign Ministry's Paix series, though on an erratic basis. There are several citations to it in the Czechoslovak chapter but only one (plus three citations of various private papers) in the other seven east European chapters. The four chapters on Germany, France's greatest concern, cite only a November 12, 1918, despatch from Paul Cambon's papers and a single document from the Paix files, undated but also probably early. Although MacMillan footnotes a great many specialized studies, her chief sources throughout are Lloyd George's papers, his notoriously unreliable memoirs, and (especially on France) his mistress's diary; Woodrow Wilson's papers and those of House; the printed records of the conference; the important collection, ***The Treaty of Versailles: A Reassessment after 75 Years***, and, to a lesser degree, the diaries of Clemenceau's aide Gen. J. J. H. Mordacq; and the contemporary journalistic accounts of C. T. Thompson and E. J. Dillon.[2] On occasion, the choice of source seems odd.

Given the vastness of the literature and the archival resources, as well as the sprawling nature of the subject, a detailed study of the peace settlement would ideally be written by a scholar who had done a dissertation and two or three additional books on the subject and had taught a doctoral seminar thereon for fifteen years or more. Macmillan, whose previous books were

*Women of the Raj* and *Canada and NATO*, lacks this background. Perhaps this accounts for such gaffes as assertions that the German and Polish coal mines were flooded in World War I (p. 60); that the French mines were blown up (p. 191); that the Czechs were Protestants (pp. 231, 241); that the Sykes-Picot agreement assigned Palestine to France (p. 416); and that the German army and bureaucracy "had been obliterated" by early 1919 (p. 461). We all make mistakes, of course, but lapses of this ilk, some contradicting correct statements elsewhere in the book, imply either a shaky grasp of the material or over-hasty fingers on the keyboard or both.

Yet the bibliography and footnotes attest to MacMillan's wide reading and careful combing of recent scholarship, especially *The Treaty of Versailles: A Reassessment after 75 Years*. The bibliography precedes the footnotes which for some reason is extremely unhandy, particularly since footnotes are as brief as possible with no initial full citation. The footnoting system is idiosyncratic: with rare exceptions, paragraphs either have a single footnote at the end or none at all, even if containing quotations. The one citation lists sources for the paragraph in the order used, which in at least one instance meant citing the same book twice in a single note (p. 99, n. 3). This is not entirely satisfactory. An attempt to find the origin of an erroneous statement on Russia's 1918 reparations obligation to Germany in the middle of a paragraph on German financial questions (p. 185, n. 14) produced three perfectly good citations on Germany but nothing on Russia.

The text would have benefited from greater focus and clarity as well as a firm editorial hand to eliminate extraneous material, contradictions, digressions, long parentheses, unfounded rumors, and false suspicions or charges (unless refuted and cited as evidence of bias). We do not need to know of Rumanian marriage customs or the ban on submarines in landlocked Austria's treaty. Telling us that Milan Stefanik won hearts in wartime Paris is pointless unless we learn what he was doing there and why he mattered. This pruning would have provided space for a much sharper focus and some badly needed summation and assessment, especially of the treaties with the lesser powers. One needs to know the implications of Anschluss which, aside from population, are omitted, and what the Austrian and Hungarian treaties added up to. On some occasions, the point is there but, without emphasis, it gets lost amid other details. For example, Bulgaria's loss of access to the Aegean Sea is included in a list of treaty terms but its significance may well escape the uninitiated.

To a considerable degree, MacMillan focuses on the Big Three. Italy and Japan receive comparatively short shrift. She lingers long and gently on Lloyd George. Wilson comes off poorly, as does Sonnino; clearly she finds both to be unattractive individuals. She is kinder and fairer to Clemenceau than her predecessors but, perhaps, does not fully capture his personality. On the whole, the book is written from an Anglo-American point of view, especially Anglo. A good deal of British Francophobia is quoted. For all that, there is genuine comprehension of France's fears and dilemmas.

MacMillan is particularly effective at presenting background material and surrounding circumstances, though sometimes she is short on dates, blurs sequence, and seems unevenly selective. She obviously enjoys this material and seems much more at home with it than with the peace conference itself. Once she gets to Paris, she often sets an issue up and then jumps abruptly to the outcome, scanting how and why it was reached. The Polish chapter dwells primarily on Josef Pilsudski's activities in Warsaw. At heart, MacMillan is a storyteller and a very good one.

She dismisses John Maynard Keynes's published avowal of sexual interest in German reparations expert Carl Melchior, which some historians consider a partial explanation of his biases.[3]

Her odd organization offers occasional insights into sequence and simultaneity. And sometimes there are shrewd observations, such as: "The foreign services and governments of Britain, France, and the United States were staffed by products of a classical education, their love of ancient Greece unimpaired by any close acquaintance with the modern nation" (p. 353). Otherwise, there is little of importance that is new to experts in *Paris 1919*. That is of small consequence, as is the fact that most of the conclusions are negative. What matters is that MacMillan may succeed where authors of scholarly monographs have failed in convincing a wider audience that the peace settlement in general and the Versailles treaty in particular were not fully or even primarily to blame for a supposed twenty year nightmare and a second world war. If her book accomplishes this, we may all be grateful.

It seems likely that professors whose courses dwell in some detail on the peace settlement will mine this book for entertaining anecdotes to enliven their lectures, while continuing to assign to their students Alan Sharp's solid and systematic *The Versailles Settlement: Peacemaking in Paris, 1919*.[4] Members of the educated general public and professors specialized in, say, the age of Andrew Jackson will undoubtedly enjoy reading MacMillan's account. However, they may well emerge wondering why they do not have a clearer picture of the peace settlement as a whole and its effects.

Notes

[1]. Richard M. Watt, *The Kings Depart: The Tragedy of Germany, Versailles, and the German Revolution* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968); Charles L. Mee, Jr., *The End of Order, Versailles 1919* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1980). Watt deals only with the German treaty; Mee provides a minimal outline of the others. Both condemn the Versailles treaty.

[2]. On Llyod George see *The Truth about the Peace Treaties*, 2 vols. (London: Gollancz, 1938); and *Memoirs of the Peace Conference*, 2 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1939). On Lloyd George on France see Frances Stevenson, *Lloyd George: A Diary*, ed. A. J. P. Taylor (New York: Harper and Row, 1971). The printed records of the conference are in United States, Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States: The Paris Peace Conference, 1919*, 13 vols. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1942-47). For the collection on the Treaty of Versailles see Manfred F. Boemeke, Gerald D. Feldman, and Elisabeth Glaser, eds., *The Treaty of Versailles: A Reassessment after 75 Years* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). Also see Jean Jules Henri Mordacq, *Le Ministere Clemenceau: journal d'un temoin, novembre 1917-janvier 1920*, 4 vols. (Paris: Librarie Plon, 1930-31). For contemporary journalistic accounts see Charles T. Thompson, *The Peace Conference Day by Day: A Presidential Pilgrimage Leading to the Discovery of Europe* (New York: Brentano's, 1920); and E. J. Dillon, *The Inside Story of the Peace Conference* (New York and London: Harper and Brothers, 1920).

[3]. John Maynard Keynes, *Two Memoirs* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1949), p. 20. Since male homosexuality was still a prosecutable offense in Britain, Keynes's statement was slightly veiled but clear enough.

[4]. Alan Sharp, *The Versailles Settlement: Peacemaking in Paris, 1919* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1991).

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