

CHRISTOPHER CLARK, *THE SLEEPWALKERS: HOW EUROPE WENT TO WAR IN 1914*, LONDON: HARPER PERENNIAL 2012, ISBN 978-0-061-14666-4, 736 P.



A large number of books were published last year in relation to the hundredth anniversary of the outbreak of the First World War, books which looked both at developments in the pre-war years, and at the outbreak and course of the war itself. Australian Christopher Clark, Professor of Modern History at the University of Cambridge, published the reviewed book in 2012, and as such paved the way for the rush of books last year, and furthermore came up with a study which in terms of quality and assessment surpasses most documents looking at the First World War by some margin.

Clark divides his monumental work into three main parts. In the first part, the author describes the original actors in 1914's July crisis — Serbia and the Habsburg Monarchy — with a large dose of criticism in the first two chapters. An undoubted advantage here is the fact that he presents and assesses the unstable situation and the sometimes questionable at best role and actions of the Serbian military command in Serbia with complete openness. It is in this light that he gives a singular presentation and viewpoint on probably the most important Serbian politician of the pre-war period, Nikola Pašić.

Part Two looks at European politics over roughly the quarter century before the war. In Chapter 3, Clark assesses the causes and consequences of the creation of the Franco-Russian Alliance for the constellations of power in Europe, and he focuses much attention on Great Britain, whose policy of "Splendid Isolation" gradually became less effective, and to a certain extent even dangerous for Britain. In looking at Germany, the author many times abandons completely the deep-rooted stereotypes often built on completely mistaken foundations, whose origins can be traced back to the period following the First World War.

Chapter 4 presents the leading European statesmen and also looks at how public opinion and the press affected policy. Although the next, fifth chapter, begins with Italy's attack on then-Ottoman Libya, the author subsequently returns to the turbulent Balkans, including looking at the objectives and positions of Serbia and Bulgaria, the growing difficulties of Austria-Hungary and the effect of the Franco-Russian Alliance in regard to the ever more complex situation in the Balkans.

Chapter 6, the final chapter in Part 2, in a manner maps out the "*calm before the storm*". The author provides information on negotiations between the powers, paying particular attention to Germany's activities in the Ottoman Empire. Of particular note is Clark's assessment of how political and military leaders influenced each other, leaders who were shortly to bring their countries into the largest war in history.

Part 3 of the book looks at developments from the Sarajevo assassination on 28 June 1914 until the outbreak of the Austria-Serbia war on 28 July 1914, or more specifically to the beginning of August 1914 when this originally local conflict quickly mushroomed into the Great War. In Chapter 7, Clark carefully maps the immediate circumstances which preceded the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria and his wife in the Bosnian capital, the course of the assassination itself and the immediate response to it. Chapter 8 further assesses responses to the assassination abroad, with special attention paid to the mission of Count Hoyos, *chef de cabinet* of Austrian Foreign Minister, Count Leopold Berchtold, in Berlin. The author further

looks into the circumstances surrounding Austria-Hungary's ultimatum eventually given to Serbia, and tells readers of the 'strange death of Nikolai Hartwig'. As Russian minister in Belgrade, and undoubtedly influential in Serbian politics, Hartwig died during a visit to the Austro-Hungarian legation in the Serbian capital, literally in the arms of Austro-Hungarian minister, Baron Giesl. Some of the press attempted to present the event as the result of Austrian intrigue, even though it had been shown beyond any doubt that the Russian diplomat had died a natural death. Chapter 9 provides some fascinating insights, mapping the course of French President Raymond Poincaré's visit to Russia during July's days of crisis. It also gives a fascinating perspective on the views of French diplomat, Count de Robien, on Russia, which were not always favourable to France's then-ally. The tenth and eleventh chapters recap the immediate circumstances surrounding the declaration of war between Austria-Hungary and Serbia on 28 June 1914. The final, twelfth, chapter gives a picture of the situation when "*a strange light falls upon the Map of Europe*", or in other words it captures the process of transformations which turned it into the Great War.

Uncovering and understanding the causes which led to the outbreak of the First World War is not at all easy. It was both the result of factors which had been acting for many years, and also on immediate circumstances such as the Sarajevo assassination. One of the main problems here is the fact that in the summer of 1914 it is likely that none of the leading politicians or military leaders in Europe could have conceived of the awful consequences which the Great War would bring. This is somewhat surprising when we realise that a precedent had been set in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905.

Christopher Clark's book is a work of truly landmark importance. The author has demonstrated marked courage, rejecting all previous one-sided explanations in his presentation of the fundamental issues, and carefully working towards an analysis of the "share" of responsibility each individual power had for the outbreak of the war on the basis of a critical assessment of the key facts. In essence, he clearly rejects the today outdated "agreed" interpretation that Germany was at fault, as based on the infamous Article 231 of the Versailles Peace Treaty. I particularly appreciate his assessment of Russia's role and the negative consequences of its Balkan policy, as well as his critical assessment of French policies and its key figures. On the other hand, he gives an equally strong critical view in assessing the policy of the Habsburg monarchy. It is great that Clark is not hesitant even for a moment in terming certain key facts in a manner they deserve — for him, the Sarajevo assassination was a terrorist act organised in Belgrade and not an act of young patriots deserving merit. I consider Clark's profiles of many figures, both politicians and in the military, to be of great benefit. The book is also excellent in terms of the author's style and its attraction to the reader, as it is written very engagingly. These qualities mean that Clark's book is highly recommended to readers.

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