



The Army collections in the defence museums

Earth Thought Notebooks

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heritage, history and genesis of a "museum" heritage

After having specified the genesis and the filiation of the collections of the Museum of the Army and the weapons museums, the Chief of Battalion Aude Piernas dethe choices made in terms of organisation and rationalisation, the necessary training of curators, and outlines a possible direction for meeting the museum challenge of the 21st century.

The commemoration of the centenary of the Great War provides an opportunity for defence museums to bear witness to the action of French troops by exhibiting contemporary objects from this major military historical event. When you visit the exhibition "Verdun, the Air Force", you can see that^[1] that the objects on display have reached us in different ways. These objects were either trophies taken from the enemy, or were recovered from the battlefield, or equipped the forces and then used in the war. These objects were either trophies taken from the enemy, recovered from the battlefield, equipped the forces, and then either kept by the units or passed through private collections of militaria enthusiasts before being acquired by one of the defence museums.

However, it turns out that this legacy of military collections has its roots beyond the First World War for army museums. Although the Army Museum is the first military museum, its creation and origins are much more complex and ancient. study the collections of the present seventeen army museums forces us to consider the legacy, history and genesis of this heritage, sometimes unique in the world.

These collections represent an undeniable wealth and bring together a certain volume of objects of different natures ranging from weapons (firearms, ammunition, edged weapons), to works of art (paintings, sculpture, engravings...), through uniforms (clothing, decorations, headdresses...) and armour, without forgetting objects relating to military

music, military life (campanile objects, vehicles, aircraft, radio...), etc.

This work of justification of filiation between the current collections of the Army Museum, the real head of the network of defence museums, those of the sixteen museums, and those of the sixteen museums of the French army, is a real challenge. *es de tradition de l'armée de Terre, et les collections de militaria antérieures à 1905, date de création du musée de l'Armée, s'avère délicat.* It highlights the difficulties of administering and monitoring the collections according to the thread of historical and administrative events. The scientific ambition is to unveil the mechanisms of transmission of the objects, to retrace the path and experience of these collections and to analyse the acquisition policy of military museums while understanding how and why these collections were created.

Weaving this link of filiation makes it necessary to study the origins prior to 1789. These centuries-old origins of military collections show that there is a definite craze in France for these objects relating to military matters, even giving rise to the first military museums. In the 19th century, this legacy of the Ancien Régime became a ^{real} breeding ground for the Musée de l'Armée and today's military museums. While the twentieth century saw the emergence of a vast museum landscape, the end of the twentieth century and the ^{beginning} of the twenty-first century clearly raised the ^{question} of the management of collections, their status and above all their future.

Centuries-old origins

The Army Museum seems to have inherited part of the various ancestral collections, private or state, built up under the Ancien Régime.

These collections of weapons and armour were originally kept in weapons cabinets, the first conservation of weapons, traces of which date back to the 15th century. Wealthy princely families, even members of the Crown themselves, kept the objects of their forefathers, gathered to commemorate the power of a warrior line, alongside their service weapons. These items were thus shown to family visitors. Inventories of these objects in the castles of large families testify to this, such as that of François de Chabannes. Similarly, in the 16th ^{century}, there seems to exist in Fontainebleau a collection of ancient and perhaps exotic weapons. Let us also mention the first pre-museum inventory, that of Anne of Brittany's cabinet of arms, drawn up at the end of the 15th century, which is interesting to ^{evoke} in terms of the mixed technique of *theme des inventaires et des précisions apportées sur les objets, annonciateur de notre gestion muséale actuelle; tandis que Louis XII serait en quelque sorte le précurseur de l'exposition d'armes publique*. In 1498, the first Army Museum was established in Paris and an exhibition of weapons was organised on the occasion of its first entrance, after the coronation of Reims in early July 1498.

During the XVIIth century, collections of state military objects, whose use and usefulness are of current interest, were officially established by the royal will. The "Musée d'Artillerie" of Humières, a great master of artillery, and the secret collection of relief plans, initially installed in the Louvre under Louis XIV, but also the first collection installed at the Invalides in 1776, were designed for this new use. The Artillery Museum, the Crown's furniture repository is open to the public a few days a week. The royal collections reflect the military achievements and power of the kingdom as evidenced by the trophies taken from the enemy and displayed at Notre-Dame. The exhibition is a tribute to the warrior

pictorial heritage of the refectories of the Invalides, the galleries of Versailles and the Military School. Similarly, specific rooms were reserved in the royal arsenals to store weapons and armour in service, both old and taken from the enemy. The Saint-Etienne factory was the beginning of a unique armament collection as early as 1764. Finally, the collections of the Montmorency, the Duc de Bouillon, the Condé in Chantilly, the Duc du Maine, which were either confiscated by the royal power or given to the King, will feed the royal collections.

Then, during the Revolution, the collections thus built up were dispersed, lost and plundered by the revolutionaries and the Prussians, before being destroyed. They were found and partly gathered together in the new Artillery Museum in 1796 in the Jacobin Convent of Saint-Thomas d'Aquin in Paris by Edmé Régnier, the museum's first curator. The events of 1830 and the collection of Napoleon III for the Musée des Souverains still scatter these collections, blurring the lines.

However, the sacralization of emblems and trophies continued at the Invalides, at the Saint-Louis church, temple of Mars. The collections of the Historical Museum of Versailles, the trophies of the Saint-Louis church, the Sovereigns' museum, as well as later on the regimental halls of honour of Boulanger, became the vectors of patriotism in the 19th century, enriched by ancestral objects, purchases and objects made for the occasion. Some private collections are still in existence, notably that of Napoleon III, an amateur collector, at Pierrefonds Castle.

In 1871, the Artillery Museum, heir to Régnier's museum, was then installed in Les Invalides. A true conservatory, it intends to centralise all the specimens of artillery pieces in its collections in order to have complete collections through donations, legacies and transfers of military equipment: arms, armour and artillery from the central artillery depots, the Bourges foundry, and the disposal of Napoleon III's personal collections. Ethnographic collections were acquired through wartime captures and samples from military expeditions to constitute the ethnographic gallery, as well as objects from archaeological excavations and so-called "miscellaneous" objects. The first inventory began in 1863.

The Historical Museum of the Army^[12] was created in 1896 at Les Invalides, located geographically opposite the Artillery Museum in the main courtyard, following the success of the Army Pavilion at the Universal Exhibition of 1889 and at the will of the painter Édouard Detaille and La sabretache, an association of the museum, in a context of Revenge. The museum's primitive collection is based on the donation of the painter's personal collection to the armies of Ernest Meissonnier at his death. It was then hastily completed with a view to opening the museum's first room. A vast hall of honour, more like a conservatory, its collections are enriched by objects brought back from colonial expeditions, numerous gracious donations from soldiers and legacies, notably those of General Vanson, the museum's first curator. Universal exhibitions and the role of the sabretache contribute to this enrichment. The typology of the objects differs from that of the Artillery Museum: uniforms, accessories, graphic arts and paintings... The museum was finally merged with the Artillery Museum in 1905 by ministerial decree to become the current Army Museum.

Appearances of weapons museums

Contemporaries of the Army Museum, museums of tradition within the Army weapons appear at the beginning of the 20th century. The context of the Revenge, the will to preserve the traditions of the dissolved units, disappeared and then recreated, aim at making the young recruits adhere and at giving birth to the spirit of defence. Several types of museum genesis can be seen. Museums are either the result of the metamorphosis of General Boulanger's rooms of honour, or the will of passionate servicemen and women who want to preserve the memories and traces of their units or military objects, or the will of an association and the hierarchy.

The period 1794 to 1945 saw the creation of training school museums, such as the Saint-Cyr school created in 1912, collections built up by the chaplain, that of the schools of Artillery schools in 1794, the Museum of the African Army in 1930, but also those of the rooms of honour of prestigious units which took on the appearance of a museum, such as that of the Foreign Legion in 1892. The Second World War and decolonization were the cause of the dispersal and disappearance of entire collections of which those of the Artillery Schools, the Army Museum and the African Army Museum were victims.

Then, after 1945, in addition to the museum of Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan, a place of remembrance^[13] which was reborn in 1947 from its ashes thanks to La Saint-cyrienne. ...other museums are being created. Their founding fathers are essentially senior officers, former military history enthusiasts and above all the history of their respective units. Enriching and enhancing the value of their rooms of honour during their time of activity, they continue, in retirement, their heritage initiatives by collecting objects by purchase^[14] and through donations from the military, with a view to creating a weapons museum. . They then have their work recognized by the military hierarchy. This process of silent creation of traditional museums began in the 1960s. These initiatives were relayed by the later creation of associations, composed essentially of active or retired soldiers, who would help the museum financially. The 1970s saw the creation^[15] of several museums of arms and traditions with "science and technology" collections. .

From the 1980s onwards, an awakening of identity shook the military museum landscape.^[16] . Some museums are created ex nihilo, others are the developed product of halls of honour or museums hitherto closed to the public or in a state of drowsiness. The general effervescence pushes the arms or services to have their own museum to safeguard their memory and traditions. Seven other museums of arms and traditions were created to safeguard the history of the units. Twenty-five museums were thus listed at the beginning of 1990.

Their collections are created from dissolved regimental halls of honour, donations, legacies and objects collected, picked up on the battlefields, purchased by museum officials or via associations of friends of museums, despite a small allocated acquisition budget. Some objects turned out to be identical reconstructions, such as the uniform of a nineteenth-century canteenwoman at the Museum of^{Marine} Troops. These museums are managed by active or retired staff with no particular museum training.

Becoming and managing these collections in the 21st century

While the 1980s were the cradle of movements of identity expression, the following decades will be those of defining the concept of "military culture and heritage". The 1990s

were a decade of suspension of military service and the beginning of the cultural influence of defence and the army, which forged close links with other countries. The 1990s saw the suspension of military service and the beginning of the cultural influence of the defence and the army, which forged close links with other ministries in charge of heritage management, such as the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Tourist Facilities and the Ministry of the Environment and Local Authorities. Aware of this wealth of heritage, the Army seeks to enhance it.

Enhancing, conserving, developing and passing it on to both soldiers and citizens, developing the nation's armed bond, which has been weakened as a result, became the mission of the delegate for heritage in 1993. This function then created makes the Heritage Delegate the cultural adviser to the Chief of Staff of the Army. This delegation is also a structure for analysis and synthesis.

This major "patrimonialization" drive has thus brought the army's military collections out of the confines of confidentiality and out of the confines of the units thanks to a policy of opening them to the public, renovating museums and restructuring, which is considered essential to "dust off" the collections. The Délégation au patrimoine de l'armée de Terre (DELPAT), headed by General André Cousine, is drawing up an orientation note on museums. es de tradition de l'armée de Terre, a general summary presented to the office of the Minister of Defence with a view to enhancing and promoting its museums. Then a policy for traditional army museums, a master plan and an action plan for the next ten years are drawn up. These collections enable the army "to recognize itself, identify itself and assert itself in the face of a possible future".

In order to manage the collections, preserve, develop and enrich them, the curators of the museums of traditions had to receive training in museology, just like civilian curators. . The collections are thus reworked by heritage professionals to present them with a new museology. . Collection management tools have been put in place, such as the MICROMUSEE® database to create inventory sheets for each object, which will be phased out in 2016 to make way in 2016 for ARCHANGE®, a database created to measure by the DMPA. . The restoration of the objects, carried out at home, now involves professional workshops, while the rigorous rules of preventive conservation of objects are now intruding into the exhibition halls and storerooms. Enrichment is hardly changing. It is still based mainly on donations, on a few purchases via the allocated indigent budget, on associations, on legacies and donations. on the reformed objects, as well as on the numerous dissolutions of units and their rooms of honour returned to the respective armament museums. It should be noted that some of these pieces are true relics that belonged to heroic soldiers, or are faithful reconstructions.

Finally, a rationalization of the museum map is being undertaken. Of the twenty-five museums identified in 1990, sixteen have been retained. Some of them become honorary rooms again, others museums, or even move into the civilian museum sphere. . Some of them get the "Musée de France" designation... This is a quality of scientific rigour for the good management of collections recognised by the Ministry of Culture, and as a result their collections are inalienable, whereas other collections are legally disinherited from public collections. To this day, the collections of the Musée de l'Infanterie are still in a box awaiting the museum's rebirth.

The renewal of collections: a challenge for the years to come

The origin of the collections of the seventeen current Army Museums weaves its genealogical links in the private and state arms collections of the Ancien Régime. Their enrichment is intimately linked to military epics, their dispersion and disappearance to political episodes, and their reconstitution to individual or hierarchical military will. Their evolution is complex.

The museum challenge of the twenty-first century^{lies in} the question of whether army museums should be grouped together within a specific public institution organized on a federative basis, thus providing them with a real status. The museums would then be attached to the Army Museum. These distinct collections of diverse origins would thus have only one legal status, that of "Musée de France", guaranteeing their inalienability. Finally, a museum remains alive because its collections are enriched with objects that bear witness to ancient historical facts and recent objects. The intense military commitment of the French forces over the past two decades should be represented in the various museums of the intense military commitment of the French forces over the last two decades should be represented in the various armament museums to pay tribute to the men and women projected into the various theatres of external operations, protecting the interests of the French nation. This representation will involve the transfer to the museums of the various objects bearing witness to these commitments. Every soldier is thus invited to take part in this enrichment which, in the end, retraces its history.

At the end of the Special Military School of Saint-Cyr, Battalion Commander Aude PIERNAS chose the signals weapon. Received at the National Heritage Institute to follow a training course as a heritage curator in order to manage the conservation of one of the sixteen traditional museums of the Army, doctoral student in history of heritage at the EPHE, she gives us some reflections on the collections of these museums.

¹⁾ Exhibition at the Musée de l'Air et de l'Espace in Le Bourget, from 15 October 2016 to 29 January 2017. This museum was created in 1919 at the end of the Great War.

2) ALAT and Helicopter Museum, Cavalry Museum, Remembrance Museum, Engineering Museum, Parachutists Memorial Museum, Musée du Sous-officier, Musée national des Enfants de troupe, Musée du Matériel, Musée des Blindés, Musée des Transmissions-espace Ferrié, Musée des Troupes de montagne, Musée de l'Artillerie, musée des Troupes de marine, musée de la Légion étrangère, musée du Train et des équipages militaires, salle d'honneur de l'infanterie (en attendant l'ouverture de la Légion étrangère (while waiting for the opening in Draguignan of the Infantry museum which closed when the application school moved there) and the Army museum.

3) General Bardin Etienne-Alexandre, "Le muséum d'Artillerie", Paris ou Le livre des centet-un, Volume 11, 1833, p 183; "Recherche historique sur quelques cabinets d'armes de l'Europe", "Le spectateur militaire Recueil de science, d'art et d'histoire", tome 9, Paris, 1830, p.162-167.

4) Baron de Curton, in his castle of Madic, dated January 15, 1562.

5) Dan Pierre, "Le trésor des Merveilles de la Maison royale de Fontainebleau", Paris, 1642, chap. VI, p. 31.

6) National Library, Paris, ms. fr. 23335, p. 113-118.

7) Paul Lecestre, "Notice sur l'arsenal royal de Paris jusqu'à la mort de Henri IV", Mémoires de la Société de l'histoire de Paris et de l'Ile-de-France, 42 (1915), p. 187.

8) Refers to the administration in charge of the management of furniture and objets d'art intended for the decoration of royal residences. They were also stores where weapons and armour were stored on racks.

9) Lieutenant-Colonel A Champeaux, "Les emblèmes, textile sacrés, textiles profanes..." Réflexions sur la présentation de collections de textiles, de costumes et d'uniformes, AGCCPF-PACA, Fage Éditions, 2006.

10) Battalion Commander Aude Piernas, Ibid. , p 54.

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11] Order of 15 March 1886, which provided for the decoration of each room, thanks to the two hundred francs taken from the barracks maintenance credits for the years 1886 and 1887, with the bust and portrait of the President of the Republic, the head of the corps and his predecessors, paintings bearing the names of officers, non-commissioned officers, corporals and soldiers killed by the enemy, the history of the regiment and anything else that could exalt esprit de corps, and a biography of the name of the newly baptized barracks from December 1886.

12] Yves-Marie Rocher, "Les collections du premier musée de l'Armée. Le musée historique (1896-1905)", Master's thesis in art history under the direction of Barthélémy Jobert, 2010-2011, PARIS IV-Sorbonne.

13] The "Société amicale de secours des anciens élèves de l'École spéciale militaire de Saint-Cyr" was formed in 1887 and was declared of public utility in 1890.

14] Colonel Aubry and Captain Tributsch travelled across Europe for 30 years to recover armoured vehicles, forming the collection of the Musée des Blindés.

15] The Artillery museum was recreated again in 1976 in Draguignan after the looting of the Germans in 1945. The ALAT museum in 1978 started with three helicopters.

16] Museums: Marine Troops (1981), Train (1978), Columbophilia (1981), ALAT (1983), Airborne (1983), Military Symbolism (1985), Troop Children (1985), NCOs (1986), Mountain Troops (1988), Spahis (1988), Commissariat (1993), after Le Quid, Robert Laffont, 1995. New museums were created after this Quid (Matériel en 1997, Transmissions en 1999).

17] The DELPAT has worked to offer professional museological training to its curators by offering them schooling at the École du Louvre or the Institut national du patrimoine.

18] The museums of the Armoured Cavalry, Marine Troops and Engineers have been modernized.

19] Direction de la mémoire, du patrimoine et des archives.

20] Donation is an exceptional method of payment which allows the payment of a tax debt by the handing over of works of art, books, collection objects, documents, of high artistic or historical value. It is a fair system that allows the taxpayer to extinguish his debt and the State to enrich public collections. Cf. law n°68-1251 of 31 December 1968.

21] The Musée des Spahis de Senlis falls within the municipal sphere. The Valence Spahis Museum once again became a simple hall of honour. The Musée de la Circonscription de Strasbourg disappears from the landscape.

22] The Army museum in 2002, the museum of the Navy Troops, the Artillery museum and the museum of the Foreign Legion. Other museums are in the process of being named.

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