

INTRODUCTION

“The history of a battle is not unlike the history of a ball. Some individuals may recollect all the little events of which the great result is the battle won or lost; but no individual can recollect the order in which, or the exact moment at which, they occurred, which makes all the difference as to their value or importance.”¹

— Arthur Wellesley,
Duke of Wellington



WHY A CONFERENCE - AND A PUBLICATION - ABOUT WATERLOO?

2015 marks the bicentenary of the Battle of Waterloo, a milestone in Europe's 19th-century history, a defining moment in European history which marked the end of the Revolutionary and then Napoleonic wars (1792-1815), and drew the curtains over the first phase of the revolutionary years.

Many initiatives are taking place to commemorate the anniversary, such as official commemorations on the battlefield and academic events. It is high time, then, for history education organisations and educators to seize the moment and develop cross-border, engaging educational initiatives. In this framework, EUROCLIO, the European Association of History Educators, together with Waterloo200, the Commune of Braine-l'Alleud, and the Province of the Brabant Walloon, organised an international Seminar for history educators, titled *“Teaching 1815. Rethinking the Battle of Waterloo from Multiple Perspectives”*, which took place in Braine L'Alleud on 12-15 February 2015. Stemming from this successful initiative, this publication tries and gives an idea of the complexity of the battle of Waterloo, the multiple angles it can be approached from, and the intellectual richness it can provide students with, if taught with passion, innovation, and cultural awareness.

This publication aims at overcoming the classic military reading of the battle, by including the views and opinions of a larger variety of characters (civilians, common soldiers, public opinion at large...). Besides, it aims at countering the classic 'great men history', who

occupy the centre of the stage, leaving little space for a democratic narrative - and consequently no room for a full understanding of the great changes in history.

Finally, EUROCLIO, and therefore this publication, tries and speak to a wide audience; in fact, we hope to reach the widest possible audience, and to seed in the reader's mind some of the principles EUROCLIO is committed to: innovation in history education, multiperspectivity, the concept of responsible history teaching, and development of critical thinking.

Young people, young students, are therefore at the centre of our concerns. During the Seminar in Braine-l'Alleud emerged a feeling, among educators, that the battle of Waterloo is an important event which had a huge impact on European history, and yet not enough time is dedicated to it in schools.

While trying to reach a general audience, this publication was primarily written with teachers and teachers' needs in mind; its primary mission, so to say, is to support high quality teaching of the battle of Waterloo.

The Battle has enjoyed quite an amount of attention from a military point of view. But the battle of Waterloo is not only a battle between Napoleon and Wellington, nor is it a mere military confrontation. Waterloo is a defining moment in European history; Waterloo is one of those fine tipping points that decided on the course of history. In sum, Waterloo is much more than a battle: it is a metaphor of both the preceding and the successive years, and as such it is also an extremely useful event for history teaching.

