

Juin 2011

PRELIMINARY STUDY SUMMARY

The time has come to provide everyone with a cultural venue offering exhibitions, information and debate about France's past: a *Maison* where people will be able to examine the cross-fertilisation of a word – "History" – and a name – "France" – whose social identity is changing rapidly in the early years of the 21st century. This Centre will be none of the following: a training ground for French national identity, a cosy national feel-good venue, a parallel university, a forum, or a pulpit. Nor will it be a pageant of diversities and pluralities that masks the singular and continuous nature of this country. With its metaphorical doors and windows wide open, it will encourage the greatest possible number of people to familiarize themselves with documents, "footprints", images, sounds, writings and ideas. It embodies the cultural ambition of fostering the diffusion and transmission of historical knowledge in order to question better how we live together, in the past and in the future and to understand and help others understand in order to gain access, through a culture of history, to some truths about oneself, other peoples, and the world at large.



PRELIMINARY STUDY SUMMARY

The Maison will be a place where everyone will be able to find the tools they need to gain an understanding, along with opportunities to probe the history of France. It is to be a “cultural institution created to present to the widest possible audience, in a variety of evolving formats, the relationship which the French people and all who live in France – mainland France as well as its Overseas *Départements* and Territories – have had and have today with its history, and also with its memories, heritage and societies,” as the Minister for Culture and Communication said on 13 January 2011, as he installed the *Comité d’Orientation Scientifique* (“Scientific Advisory Committee”) tasked with “guaranteeing a scrupulously scientific approach towards the content of the Centre,” and with developing “all the components of the programme” and, once the pre-launch period is over, with making recommendations as to its “cultural policy”.

The final project for the Maison will be submitted to the Minister in January 2012. It will take into account the comments and proposals received following the circulation of the present preliminary study, in which the recommendations of the Committee are set out in a ten-point programme:

I- The *Maison de l’histoire de France* (MHF) will be established at the point where the social concern of not being cut off from the past intersects with the untrammelled scientific concern to develop areas of knowledge which help to interpret and understand that past. The Maison will provide services and opportunities to meet and discuss, and will encourage initiatives aimed at promoting historical culture and knowledge.

II- The *Maison* will highlight fields of research and investigation which regenerate a general approach to the history of France, along with a range of historical themes. These will include, for example, duration and filiation, man and nature, religious life, symbolic policies, the history of business, that of violence and war, that of the France’s colonies and overseas possessions, and that of the arts, culture, creativity, images, and sound.

III- It must be possible for every kind of audience to find evidence of the democratisation and renewal of knowledge about France’s past. Special attention will be paid to the provision for groups including the “general public” of history lovers, both French and foreign tourists, as well as professional historians, those still studying, and children and young people.

IV- The ambitions of the Maison will be to provide a vast provision of digital resources aiming to show the importance of history through reference to original documents, the provision of primary and secondary sources, a prioritising of initiatives, and guidance for web-based users. The Centre’s pre-launch website will go live in September 2011, and its portal in 2012.

V- Its permanent, variable-geometry *Galerie des Temps* (“Gallery of the Times”) will introduce visitors to the history of France from two entry points: a chronological “backbone” pointing to specific times and spaces, and a series of “compartments” which can be visited independently and which will present “historic moments” that will be continually updated in the light of new research. It will thus combine respect for the “initial view” of the history of France: a display unfolding the flow of the centuries and our heritage, together with comparisons with other national examples, all with the necessary critical distancing.

VI- The *Maison* will contribute to debates on approaches to exhibiting historical issues. It will present large-scale exhibitions focusing on regional, national, European and global issues; mid-sized exhibitions; small, highly-mobile, single-topic exhibitions; multi-format events (eg, commemorations, symposia, awards, café debates) and, every two years, a major historical survey and multi-faceted cultural event exploring a key

historical topic. All these events will be organised in conjunction with the Maison's partners and orchestrated by local coordinators.

VII- European by necessity, contributing to France's overseas cultural activities, and aware not only of the history of cultural transfer and post-colonial issues, the *Maison* has the aim of breaking down scientific and cultural barriers, foster openness to other history world views, and to showcase French historical culture around the world.

VIII- It will strive to promote research into French history by catering for French and non-French historians in residence, setting up a regional and international network of coordinators, organising an annual symposium on emerging approaches to historiography (*Rencontres de l'histoire de demain*) and a "People's University", as well as publishing and making available documentary resources.

IX- The Maison will not be able to become a pole of attraction unless it encourages and hosts initiatives of all types, developing multiple partnerships and promoting synergies between them to the point where a network is created. Without turning its back on existing professional networks, it will have as its "Primary Partners" nine national museums and six other institutions, whose activities and resources range from pre-history to the present day. It will also work closely with other key institutions, encourage the organisation of events in France's "myriad historical and memorial venues", and forge close ties with leading institutions worldwide.

X- A pre-launch exhibition, entitled *La France, quelle histoire !*, scheduled to open in late 2012, will form the foundation stone of the *Maison* and will address France's historical specificity from a variety of angles against a European and global backdrop.



SUMMARY

Officially installed by the Minister for Culture and Communication on 13th January 2011, the Scientific Advisory Committee (*Comité d'orientation scientifique*) of the *Maison de l'histoire de France* (MHF) has since then been discussing the design of what the Minister hoped would be a "cultural institution created to present to the widest possible audience, in a variety of evolving formats, the relationship which the French people and all who live in France – mainland France as well as its Overseas *Départements* and Territories – have had and have today with its history, and also with the its memories, heritage and societies." The outcome of the committee's discussions, the "Preliminary Study presented today aims to sketch in the intellectual outlines of the future MHF.

As an exhibition venue, an information source and a focus of ongoing debate on France's past, the MHF will contribute to the circulation and transmission of historical knowledge by displaying and explaining documents, "traces", images and sounds, works of history, and ideas. It will seek to understand, and help others understand, and strive to facilitate access to a certain truth about ourselves, about others, and about the world through the medium of historical culture. This objective naturally implies that the MHF will be neither a place from which to foster a 'national identity', nor a mouthpiece for an "official" version of history. Nor will it be a platform for showing off diversity and plurality to the point of disguising the singularity and continuity of our country.

ACCESSIBLE TO ALL AUDIENCES

Aware of the different nature of academic history and the general public's thirst for things historical, and aware also of the multiple realities the term "historian" covers (from University professor to high-school teacher, and from a graduate of the *École des Chartes* to the outreach officer of a historic city, and from the museum curator to the local history scholar, not to mention the novelist and scriptwriter), the MHF will conscientiously and scrupulously do its utmost to offer all interested parties responses appropriate to their historical desiderata.

Situated in the heart of Paris, it will benefit from this privileged location where a variety of institutions receive 5-6 million visitors every year. It will be open to the greatest possible number through an attractive pricing policy and will be a natural meeting place for traditional history museum audiences and lovers of heritage. It will also seek, ambitiously and inventively, to attract and forge permanent ties with three other types of audience. The first of these is local, national and foreign tourists, the latter flocking to France in large numbers each year but who suffer from the lack of a site offering an

outline of the country's history and, by the same token, of a place to debate cultural transfers and the comparative history of peoples, nations and states. Would it not be enriching for a Japanese or American tourist, for example, to compare their country's chronological history with that of the history of France? The second group comprises working people in initial or continuing education – an audience of working people whose desire to retrain or attend additional training could go hand-in-hand with a proposal to rediscover the concepts of transmission and heritage via the history of working life, technology and work. The third and last group is formed by young people for whom the MHF will seek to make a special effort by reconciling the needs of history teaching in schools and the natural curiosity of all children and teenagers. Relying on the vital assets of education departments, the MHF will seek to explore complementary avenues and, in a sense, invent a "hands-on" approach to French history which will boost its attraction, just as that approach has revolutionised science teaching.


AN AMBITIOUS ONLINE OFFERING

What will be on offer to a general public will be designed for the 'real' and online worlds, each supplementing and enriching the other. This is why the MHF will develop an online strategy designed to underscore the relevance of history, reflect the MHF's activities and those of its partners, (in this connection a calendar of history-related cultural activities in France and their online conservation, in conditions to be defined, would seem desirable), and provide everyone with well-organized, unbiased, documentary resources.

The MHF's online offering will also be a component of its physical layout –one component in a range of types of mediation. Part of the offering will be generated in-house, notably in the field of e-learning. In partnership with the sector's leading players, the MHF will strive to make audio and visual archive materials available and explore the potential of WebTV, or online television. Its online strategy will initially be underpinned by a pre-launch website, scheduled to go live in Autumn 2011, and then by a dedicated portal, due to come on stream in 2012, whose content will be enriched progressively.

A "GALERIE DES TEMPS"

The main exhibit of the MHF's museum offering will be the *Galerie des Temps* (GdT) which will occupy at least 2,500m² of surface area. Because it is out of the question to reduce the history of France to little more than the ability to handle a games console, and because nothing can supplant contact with the materiality of objects, this gallery will display an outline of the History of France, from the very first traces of human occupation down to the present day. By stressing continuity (but steering clear of teleological interpretations) and by highlighting the combination of continuities and discontinuities that comprise the fabric of a nation's history, the GdT will provide a searching, dispassionate vision of the history of France that will continually seek to elicit surprise and stimulate the visitor's perceptions. The GdT will be structured in two main components: a chronological backbone enabling visitors to travel through continuous time, and a series of "compartments" opening off from the backbone, presenting discreet points in history. The chronological backbone will allow visitors to become a part of history themselves and gauge the "depth" of time. By multiplying and cross-referencing chronological



series, the GdT will encourage each visitor to gauge them in relation to their own time-span – that of their family or their country – against the time-span of the history of France. As far as possible, it will combine chronological components and maps and will show not only the main outlines of the development of political institutions but also those of everyday life. The “history snapshots” exhibited in the branching compartments will not be exhaustive and will, as far as possible, be changed on a regular basis. Each of them will be built on the same principle, and will simultaneously display knowledge-based items (ie, images or objects), what the historian makes of these items, and memories of when the snapshot was taken, exploring a range of historiographical interpretations.

The MHF will not possess a permanent collection of its own. At the same time as it deploys the full range of online museum science, it will nevertheless exhibit authentic objects that have been loaned or deposited by partner institutions on which it will train a historical spotlight.

EXHIBITIONS AND GATHERINGS

Without encroaching on the territory of the fine arts, in which a great many French cultural institutions excel, the MHF will organise cycles of temporary exhibitions on historical topics complementing the exhibits in the *Galerie des Temps*. In the run-up to the opening of the MHF, an in-depth exploration of the possibilities will take place, taking its cue from existing examples. While not playing down the aesthetic value of the objects displayed, these temporary exhibitions will strive to explore the history of phenomena and institutions, and the relations between France and various countries, etc. They will place objects and historic documents in context and explain the issues involved and the history of these issues. The exhibitions may be large-scale such as an exhibition on Franco-Chinese relations down the centuries, for example, or medium-sized or small-scale, as a means of showcasing the findings of a completed social science research programme funded by France’s *Agence Nationale de la Recherche*. These exhibitions will cover all areas of history without exception and will where possible and desirable tie in with French and European cultural calendars. In its calendar of exhibitions, the MHF will enhance the visibility of the institutions in its network by means of co-productions or by hosting exhibitions organised locally outside the capital, in Paris. A calendar offering one major exhibition each year, supplemented by two mid-sized exhibitions and three or four small-scale ones seems suited to the ambitions of the MHF.

These exhibitions, which will always provide courses, lectures, symposia, screenings, and publications, will be supplemented by other events, their contours as yet undecided, which will place at the MHF from a more mass-media related angle, with major conferences on the history of France for example, or a History of France book award, etc.

EXTENDING THE VISIBILITY OF RESEARCH

The French social sciences research landscape is rich and varied. The MHF is not destined to become one more research institute, a parallel university or CNRS (national scientific research centre). However, because its brief is to circulate historical knowledge as widely as possible, it must acquire credibility in academic circles and strive to build bridges between these and its audience of visitors, whether to its bricks-and-mortar or digital premises. The MHF will therefore drive its policy of publicizing research

from a variety of angles. In the first instance, it could host researchers in residence for limited periods of time, whose fields of research will parallel the MHF's own cultural activities. Thus, a foreign researcher working on the history of France could take up residence at the MHF during the time it takes to prepare an exhibition that will be presented there, along with a cycle of related lectures and seminars. At local level, the MHF will build up a corps of coordinators, all representative of aspects of the cultural sphere of history. These coordinators will be tasked with relaying news of the MHF's activities and offerings, and with channelling news of local initiatives and expressions of needs back to the MHF. The network will be used to organise a history "People's University" structured around both the history of France in general and the MHF's cultural calendar. Lectures, talks, seminars and introductions to historical methodology will be organised, as well as discussions on current historical affairs. For more well-informed audiences, the MHF will also develop a policy of web-based or printed publication of source documents and tools for historians (eg, bibliographies and guides to sources). It will also regularly organise symposia on the "history of tomorrow" at which everyone involved in the study of history (academic researchers, heritage workers, etc.) will be encouraged to reflect on the epistemology and methods of the study of history and to compare methods, sources, and approaches.

A NETWORK OF PARTNERS

The MHF will operate interactively with numerous institutions who need to know about the history of France in one shape or form, and which come under one of four distinct groupings. In the first place are the "Primary Partners" among which are nine national museums which the Minister for Culture and Communication wants to form into a confederation with the MHF. These are the *Musée National de Préhistoire* at Eyzies-de-Tayac (Dordogne); the *Musée d'Archéologie Nationale* in Saint-Germain-en-Laye (Yvelines); The *Musée de Cluny-Musée National du Moyen Âge* in Paris; the *Musée National de la Renaissance* in Écouen (Val-d'Oise); The *Musée National du Château de Pau* (Pyrénées Atlantiques); the *Musée des Plans-reliefs* in the Invalides, Paris; the *Château de Fontainebleau* (Seine-et-Marne); the Musée National de Malmaison et Bois-Préau (Hauts-de-Seine) and its annexes the Museums in the Île d'Aix and the house of the Bonapartes in Ajaccio, Corsica; the *Musées et Domaine Nationaux* in Compiègne (Oise); and the *Musée National de la Coopération Franco-Américaine* in Blérancourt (Aisne). To these will be added six other institutions whose collections and vocations round out the MHF's scope of activity. These are the *Musée Carnavalet d'Histoire de Paris*; the *Centre Historique Minier* in Lewarde (Nord); the *Centre Européen du Résistant Déporté* on the site of the Natzweiler concentration camp in the Struthof (Bas-Rhin); the *Bibliothèque de Documentation Internationale Contemporaine* (BDIC) in Nanterre (Hauts-de-Seine) and *Musée d'Histoire Contemporaine* in the Invalides in Paris; the *Musée des Civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée* - MUCEM in Marseille (Bouches-du-Rhône); and the *Archives Nationales d'Outre-mer* in Aix-en-Provence (Bouches-du-Rhône).

Prior to the creation of the public undertaking of the *Maison de l'histoire de France*, the Ministry of Culture and Communication will establish ties between the new undertaking and the nine national museums concerned by the project. The "Pre-launch Association" and the *Comité d'Orientation Scientifique* (Scientific Advisory Committee) will for their part have made the necessary contacts with the six other institutions to agree on the practical partnership measures and will draw up the agreements to put those measures into effect.

The second grouping is formed by the flagship institutions of historic reference, namely leading cultural institutions such as the National Archives, the BNF national

library and the Louvre, along with major history museums in the French regions, such as the *Musée Dauphinois* in Grenoble, and the *Musée d'Aquitaine* in Bordeaux, and national representation museums and nationally important venues such as the National Assembly and the Senate, the Panthéon, etc. The third grouping comprises the "myriad historical and memorial sites" scattered around the country, which include museums, artistic and historically-important towns and areas, and *Département* and municipal archives, libraries, monuments, local history societies, history and memorial displays, the houses of great men and writers, university research departments etc. For all these venues, and in conjunction with the professional networks that already tie them together, the MHF will be a place to exchange and share real or online information, proposals and cultural initiatives. The MHF will keep the network in action by suggesting a new research topic every two years that will simultaneously showcase the collections of a variety of institutions. Chosen and announced ahead of the official launch, these themes will be addressed in publications, symposia and local events before being rounded off with a large travelling exhibition.

The last group to make up the MHF's network will be European and international. Through regular exchanges with foreign local history societies devoted to the study of the history of France, the MHF will strive to bring the work of foreign historians to the attention of French audiences. It will also forge ties with "sister" institutions in European and elsewhere, such as the *Museo Nazionale del Risorgimento* in Turin, the *Musée de l'Europe* and future *Maison de l'Histoire Européenne* in Brussels, the *Imperial War Museum* in London, the National Museum of Scotland, in Edinburgh, the *Deutsches Historisches Museum* in Berlin, the *Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* in Bonn, the National Museum of American History in Washington, and the *Musée de la Civilisation* in Quebec.

The public undertaking of the *Maison de l'histoire de France* will come into being on 1 January 2012. At the end of that same year, it will inaugurate a pre-launch exhibition using the working title *La France, quelle histoire !* in an emblematic venue. This will tell the story of France through several themes which seem to embody it in its singularity.

The *Comité d'Orientation Scientifique* is confident that throughout this process, the French government will make it possible, through the necessary investment in human and material resources, to implement all of the recommendations included in the present preliminary study.



ACCESS THE FULL PRELIMINARY STUDY AT

WWW.MAISON-HISTOIRE.FR