## Introduction

'We all had the impression, I think, of having passed out of the modern world back into a vanished civilization.' These were the words of the American historian James Shotwell following a visit to the devastated towns of Reims and Soissons in northern France in the spring of 1919.[1] Shotwell was a prominent internationalist who taught at Columbia University, was heavily involved in the work of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and was a member of President Woodrow Wilson's Inquiry, a team of experts brought together to plan the post-war peace.[2] It was in the latter capacity that he was in Paris in 1919 as part of the American delegation to the peace conference. During his time in Paris, Shotwell visited the nearby battlefields and *régions dévastées*, confronting the material damage of total war face on, and writing of his experiences in graphic detail in his diary. The battlefields of Verdun and the Belgian town of Ypres, he recounted, symbolized 'the utmost that has ever been suffered and endured by men from the beginning of the world'.[3] And yet Shotwell argued that while wartime destruction needed to be understood in a manner which was tangible and graphic, it also took more subtle forms where 'there was no marching army in evidence'. This was the cultural war. 'There are devastated regions in the realms of philosophy and religion', he argued, 'as well as on the desolate fields of Northern France'.[4] At the heart of this book lies Shotwell's assertion that the war had caused physical harm but also damage to more abstract entities like the production of different branches of

[1] Diary entry for 6 April 1919, James T. Shotwell, *At the Paris Peace Conference* (New York, NY, 1937), p. 247.
[2] Harold Josephson, *James T. Shotwell and the Rise of Internationalism in America* (Cranbury, NJ, 1975).
[3] Diary entry for 23 May 1919. Shotwell, *At the Paris Peace Conference*, p. 331.
[4] James Shotwell, 'The Social History of the War: Preliminary Considerations', *Columbia University Quarterly*, 21 (1919), p. 291.

knowledge. In the wake of the most destructive conflict in human memory, which was an intellectual as well as a military confrontation, how might intellectual life, its institutions, and its practitioners be rebuilt from the ruins of war?

The First World War ushered new ways of waging war into the twentieth century. The logic of total war meant that whole societies were mobilized in prosecuting industrial and mechanized warfare where the distinction between civilian and combatant was increasingly blurred.[5] This was evident not only in the wider societal mobilization for war, but also in the conflict's targets and victims, with this war seeing the first aerial bombardment of civilian populations, mass internment of enemy alien civilians, and the vast displacement of populations.[6] The conflict was inaugurated by infamous instances of cultural destruction in 1914, such as the burning of Louvain library in August and the shelling of Reims Cathedral the following month, both by the German army. These acts quickly became notorious around the world as examples of the wanton excess of modern warfare.

Beyond the well-known examples of Louvain and Reims cultural life sustained severe damage across Europe in a series of interconnected ways that took years, and sometimes decades, to resolve.[7] Universities, libraries, churches, schools, and other sites of cultural importance were destroyed by long-range artillery fire, aerial bombing raids, or deliberate acts of vandalism by armies as they advanced or retreated. In eastern Serbia, the Bulgarian army sought to eradicate Serbian cultural influence through the destruction of books, manuscripts, and archives, while, in northern Italy, Austrian and German forces conducted bombing raids that caused significant damage to churches, museums, libraries, and archives.[8] These examples are far

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[5]  John Horne, 'Introduction: Mobilizing for "Total" War', in Horne ed., *State, Society and Mobilization in Europe during the First World War* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 1–17; Roger Chickering and Stig Förster eds., *Great War, Total War: Combat and Mobilization on the Western Front, 1914–1918* (Cambridge, 2000).

[6]  Tammy Proctor, *Civilians in a World at War, 1914–1918* (New York, 2010), p. 3.

[7]  Alan Kramer has argued that cultural destruction was 'intrinsic' to the war itself. Kramer, *Dynamic of Destruction: Culture and Mass Killing in the First World War* (Oxford, 2007), p. 159.

[8]  Milovan Pisarri, 'Bulgarian Crimes against Civilians in Occupied Serbia during the First World War', *Balcanica*, 44 (2013), pp. 357–90; Kramer, *Dynamic of Destruction*, pp. 55–57; Robert Bevan, *The Destruction of Memory: Architecture at War*, 2nd ed. (London, 2016).

from exhaustive.[9] The deliberate destruction of sites of cultural import-
ance in wartime contravened the 1907 Hague Convention, which stipulated
that 'buildings dedicated to religion, art, science, or charitable purposes'
should not be targeted unless they were being used for military reasons.[10]

Beyond built infrastructure, cultural life suffered severe and direct
damage through the loss of human life: many young scholars, writers,
and artists died in combat at the front lines. The mass deployment of
troops at the beginning of the war meant that those with specialist skills
were often mobilized in regular fighting units. As the war progressed,
these men began to be 'combed out' to work on war-related projects more
closely aligned with their skills. Nevertheless, the move came too late for
promising intellectuals, such as the British physicist Henry Moseley and
the French sociologist Robert Hertz, both of whom had already been
killed in action. The deaths of individuals constituted a loss to wider
intellectual life that was understood as such by contemporaries.[11]

International cultural life suffered in more subtle ways during the war;
the disruption caused by the conflict to international communications
mechanisms meant that, in many cases, the exchange of people, books,
and ideas – essential to much pre-war intellectual activity – was severely
impeded. Cultural destruction, such as that which took place at Louvain
in 1914, was central to wartime cultural mobilization and the creation of
an image of the barbaric enemy.[12] The conflict was fought as a cultural

9   Vėjas Gabriel Liulevičius, *War Land on the Eastern Front: Culture, National
    Identity, and German Occupation in World War I* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 129;
    Roger O'Keefe, *The Protection of Cultural Property in Armed Conflict*
    (Cambridge, 2006), p. 37; James Wilford Garner, *International Law and the
    World War*, vol. 1 (London, 1920), p. 451.
10  O'Keefe, *The Protection of Cultural Property*, p. 24.
11  Tomás Irish, 'Fractured Families: Educated Elites in Britain and France and the
    Challenge of the Great War', *Historical Journal*, 57.2 (2014), pp. 509–30;
    Jay Winter, *The Great War and the British People* (London, 1985), pp. 92–9;
    Jean-François Sirinelli, *Génération intellectuelle: khâgneux et normaliens dans
    l'entre-deux-guerres* (Paris, 1988), pp. 26–30.
12  Pierre Purseigle, 'La Cité de demain: French Urbanism in War and
    Reconstruction, 1914–1928', *French History*, 35.4 (2021), pp. 508–9. On
    reconstruction, see Tammy Proctor, 'The Louvain Library and US Ambition in
    Interwar Belgium', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 50.2 (2015), pp. 147–67;
    Luc Verpoest, Leen Engelen, Rajesh Heynickx, et al. eds., *Revival after the Great
    War: Rebuild, Remember, Repair, Reform* (Leuven, 2020); Nicholas Bullock
    and Luc Verpoest eds., *Living with History, 1914–1964: Rebuilding Europe
    after the First and Second World Wars and the Role of Heritage Preservation*
    (Leuven, 2011).

war with intellectuals trading bitter manifestos across borders in defence of their national cause, with the Allies claiming to defend Western 'civilization' and Germany invoking its *Kultur*.[13] The most infamous intellectual manifesto was the German 'Appeal to the Civilized World', published in October 1914. Signed by ninety-three eminent German intellectuals, it defended Germany's conduct in the war while denying that atrocities had been committed by the German army in Belgium.[14] It elicited a strong international reaction with many intellectuals and institutions in allied and neutral countries severing ties with their erstwhile colleagues as a consequence.[15] The bitterness of wartime divisions meant that international connections, too, would need to be rebuilt in a process that took years.

Against the backdrop of unprecedented violence being waged on cultural life, the war saw the beginning of humanitarian efforts to assist intellectual communities and institutions. Aid of this type was often presented as a demonstration of solidarity between allied nations and a means through which nations mobilized culturally during the conflict. Following the German invasion of 1914, hundreds of Belgian refugee scholars were accommodated at institutions across Europe and North America. A 'Belgian University' was formed at Cambridge to allow exiles to continue their studies and to conduct research, where one observer claimed that it was evidence that 'the sacred hopes of our country have come through all her trials undiminished'.[16] Serbian scholars were afforded a similar welcome in allied countries from the onset of the Central Powers' offensive in late 1915.[17] The housing of refugee intellectuals privileged them as symbols and custodians of national life in exile. These relief efforts emphasized the importance of ensuring not only the good health of intellectual refugees, but the

[13]  Anne Rasmussen, 'Mobilising Minds', in Jay Winter ed., *The Cambridge History of the First World War*, vol. 3 (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 390–418.

[14]  Rasmussen, 'Mobilising Minds', pp. 390–9; Tomás Irish, *The University at War 1914–25: Britain, France and the United States* (Basingstoke, 2015), pp. 25–7; 32–25.

[15]  Robert Fox, *Science Without Frontiers: Cosmopolitan and National Interests in the World of Learning, 1870–1940* (Corvallis, OR, 2016), pp. 45–52; Irish, *The University at War*, pp. 83–7.

[16]  Charles Dejace, 'The Belgian University at Cambridge', *A Book of Belgium's Gratitude* (London, 1916), p. 299.

[17]  Miloš Paunović, Milan Igrutinovic, Dejan Zec, et al., *Exile in the Classroom: Serbian Students and Pupils in Great Britain During the First World War* (Belgrade, 2016), p. 59.

continuity of their scholarly work and, in turn, national cultural life. This paradigm would be replicated on a larger scale in the post-war years.

Wartime relief to intellectuals had value in demonstrating solidarity with fellow allied states in wartime but it also spoke to the belief that cultural pursuits might form a protective bulwark against the barbarism of modern warfare. In many belligerent states, war libraries were established to send books to troops at the front, keeping their minds healthy and active against the ravages of total war.[18] Book relief emerged in other ways that spoke to intellectual, educational, and class differentiation, notably where soldiers and civilians were being held in internment or prisoner-of-war camps.[19] While the Hague Convention of 1907 made no specific provision for the treatment of interned intellectuals, many relief organizations sent specialist reading and laboratory equipment to camps, with informal 'universities' set up to structure learning.[20] Alfred T. Davies, who oversaw a British book relief scheme, stated that his work was 'absolutely essential to save the prisoners from mental starvation'.[21] A French prisoner of war newspaper described the camp library as 'a wonderful intellectual dining room where we can satisfy our literary and scientific appetites'.[22] The use of this humanitarian metaphor equated literal hunger with an

[18] T. W. Koch, *Books in the War: The Romance of Library War* Service (New York, 1919); Sara Haslam, 'Reading, Trauma and Literary Caregiving 1914–1918: Helen Mary Gaskell and the War Library', *Journal of Medical Humanities*, 41 (2020), pp. 305–21.

[19] *Report of the International Committee of the Red Cross on its Activities During the Second World War, Volume I, General Activities* (Geneva, 1948), p. 276; Alfred T. Davies, *Student Captives: an Account of the Work of the British Prisoners of War Book Scheme* (London, 1917); T. W. Koch, *War Libraries and Allied Studies* (New York, 1918).

[20] 'Convention (IV) Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land and its Annex: Regulations Concerning the Laws and Customs of War on Land. The Hague, 18 October 1907', ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/Treaty.xsp?action=openDocument&documentId=4D47F92DF3966A7EC12563CD002D6788 [accessed 1 August 2022]; Matthew Stibbe, *British Civilian Internees in Germany: The Ruhleben Camp, 1914–18* (Manchester, 2008), pp. 80–94; Alon Rachaminov, *POWs and the Great War: Captivity on the Eastern Front* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 99–101.

[21] 'Books for Prisoners', *The Times*, 29 December 1916, p. 11; Davies, *Student Captives*, p. 17; Edmund G.C. King, '"Books Are More To Me Than Food": British Prisoners of War as Readers, 1914–1918', *Book History*, 16 (2013), pp. 246–71.

[22] *L'intermède: Camp de Würzburg*, 14 January 1917, p. 47.

**Figure 0.1** British war library workers prepare book parcels to send to wounded British soldiers, 1916 (Topical Press Agency/Stringer/Getty)

absence of specialist reading material; in this way, it also claimed that the needs of middle-class intellectuals differed from those of other sufferers as they needed intellectual as well as corporeal sustenance. As will be shown throughout this book, this metaphor became widespread in the early 1920s across a range of organizations and initiatives.

While the war posed an existential threat to European intellectual life, the conditions underpinning this threat did not abate with the signing of the armistice in November 1918. Violence of different types continued with great intensity across much of the continent into the early 1920s.[23] Hunger and disease were rife in Central and Eastern Europe by 1919, while the mass displacement caused by the Bolshevik Revolution and the Russian Civil War led to a major refugee crisis. Spiralling inflation gripped countries like Germany and Austria, meaning that practitioners of intellectual pursuits were unable to purchase books, periodicals, or laboratory equipment. Cumulatively, these

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[23]  Robert Gerwarth, *The Vanquished: Why the First World War Failed to End, 1917–1923* (London, 2016).

events put millions of lives in Europe at risk, among them thousands of intellectuals and their institutions, many of whom had already suffered severe disruption owing to the First World War.

All of this meant that when James Shotwell wrote of the damage wrought by the war on intellectual life in 1919, the worst was still to come. What followed was not just an act of reconstruction, but an improvised humanitarian intervention to save Europe's intellectual life. Governments, philanthropists, and humanitarian organizations oversaw a vast range of initiatives designed to save intellectuals and rebuild cultural institutions in the face of widespread fears over the fate of European civilization and the perceived threat of disorder across the continent. This book tells the story of how intellectual lives were saved from starvation and disease, libraries were rebuilt and restocked, and refugees were placed in new homes because they were deemed to be intellectuals. It argues that intellectuals and intellectual life were seen as an important emblem of the old, pre-war European order; thus, their salvation and restoration were symbolic means of safeguarding peace and stability following the terrible bloodshed of the Great War and the humanitarian crisis that followed.

## Intellectual Relief: Definitions and Contexts

*Feeding the Mind* shows how the reconstruction of intellectual life formed a distinct and important part of the broader effort to rebuild Europe and save lives in the aftermath of the First World War. I term all of this intellectual relief. This form of relief was highly elitist, in that it was directed towards educated, middle-class communities, and was also seen as an emergency measure in response to a crisis of European intellectual life. Intellectual relief was both literal and metaphorical; it proceeded from the conviction that not only did the physical lives of intellectuals need to be saved, but that intellectual life itself – an abstract, intangible entity – needed salvation in the face of a mortal threat. Intellectual relief stressed that it was insufficient to merely restore intellectuals to physical health through feeding and medicines; their minds, too, required sustenance and restoration. Humanitarian organizations of differing sizes led schemes that provided food and medical aid to intellectuals at risk of death, but also supplied books, laboratory equipment, and other materials so that they could continue

their creative work as both producers and imparters of knowledge. Beyond this, intellectual relief entailed the reconstruction of institutions like libraries and universities that had been destroyed by the violence of total war. Cumulatively, it sought to reconstruct Europe's intellectual life as it had been in 1914.

This type of humanitarian activity constituted an important element in the quest for stability in post-war Europe; it was, in many cases, directed towards new states in Central and Eastern Europe where democracies replaced deposed multi-ethnic empires. Here, the study of humanitarian aid offers a unique perspective on how philanthropists and policy makers sought to build stable states through the work of intellectuals; not so much in terms of what they researched or wrote, but what they represented as figures who were deeply embedded in the pursuit and dissemination of knowledge and who embodied middle-class interests. It is an example of what Charles Maier called 'recasting bourgeois Europe', a reaffirmation of middle-class interests against the perceived threats to order posed by Bolshevism, the growing strength of the working classes, or calls for self-determination from empire.[24]

Intellectual relief utilized both the practices and the language of post-war humanitarianism. In Austria, Poland, and Russia, 'intellectual kitchens' were set up to provide food and nourishment exclusively for those labelled intellectuals. In a similar manner, intellectuals were identified for special assistance among the 150,000 Russian refugees stranded in Constantinople in 1920 and 1921, with the League of Nations resolving in August 1921 that it was 'especially desirable' that they receive 'special protection and employment'.[25] Across Europe, from Vienna to Berlin, Budapest to Warsaw, Paris to Odesa, and Belgrade to Moscow, there is much evidence of a similar emphasis on ensuring the wellbeing of those involved in intellectual and cultural pursuits which marked them as a distinct category of sufferers. *Feeding the Mind* explores the contours of intellectual reconstruction and humanitarianism as a discrete project

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[24] Charles S. Maier, *Recasting Bourgeois Europe: Stabilization in France, Germany, and Italy in the Decade after World War I* (Princeton, NJ, 1975). This idea has also been explored in histories of humanitarianism such as Michelle Tusan, 'Genocide, Famine and Refugees on Film: Humanitarianism and the First World War', *Past & Present*, 237.1 (2017), pp. 197–235; Emily Baughan, 'International Adoption and Anglo-American Internationalism, c 1918-1925', *Past & Present*, 239.1 (2018), pp. 181–217.

[25] 'Conference on the Question of Russian Refugees', 24 August, 1921, League of Nations Archives (LNA), Geneva, C-277-M-203–1921-VII.

because that is how it was viewed by a wide range of contemporary actors, including politicians, diplomats, philanthropists, aid workers, and intellectuals. Across organizations such as the American Relief Administration (ARA), the Imperial War Relief Fund (IWRF), the Friends' Emergency and War Victims' Relief Committee (FEWVRC), and the Rockefeller philanthropies, the category of the intellectual (and the related field of 'intellectual life') emerged again and again as necessitating bespoke, distinct, and discrete aid in post-war Europe. Seen as emblematic of wounded European civilization, intellectual relief was almost existential.

Alongside threats to human life presented by post-war famine, disease, and displacement, the peril of cultural death loomed large over post-war Europe. Discourses of civilizational decline, famously articulated by Paul Valéry and Oswald Spengler, were widespread among European intellectual elites following the end of the First World War and, in this reading, ideas and culture themselves faced extinction. A 1921 appeal by the British Quakers stated its fear that 'Austria, the beggared nation, will starve in her rags; a noble and splendid civilization will have passed away'.[26] Following the example of aid to prisoners of war in the recently-ended conflict, humanitarian appeals frequently spoke of the 'intellectual hunger' or 'intellectual starvation' of individuals in central and Eastern Europe who could not access recent literature and continue their cerebral work for the cause of civilization. The breakdown of cultural life was further evidence of post-war disorder which in turn provided an impetus for aid programmes to disperse literature and laboratory equipment to those in need. In the words of the ARA's head, Herbert Hoover, it was a matter of 'keeping their minds alive well as their bodies'.[27] This phrasing showed how those engaged in intellectual relief drew on fears of civilizational decline but utilized the language of humanitarianism in order to locate their work firmly within that sphere.[28]

[26] *Hidden Tragedy in Vienna* (London: Friends Relief Committee, Vienna, 1921), Library of the Society of Friends (LSF), London, YM/MfS/FEWVRC/4/3/7/4, pp. 26–7.

[27] Memorandum regarding talk of Mr. Whittemore, 1 January 1921, Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Library (CURBML), Bakhmeteff Archive of Russian and Eastern European Culture, Columbia University, New York, Committee for the Education of Russian Youth in Exile Records (BAR Ms Coll/ CERYE), 1914–1939, Box 99, Folder 10.

[28] Didier Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present* (Berkeley, CA, 2012), pp. 2–3.

*Feeding the Mind* has two overlapping and mutually reinforcing themes, being the fate of intellectuals and intellectual life in post-war Europe and the humanitarian effort undertaken to reconstruct Europe in the same period. Neither of these themes is examined in isolation; indeed, I argue that each elucidates the other in a reciprocal manner. Humanitarianism shaped the organization of post-war intellectual life and the squalid conditions and cultural destruction of the war informed the humanitarian response that followed. In this manner, the two themes – seemingly distant and traditionally occupying distant places in the historiography – are deeply interconnected.

Intellectual relief was a widespread but limited element of post-First World War humanitarianism which sheds important light on the emergence of humanitarian practices in this key transitional period.[29] 'Intellectuals' were identified as especially deserving of aid owing to their societal and cultural eminence, which, in the eyes of philanthropists, politicians and many aid workers, differentiated their needs from those of other sufferers in the wider humanitarian landscape. Davide Rodogno has shown that 'civilization' was a key political and moral norm underpinning early twentieth-century humanitarianism; the concern to bolster civilization in areas seen as 'less civilized', such as Eastern Europe and the Near East, was fundamental to much humanitarian activity.[30] The idea of civilization was premised upon racial and gendered visions of global order. The same preoccupation with civilization informed intellectual relief and cast scholars, writers, artists, and students, as well as the institutions that supported them, as the elite embodiments of European

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[29] Bruno Cabanes, *The Great War and the Origins of Humanitarianism 1918–1924* (Cambridge, 2014); Julia F. Irwin, *Making the World Safe: The American Red Cross and a Nation's Humanitarian Awakening* (Oxford, 2013); Tammy M. Proctor, 'An American Enterprise: British Participation in US Food Relief Programmes (1914–1923)', *First World War Studies*, 5.1 (2014), pp. 29–42; Keith David Watenpaugh, *Bread from Stones: The Middle East and the Making of Modern Humanitarianism* (Oakland, CA, 2015); Branden Little, 'An Explosion of New Endeavours: Global Humanitarian Responses to Industrialised Warfare in the First World War Era', *First World War Studies*, 5.1 (2014), pp. 1–16; Heather Jones, 'International or Transnational? Humanitarian Action During the First World War', *European Review of History/Revue européenne d'histoire*, 16.5 (2009), pp. 697–713; Davide Rodogno, *Night on Earth: A History of International Humanitarianism in the Near East, 1918–1930* (Cambridge, 2021); Daniel Maul, *The Politics of Service: US-amerikanische Quäker und internationale humanitäre Hilfe 1917–1945* (Berlin, 2022).

[30] Rodogno, *Night on Earth*, pp. 2–4.