

**IN THE SHADOW OF CLIO:
WORLD WAR I CAPTIVITY AND HISTORIOGRAPHY**

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ABSTRACT

Our study presents the development of research on the POW issue from the Great War to the present day. In doing so, we address the lack of comprehensive historiographical works focusing on prisoners of war during the First World War. We emphasize the social consequences of the neglect of the subject. Furthermore, we examine the evolution of interest in the subject by period. We examine the purpose of the first works on POWs and the main features of the texts published in Hungary, Austria and Serbia, moving from one period to the next. In addition, we try to respond to the changes in attitude occasionally evident in the works. Our study concludes with a summary of the development of Serbian historiography, which may explain the marginalization of the issue of POWs.

INTRODUCTION

The first major international conflict of the twentieth century has always been of great interest. As a result, readers interested in the subject can enrich their knowledge with a vast amount of professional literature. However, these works have serious shortcomings. Most of them deal exclusively with the theatres of war and foreign policy. In contrast, a minority deals with everyday life and the hinterland,

but almost all give only a cursory account of the ordeals of prisoners of war. Hence, Michael Howard's apt comment that „*there has been no shortage of books on the topic of First World War in the last half-century, but if we count them all, we learn very little from them.*”¹

After the end of the world war, the neglect of prisoner of war problem across Europe had severe consequences. On the one hand, our knowledge about prisoners of war is still incomplete and superficial. On the other hand, because the perception of the time was that being a prisoner of war was a disgrace, researchers mostly ignored this issue, which meant that former prisoners of war could not take their rightful place among veterans.²

Interest in the Great War faded after the Second World War, and it was not until the end of the 20th century that the topic generated serious interest. However, the issue of prisoners of war remained obscure. The status quo of almost a century began to change with the new questions raised during the centenary and pre-centenary periods, including the bottom-up presentation of historical events. Despite this, the lack of interest in prisoner of war issues and the lack of research on the subject remains a severe problem, and the lack of literature is particularly true for the former Austro-Hungarian Empire.

HISTORIOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT: LITERATURE ON CAPTIVITY IN AUSTRIA, HUNGARY, AND SERBIA

The history of captivity, an inevitable part of the First World War, spans longer than the armed conflict. It begins in August 1914 and ends in the summer of 1922, when the last groups of prisoners of war leave Soviet Russia from the port of Vladivostok. From Rachamimov's research, we know that prisoners spent an average of 3–4 years in captivity, and most of them were able to return home in 1918–19. However, this was not necessarily the case for prisoners in the Russian Empire. German, Austro-Hungarian, and Turkish prisoners taken to Siberia during the war were not allowed to return until 1921–22. Their number may have been approximately 430 thousand.³

In the period following the First World War, the processing of the history of POWs was similar in both Hungary and Austria. The main intention was to familiarise the public with the issue of prisoners of war. The main feature of the post-war POW literature was that it was written mainly by people who had been POWs themselves or by senior officials directly connected to the issue through their work. In the case of Austria, this is particularly true, as is the fact that the prisoners of war in Russia have been the main focus of attention. The main reason for this is that it was the country where the most significant number of Austro-Hungarian

prisoners, some 2.1 million,⁴ were held, and from where members of the International Red Cross most often reported inhuman treatment.⁵ By the time the Monarchy collapsed, only 4.595 officers and 675.719 soldiers had returned home.⁶

The above facts explain the initial interest in the subject. The first major work on the issue was written by the Swedish nurse Elsa Brändström, entitled *Unter Kriegsgefangenen in Russland und Sibirien 1914–1920*.⁷ The importance of this work lies in the fact that the author describes in detail the living conditions of German and Austro-Hungarian soldiers. From Rachamimov's research, we learn that he got his information first-hand, as Brändström, the daughter of the Swedish ambassador and a patron of the Swedish Red Cross, coordinated the relief of prisoners of war for more than five years. Her work has taken her to Russia, where, faced with the problems of the international laws of war, she has raised awareness of the importance of renegotiating them.⁸ Her work is essential because - unlike most Red Cross nurses - she had a deep knowledge of the conditions of captivity and, unlike others, Brändström did not write her work based on national stereotypes.

In the case of Austria-Hungary – in addition to the Red Cross –, we must also highlight the publication work of the following high-ranking officials:

1. Ernst Streer Ritter von Streeruwitz (1874-1952),⁹
2. Heinrich von Raabl-Werner (1875-1941),¹⁰
3. Maximilian Ronge (1874-1953).¹¹

The authors mentioned above are essential because, on the one hand, they have collected useful, factual information on prisoners of war and, on the other hand, in their treatment of the subject, they provide an insight into the attitude of the military and civilian leadership of the dualist Monarchy towards the prisoners of war.¹²

During the war, Streeruwitz¹³ was head of the Prisoner of War Department 10 of the Imperial and Royal War Ministry and had easy access to prisoner of war documents. A large part of his work concerns the treatment of Russian prisoners and addresses the dualist state's political activism relating to prisoners. His work, *Kriegsgefangene im Weltkrieg 1914-1918*, was never published in print, but its manuscript is still accessible in the Heeresgeschichtliches Museum in Vienna.¹⁴ In it, based on Rachamimov's summary, Streeruwitz formulated the following interlocking arguments:

1. the main reason for the suffering of Austro-Hungarian prisoners of war in the First World War was the non-compliance of the Russians with the Hague Convention,
2. the Austro-Hungarian government, taking a high moral ground, did not take revenge on the Russian POWs, although the military leadership¹⁵ demanded it,

3. aid packages could only alleviate the suffering of Austro-Hungarian prisoners in Russia,
4. the aid was insufficient because of state deficiencies.¹⁶

Building on the above arguments, Streeruwitz interpreted that there was no reason for the families of prisoners of war to regard the Monarchy with hostility. That said, we believe that the deflection of blame and anti-Russianism may have played a significant role in forming this opinion.

Heinrich von Raabl-Werner was, similar to Streeruwitz, a high-ranking official who handled prisoner of war affairs from the outbreak of the war until the last official prisoner shipments returned home in 1922. He also had access to archival sources, and, echoing Rachamimov, we stress his willingness to admit the mistakes made by the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in the POW issue. Nonetheless, despite this, he, too, blamed the other side for the damage and suffering caused.¹⁷ His works loosely related to our theme are titled *Österreich-Ungarns offizielle Kriegsgefangenenfürsorge*¹⁸ and *Der Einfluß der Propaganda unter den Kriegsgefangenen in Rußland auf den Zusammenbruch Österreich-Ungarns*.¹⁹

The third person was General Maximilian Ronge, head of the intelligence bureau, mainly responsible for eradicating anti-Bolshevik and anti-Habsburg sentiment and the repatriation of prisoners of war. His memoirs *Kriegs- und Industriespionage: 12 Jahre Kundschaftdienst*, published in 1933, provide an insight into the attitude of the Monarchy's military leadership towards prisoners of war.²⁰

One can conclude from the work of the above authors that the first post-war writings focused mainly on the humanitarian treatment of prisoners of war and explained the violation of the international laws of war by the principle of reciprocal treatment.²¹ The main intention of the three high-ranking officers' works was to justify their wartime actions since they omit from their writings the steady deterioration of conditions from the second half of the war onwards and classify it as mere enemy propaganda.

The most complex recollection of the experience of POWs is that of Austria. The Austrian Prisoner of War Association published the work in 1931 under the title *In Feindeshand*. The work contains narratives published after the war, written mainly by officers. These texts appeared as essays, memoirs, and diaries. The source collection includes the writings of 477 prisoners of war. According to Rachamimov, only 30 of the 477 contributors to the volume were man-at-arms. Despite this, the work is of great historical importance, as it has made the lives and ordeals of World War I POWs known to the public throughout Europe.²²

The book intended to prove that the soldiers fell into captivity through no fault of their own and attempt to convince the public to accept this. Nevertheless, the work

has a severe shortcoming as it deals almost exclusively with prisoners of war in Russia²³ This explanation is straightforward. The Russian prisoner of war situation was considered the most inhuman. If we examine Reinhard Nachtigal's calculations, we can conclude that most of the prisoners of the Tsarist empire came from the army of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, some 2.1 million. The death rate was also the highest in Russia, Nachtigal estimates the mortality to have ranged from 400.000 to 470.000 with a death rate of 18-20%. However, some estimates put the mortality rate as high as 40%.²⁴ In comparison, the Monarchy's mortality rate of 7.6% proved to be more favorable, attributed to the proper treatment of the people involved.²⁵

Following the end of the Great War, the issue of POWs was also a severe problem in Hungary, which meant that the general public was generally uninformed. Although Ármin Lóránt, an employee of the Hungarian Red Cross POW office – whose work had enabled him to obtain information on the fate of prisoners from the beginning of the war – wrote a summary of the POW issue as early as 1915,²⁶ it essentially went unheeded.²⁷ The historians recognized the severity of the problem; thus, research on the subject started in Hungary also. As a result, a year before the publication of *In Feindeshand*, in 1930, the Athenaeum Literary and Printing Company published the two-volume *History of Hungarian Prisoners of War*²⁸. This large-scale historical work of 1,000 pages, with many illustrations, is written as a descriptive work on the prisoners of war of the Great War. However, the work offers far more than that. The two volumes deal with the treatment of prisoners of war, from medieval measures to the First World War. The writing devotes a separate chapter to developing international efforts and discusses the ordeals of soldiers captured on various fronts in different units. Hence, the texts provide the reader with much more than *In Feindeshand*. The work discusses those caught in the Balkans, the Kingdom of Italy, Romania, France, and Russia. The readers can also trace the fate of the Austro-Hungarian soldiers captured by the Western forces, and the interested can also find out more about the fate of our prisoners in exotic Central Asia. The monumental work addresses the POW guardianship in Austria-Hungary and concludes with the repatriation of the POWs. From our point of view, this work is of particular importance, as it quotes from diaries and reminiscences whose originals got lost in the storms of history.

In contrast to the above, authors in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes – later the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, which unified after the end of the world war –, showed little interest in the subject. The main issues of Serbian historiography clustered around the borders of the Serbian state, and thus the process of unification was in the spotlight after the First World War.²⁹

We can confirm this by the fact that post-war South Slavic historians tended to focus on the story of the South Slavic volunteers, with a biased, political edge. There

was a simple explanation for this, and the answer is in the above line of thought. The Serbian volunteer corps that emerged from the POW camps were celebrated in Yugoslavia, as authors on the subject argued they had shed their blood for the unification of the South Slavic peoples. This is problematic because we now know that most South Slavic „volunteer” soldiers were not volunteers. Thus the credibility of the claims made in the above mentioned South Slavic works is highly questionable.³⁰

Analyzing the above statements, we can conclude that the POW literature between the world wars had a specific purpose: to educate the public about POWs and raise former POWs to the ranks of World War veterans. Consequently, as Rachamimov concurs,³¹ scholarly works of this period were rare.

With the outbreak of the Second World War, new perspectives appeared, which put the research on the Great War on hold for a long time. The enormous losses in the new world war, especially among civilians, meant that the First World War research became increasingly marginalized. The focus in Central Europe shifted to research on internationalist aspirations. In this context, we can only mention the research of the POWs, who became ‘internationalist volunteers’³² Meanwhile, studies of humanitarian views³³ regarding the Second World War have come to the fore in the West. As a result, research on the Second World War cast a shadow over the First. In Austria, the discourse on the topic almost completely halted, and until the mid-1950s, only a few memoirs and other sources came to light.³⁴ The situation in Austria and throughout Europe only changed with the emergence of younger generations of historians. An early contribution to the study of the First World War was a collection of essays published in 1983.

From the 1990s, there has been a growing interest in the subject. Perhaps this can be explained by the fact that some historians began to look at the POW question through the lens of social history. The latter include Gerald H. Davies’ *The Life of Prisoners of War in Russia, 1914-1918*.³⁵ The one problem with the book is that it makes little distinction between officer and crew POWs. In addition to Davies, by the 1990s, people of different nationalities such as Hannes Leidinger, Annette Becker, Uta Hinz, Richard Speed, Reinhard Nachtigal, Alon Rachamimov, Oksana Nagornaja, Giovanna Procacci, Heather Jones, and many others entered the scene.³⁶ Their research methods are very much related to those mentioned above. The majority of them deal with the role of prisoners in politics and society. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that much of the literature on the subject still focuses on the different camps and the conditions prevailing there, which is a significant gap.

Nachtigal³⁷ is a pioneer in the field of prisoner of war statistics and mortality and addresses the POW situation in Russia and the activities of the Red Cross. Another notable author is Verena Moritz,³⁸ who writes primarily on POW labor.

In reviewing their work, it is evident that the main problem with the subject is that the issue of POWs in Russia is still privileged in comparison to others. Among the more crucial Austrian authors, we can also mention the military historian Manfred Rauchensteiner, former director of the *Heeresgeschichtliche Museum*. In 1993 Rauchensteiner published his monograph *Der Tod des Doppeladlers*,³⁹ which is still considered the definitive literature on the history of the First World War. The work has been revised and expanded several times⁴⁰ and is also available in Hungarian. Rauchensteiner's importance lies in the fact that, unlike previous authors, he devotes an entire chapter to the POW question in the empire while also dealing with the POW practices of the enemy states.⁴¹

Austria has made significant progress in research on the subject and has filled many knowledge gaps. While previously historians had been concerned with the fate of Austro-Hungarian prisoners in enemy countries, more recently – probably because of the broader historical perspective – the prisoners' future in the Monarchy has also gained prominence. The latter was the subject of a major research project led by Verena Moritz between 2014 and 2017.⁴²

Although small in number, research in Hungary began in the 1960s, after the Second World War. This research focused mainly on the fate of Austro-Hungarian soldiers taken prisoner by the Entente, emphasizing Russian prisoners of war. In addition to the above, Hungarian researchers have also paid particular attention to the role of Hungarian prisoners of war in the revolutions in Russia, in line with ideological expectations. The most notable researchers on the topic during the period were members of the armed forces, including Jenő Györkei, Antal Józsa, Alajos Vajda, and György Milei.⁴³ The first studies began to appear in the 1950s. In 1956, György Milei wrote a study entitled *Some questions of the ideological image of the Hungarian communist prisoner of war movement in Soviet Russia*. He deals with the role of prisoners of war in the communist movement in Hungary. He seeks to answer how prisoners of war were acquainted with Leninist ideas and outline the ideological flaws of former prisoners of war, all in the context of Marxism–Leninism, which means that his work requires a solid critical approach to the sources.⁴⁴ Antal Józsa studied the history of Hungarian prisoners of war in Russia and the revolutions in Russia. Thanks to many archival sources, his work is still valid today, albeit with some caution.⁴⁵ Both Györkei and Vajda contributed their names to the topic mentioned above, have numerous associated publications, and have often published together.⁴⁶ It is clear from these that a thematic approach to the issue of captivity had begun, though there was also a centrally established main line of research. Unfortunately, after the initial momentum, research on the history of Hungarian prisoners of war stopped for a long time after mapping the lives of prisoners in Russia.

In 1981, Attila Bonhardt published an excellent article entitled *The Repatriation of Hungarian Prisoners of War in the First World War*,⁴⁷ based on primary sources. One could read for the first time about the method and difficulties of repatriating prisoners. From the 1980s, we can only add the work of József Gál to the list,⁴⁸ which – although it did not receive much attention – was the first in Hungary to examine the somewhat limited economic and social processes in the hinterland during the war. The author describes the circumstances of the mass recruitment of prisoners of war, the process of requesting them, the development of their quality of life, and their ordeals, which lasted for several years. The methodology of his work has been of great help to the author in writing this text.

For a long time afterward, there was no literature on prisoners of war in Hungary. The topic only came to the fore again after the regime transition, especially in the early 2000s. At that time, thematic research began, which continues to this day. A series of researchers discovered the lack of historical literature on the POW camps of the First World War, resulting in a series of works on the history of the camps. These include Zsófia Csák's small monography titled *The History of the Ostffyasszonyfa POW Camp 1915–1918*⁴⁹ and Ferenc Dely's *The Agonies of Home-sickness. Csót-camp, 1915–1923*,⁵⁰ but we also have to mention Tamás Miklós, who deals with the history of the POW camp in Esztergom.⁵¹ Finally, Lajos Horváth's, Attila Nagy's and László Varga's work on the imperial and royal prisoner of war camps in the region of Csallóköz (1914–1918), which follows the fate of the centers in Dunaszerdahely, Nagymegyér, and Somorja from their establishment to their evacuation, concludes the series of works on similar topics.⁵²

Besides the above, the fate of soldiers captured in the territory of the enemy states also came into focus. In 2014, Gábor Margittai published his work *„Ghost Soldiers of Donkey Island”*,⁵³ which tells the story of the soldiers imprisoned on Asinara, Sardinia, from their capture in Serbia to their – in a lucky case – homecoming. In addition to the Italian POWs, the history of the Russian POWs became a subject of great interest again today. However, it has not yet been the subject of a monographic study. Work has also begun on the prisoners of war in Serbia, and Tibor Molnár, the archivist from Zenta, has published several works on the *„death march”*,⁵⁴ but many questions remain unanswered. It is clear from the above that research on the subject gained considerable momentum around the centenary. Still, the thematic analysis outlined above did not include the fate of soldiers imprisoned in the Monarchy. What makes the situation even worse is that the significant monographs and syntheses published in Hungary only deal with POWs in a few sentences, which is problematic because we know that the economy of the Monarchy was saved from collapse thanks to the employment of POWs.

The works mentioned above often fail to describe the living conditions of the prisoners released for labor and the conditions in the POW camps. This is also true in the case of the large-scale work by Ignác Romsics entitled *History of Hungary in the 20th century*, which, in the section on the First World War, only contains the following:

„During the four-year war, the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy armed a total of 9 million men... Of the 9 million, 1.1 million died, almost 3.6 million were wounded, and more than 2 million were taken captive. [...] The prolonged war had profound consequences for economic, social, and political life. The conscription of newer and newer generations caused a serious shortage of labor, which the employment of POWs and women could only alleviate, not replace.”⁵⁵

It is clear from the above quote that, in our view, the issue of prisoners of war within the empire remains inadequately addressed to date. Of course, we cannot ignore that no subject can provide much detail in such monumental histories of states. Still, we nevertheless believe that there are disproportions in the individual chapters. Fortunately, we have witnessed positive changes approaching the centenary. Ignác Romsics's synthesis, entitled *Hungary in the First World War* attempts to describe the ordeals of the prisoners. In the book, Attila Bonhardt illustrates the trial of the Austro-Hungarian POWs in some 30 pages.⁵⁶ The positive influence of the centenary is also evident in later works. Ignác Romsics, in his work *The Great War and the Hungarian Revolutions of 1918–1919*, deals with the issue in more detail, albeit with a mainly economic perspective, and successfully illustrates the indispensability of the prisoners, but also their impact on society. Moreover, it gives us a picture of the severe shortage of labor.

Rural farms and „peasant families suffered above all from the lack of able-bodied men, only partially replaced by prisoners of war assigned to larger farms.”⁵⁷ It was impossible to separate the prisoners of war from the population. As a result, some of „the ‘wives’ who alone ran the farms ended up ‘sleeping with’ the prisoners, often resulting in childbirth. They were later called ‘war children.’”⁵⁸

The above later led to severe tensions between the spouses.

New research – especially local history – has shown that „... the employment of prisoners of war and the Hungarian army stationed in the hinterland helped to alleviate the situation, but could not solve it.”⁵⁹ This also put the masses of prisoners of war in the country through a severe ordeal, as they had to cope with constantly deteriorating food conditions, which also affected their morale. As can be seen from the above, Romsics examines the POW question mainly through the lens of social history, trying to portray a general picture of the difficulties of contemporary Hungarian society and the country's treatment of prisoners of war. However, the author lacks a brief assessment of the everyday life of prisoners of different

nationalities and a sketch of the conditions in the POW camps. The reason for this omission can probably be traced back to the lack of work on the subject.

The analysis above shows that most of the works deal mainly with the soldiers captured by the enemy powers. Neither Austrian nor Hungarian authors have paid much attention to the soldiers held in the territory of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. This is also particularly true for the subject of our thesis since the question of Serbian prisoners of war within the empire, especially in Hungary, remains to be comprehensively addressed. Presumably, this may also be due to language barriers, since the sources and articles on the subject are mainly in Serbian and German and less frequently in English. Therefore, understanding the issue is only possible with the help of South Slavic and some Western works and archival sources. However, the problem is that the historians of Yugoslavia have almost exclusively glorified the South Slavic Entente volunteers, emphasizing the importance of internationalism and the coveted political goal. Thus, there was no serious interest in the fate of the soldiers imprisoned in a given country, especially in the West. A change came in the 1990s, precisely at a time of growing disunity and nationalism in Yugoslavia. To some extent, this has left its mark on historical work.

In 1994, in the city of Temesvár, Božidar Panić, Sima Žarkov, Miloš Krstea, and Andrej Kačora published a work *Arad Fortress – Austro-Hungarian extermination camp for Serbs 1914–1918*,⁶⁰ in which the authors describe the fate of civilians of Serbian nationality interned by the Monarchy. The work displays intense nationalism, and its objectivity is highly questionable. The authors often fall into the trap of national bias and speak of outright genocide of internees and prisoners. According to the authors, the Arad camp was an integral part of a vast genocidal system set up by the imperial political and military leadership with the explicit aim of physically eliminating the Serbian people.⁶¹ They obviously cannot substantiate this. Therefore, they base their opinion on the recollections of eight eyewitnesses, which is problematic because, as the authors repeatedly state, there were thousands of internees in Arad at the beginning of the war, many of whom have left behind some written memories. The objectivity of the work is also questionable because several Hungarian and German sources could have shed a different light on the events in Arad during this period of the World War, but the authors did not use them.

For a long time afterward, no other work on the plight of Serbian prisoners of war in the Monarchy was published. Finally, the silence broke with Isidor Đuković's monograph *Nadjmedjer: Austro-Hungarian camp for Serbs, 1914–1918*.⁶² The author tells the story of the POW camp in Nagymegyér, including the treatment of the prisoners of war. The objectivity of the work is highly questionable. It continues the line of thought of the previous article, according to which the Hungarian armed forces carried out a deliberate genocide in Hungary. Of course,

knowing the prevailing conditions in Serbia, this is not the case. We can conclude that the situation in the Monarchy was much more humane and organized. Nevertheless, although they require strong criticism of the sources, many chapters of the work provide valuable information, as they serve as excellent control material. It reveals the daily caloric intake, the types of punishment, sanitary conditions, the number of prisoners of war.⁶³

The most recent work on this topic dates back to 2017. The authors were Isidor Đuković and Nenad Lukić, and the book tells the story of the Nezsider internment camp and the civilians imprisoned there in a more objective way than the previous publications. The most valuable part of the book is the publication of the – presumably complete – list of persons imprisoned in the camp. Nevertheless, the portrayal of the Serbian people as victims remains prominent in writing.⁶⁴

In addition to these works, some other studies also appeared. However, these texts rely primarily on the above works, sometimes summarising the data presented there, so their mention is negligible. However, it is worth mentioning the collection of sources⁶⁵ that greatly assisted the writing of the thesis, published in 1923 and reprinted in 2014, which contains selected WWI letters of Serbian prisoners and provides insights into the mental state of soldiers of the time as well as the treatment of prisoners of war by the warring parties.

Among the works that deal with the issue of captivity, the results of Anglo-Saxon authors that examine the institution of captivity from a subordinate perspective also stand out. These include the works of Heather Jones⁶⁶ and Niall Ferguson.⁶⁷ The former deals with the violence against prisoners of war and the forced labor and repatriation of prisoners,⁶⁸ while the latter examines the issue of POWs from a subordinate perspective.

A SUMMARY OF SERBIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

The above historiographical summary shows that the history of Serbian prisoners of war in Hungary during the First World War still needs to be objectively processed. There are several reasons for this. On the one hand, there are the language barriers mentioned above. On the other hand, due to the relatively small number of Serbian prisoners of war,⁶⁹ the number of memories left behind is much lower than that of Russian prisoners, making it even more challenging to deal with the subject. It is conceivable that the main reason for encountering literature on the history of camps is that their history is more accessible to grasp than that of the prisoners of war, whose numbers were constantly changing.

Furthermore, it is undeniable that one of the dominant themes of Serbian historiography is the emancipation and unification of Serbs, which has overshadowed

other issues. Still, the rapid advance of the 20th century history scenario has also prevented the complete processing of the decisive events in Serbian history. The disintegration of the state has set off a nationalist wave that has also left its mark on historiography. This is particularly evident when reading about the First and Second World Wars.⁷⁰

To understand the above, we feel it necessary to present the reader with a summary of the history of Serbian historiography, hoping that this will facilitate understanding of the subject of the study. At the same time, the author of this chapter has a severe problem in writing this section, since to date, there has not been a complete study of Serbian historiography.

In the Middle Ages, Serbian historiography developed in two locations similar to Serbian statehood, Zeta and Raška. Of the two centers, the „Serbian one”⁷¹ developed further, which is interesting because in Zeta, the first significant work of historiography, an anonymous chronicle, appeared as early as the 12th century. In contrast, the second center produced its first writing, a collection of biographies, only in the 13th century.⁷²

Medieval Serbian historiography shares a common identity with the historiography of the whole of Europe, as dynastic considerations supported the discipline up until the death of Stephen IV. Uroš.⁷³ The premature death of the Serbian Tsar put an end to all of this. His successor, Stephen V. Uroš,⁷⁴ proved to be a weak-handed ruler. Immediately after his father’s death, turmoil erupted, which soon led to the decline of the Serbian state and the eclipse of medieval historiography.⁷⁵

The promising start of medieval Serbian historiography was brought to an end by the civil wars and the Ottoman conquest, which led to approximately three centuries of stagnation.⁷⁶ Nothing proves this better than the complete disappearance of dynastic historiography from the 14th century onwards, which marks the beginning of the Ottoman conquest. For the Serbs, the only turning point was the Great Serbian Migration of 1690, when a large group of Serbs moved into the territory of the Habsburg Empire. The positive change was that the communities of Serbs found themselves in a cultural, political, and social framework that had a beneficial effect on the development of their cultural and political activity. Thus, the origins of the early modern Serbian historiography unfolded on foreign soil.⁷⁷

The Serbian Matica, founded in 1826 by a few wealthy Serbian merchants from Pest, plays a prominent role in Serbian historiography and is still considered the most crucial milestone of the Serbian national revival. The Matica also published historical literature as part of the national revival. The institution operated in Pest until 1864, when, after lengthy preparations, it moved to Novi Sad in 1864. The reason for the move was that the cultural center of the Serbs shifted to Novi Sad after the Hungarian Civic Revolution and War of Independence of 1848–1849. In

1827, the Matica published a yearbook entitled *Letopis Matice Srpske*, exclusively for Serbian historians. This shows the importance of the institution. Therefore, we can conclude from the above that there was a visible resurgence of Serbian historiography, a slow professionalization, but all this took place on foreign soil.⁷⁸

Once again, Serbian historiography became bicentric, but the professional environment in Serbia was much slower to develop because of the political background. In 1808, a college of higher education came to be in Belgrade. Still, Niederhauser notes that it was more at the secondary school level. It was not until 1905, about a hundred years later, that the institution was upgraded to a university level, meaning that Serbian historians received their professional training here only from that time onwards.⁷⁹

In the 1830s, the publication of Serbian historical sources began in the Habsburg Empire, as contemporaries believed that further development of Serbian history was impossible without them. Monographs and source publications characterized Serbian historiography in the second half of the century. Of particular importance is the fact that works written with a scholarly approach began to appear. The pioneers were Jovan Sterija Popović⁸⁰ and Aleksandar Stojčević. Still, Ilarion Ruvarac,⁸¹ also considered the father of Serbian historical criticism, played a far more significant role in raising Serbian historiography to a scientific level. Ruvarac adopted and applied Leopold von Ranke's *'as it happened'* methodology. His work thus made adequate source criticism the key criterion for serious historical journals. However, the road to adopting his views was not smooth because a 15-year long historiographical dispute erupted in the year following the Serbian Principality's independence in 1878. Romantic historiography faced off against modern. The main reason for this was that the representatives of romantic historiography were nationalists, lacking both the necessary knowledge and the necessary tools. They used the past to legitimize nationalist ideologies and present the Serbian nation's continuity from antiquity to modern times. It is therefore clear that early Serbian historiography did not take into account historical evidence. Ruvarac played an essential role in countering the nationalist „parallel history”. He was able to impose his will on a large part of the historiographical community, and as a result, eventually raised Serbian historiography to an academic level.⁸² This was much needed, as Serbian historiography did not make any significant progress in the first half of the 19th century. Until the middle of the century, no major work emerged.⁸³ The intellectuals still turned their attention to Jovan Rajić's *Istoria raznych slavenskykh narodov naipace Bolgar, Chorvator, i Serbov iz trny zabvenija izjataja*,⁸⁴ a book written in the spirit of the Enlightenment, which also launched the unified South Slavic national movement.⁸⁵ At the same time, Rajić, like most historians of the time,

made little distinction between adaptations and primary sources, so the credibility of the work is highly questionable.⁸⁶

Thus, in the second half of the 19th century, thanks to Ruvarac's efforts, the professionalization of historiography began, albeit slowly. This slow development is because there were no trained Serbian historians with a professional background in that century, nor were any critical sources published, and no specialized historical journals existed.⁸⁷ The previously outlined views explain that the cornerstone of modern Serbian historiography was national liberation and unification until the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century.⁸⁸ The reason for this was that history was considered the main instrument for strengthening national consciousness. However, thanks to Ruvarac, the ideological historiography faded into the background, and a calmer phase of Serbian historiography could begin. As a result, dilettante works and dilettante writings faded into the background at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. Another factor was that some Serbian historians had already obtained their qualifications in Vienna and other foreign universities. In addition, research in areas that had previously been unpopular began. In addition, research in the regions that had previously been unpopular began also. The topics include the history of the 15–18th centuries, the history of Turkey, the history of the Republic of Ragusa, and the history of the Mediterranean. Research into the rich historical sources of the Monarchy began, and syntheses of the history of Serbia began to emerge. The more prominent authors of the period have sought to place Serbian history in a broader European context and addressed methodological issues. At the turn of the century, the leading foreign influences came from Germany and France, so Serbian historiography was typically positivist and saw the significant effect from the French *Annales* School, and, in time, from Marxism.⁸⁹

Unfortunately, the evolutionary phase was not long-lasting. The Balkan Wars and later the Great War halted the development.⁹⁰ Victory in these conflicts gave the impression that a centuries-old desire for Serbian historiography and politics is coming true. In reality, however, this was not the case. The number of issues grew with the unification, and Serbian historiography's development came to a standstill due to the internal discord. This led to several problems for historiography, but during the unification process, the political leadership in favor of peace silenced legal and national dilemmas.⁹¹ Following Niederhauser's line of thought, this meant that the political leaders and the historians tacitly accepted that they were all part of the same nation, although no longer stated which one, resulting in a tendency to continue thinking in terms of Serbia and Serbian history.⁹²

With the establishment of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, research into the historical relations and cooperation between the South Slavic states came to the fore. The intellectuals interpreted the unification as historical determinism,

but the main problem was that historians tried to explain the global framework created by claiming that the three nations were the same. This line of thought generated severe controversy, but it became the ideological cornerstone of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, for lack of a better solution. However, the compromise solution revealed contradictions and counter-interests, which prevented Serbian historiography from reaching a sufficient level of development. The Serbian historians failed to explore the history of the Balkan Wars and the First World War. After the disintegration of Yugoslavia in the Second World War, their research was interrupted for a period.⁹³

The bloodbath of the Second World War gave way to a long period of relative peace and prosperity that lasted almost fifty years and led to significant economic and social development. During this time, the development of historiography and the factual exploration of new research topics could begin, but political and ideological constraints overshadowed the process.⁹⁴ The main feature of the historiography of socialist Yugoslavia was that it exaggerated the importance of the supposed unification processes and focused mainly on the history of the South Slavic peoples, the workers, the national liberation movement, and the socialist revolution. However, this did not include the ‘fratricide’⁹⁵ of the First World War, and Yugoslav historiography on this subject proved embarrassingly silent. There has been no codification of controversial historical issues. The explanation for this is that Yugoslavian historians sought to adapt to the interpretation of the Tito historiography.⁹⁶

One of the main characteristics of this era is the lack of objectivity. The main reason – apart from ideology –, was that the Yugoslav Institute of History’s representatives in the period after 1948 were pre-1918 born historians. Among them were for instance Vaso Čubrilović,⁹⁷ Dragoslav Janković, Jorjo Tadić, Vaso Bogdanov, Ferdo Čulinović, Jaroslav Šidak, Bogo Grafenauer, Fran Zwitter, Anto Babić, Branislav Đurđev, and others.

All but some of those listed above dealt with the period before 1918. Their activities mainly were uninterrupted until the 1960s. This was the period of the consolidation of the Yugoslavia of Tito. In the 1960s, the emergence of the reformist bloc and the economic reform that led to decentralization made it clear that the unity of Yugoslavia’s historiography depended on the unity of the system, which became increasingly contested. Tito’s figure, who did not advocate the elevation of one nation above another, ensured the relative stability of the system.⁹⁸

Despite the above, ethnic and political divisions became more and more prominent in the historiography of Yugoslavia. This was particularly true of the centralist-decentralist debates, which also left a mark on historiography – for example, Vladimir Dedijer’s *Istorija Jugoslavije*,⁹⁹ written when centralism was gaining ground. The work’s title is also evidence of the advancement of centralism since,

contrary to earlier ideas, the result was not entitled *'History of the People of Yugoslavia'*, and the content also took on a centralist arc. Dedijer presented much data but did little substantive analysis, resulting in a controversial, biased work that propagated controversial issues.¹⁰⁰ Despite the above, centralism did not triumph in 1974, as the new constitution adopted significantly increased the autonomy of the member republics. This exacerbated the disunity that Tito's death brought to the surface, as reflected in the historiography.¹⁰¹

In the 1980s, Serbian historiography in Yugoslavia took an increasingly nationalist turn. It was then that an expanded edition of Velimir Terzić's *Jugoslavija u aprilskom ratu, 1941*,¹⁰² was published. He attributed the swift April defeat in World War II to the betrayal of the Croats. Vasilije Đ. Krestić's work *Srpsko-hrvatski odnosi i jugoslovenska ideja* (1983)¹⁰³ is also strongly nationalist in spirit. The author presented the South Slavic ideology among Croats as a self-interest that emphasized Croatian superiority. Many such works emerged, and in the meantime, Serbian historical revisionism took hold, as evidenced by the work of Đorđe Stanković. It was he who elevated Pašić because he worked to solve the Serbian national question. This is a critical point because, with this statement, Stanković went against the post-war Marxist mainstream. The rifts intensified further in October 1983, when a conference was organized with 165 historians in Zagreb to discuss the evolution of historiographical issues. However, 70 persons did not attend, 34 of them from Belgrade and Novi Sad, although they were the most important. Considering the above, we can conclude that Serbian-Croatian antagonisms marked the period.¹⁰⁴

Consequently, the lack of credibility was a severe problem, greatly exacerbated by selective censorship. The latter is that most Serbian historians were free to publish works written in a nationalist spirit without severe restrictions. In comparison, the majority of historians of other nationalities were obliged to remain silent. This also shows that while the party censorship worked well in the Member States, this was not the case in Serbia.¹⁰⁵

By 1989–1990, the process of disintegration that began with the death of Tito was slowly coming to an end. As one of the last steps, the one-party system in Yugoslavia dissolved, resulting in symbolic central censorship. This enabled the reemergence of forbidden views and taboos, which remained in the background for years, significantly increasing the desire for independence. As a result, the state finally ceased to exist in a bloody civil war.¹⁰⁶ The upheaval caused by the war left a severe mark on the Serbian historians, including historiography, as many historians acted as advisors to key figures who played a significant role in the state's life. This, unfortunately, significantly reduces the reliability of Serbian works.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, in the case of Serbia, the fact that „*Serbian historiography does not have a well-developed tradition of studying its development is also a serious problem.*”¹⁰⁸

At the same time, Serbian historians rediscovered topics that were once considered taboo. Predrag Marković, Miloš Ković, and Nataša Milićević have examined which topics have begun to reshape the historical picture that existed until recently. These are as follows:

1. the redefinition of the Chetnik movement,
2. new approaches to the history of pre-communist Yugoslavia,
3. reinterpreting the question of Serbian victims of World War II,
4. rediscovering the victims of communist oppression after 1944,
5. a disproportionate role of unscientific history-oriented writings.¹⁰⁹

In addition to the authors' opinions, Christian Nielsen, in his historiographical essay, examined the interpretations of the Second World War from 1980 to the present day and outlined a gradual transformation in line with the political situation. He finds that historians from 1983 to 1991 mostly did not question the interpretations of the party-state, but from 1991 onwards, a revision of earlier views gained ground. A reinterpretation of the Chetnik picture and a more critical examination of the regime of Tito illustrates this. From 1997 to the present, however, the escalating situation in Kosovo has brought the Serbian-Albanian issue into focus.¹¹⁰

A significant challenge in the study of the development of Serbian historiography is that historians, because of their perceived unreliability, rejected the majority of earlier works published before 1990. According to Nielsen, this is a wrong move because one can often read more politicized writings than those rejected. The rehabilitation of those found in the meantime guilty of war crimes is also problematic. All of the above are part of nationalist revisionism, the main feature of which is the competitive role of the collective victim. This is evident in the work of contemporary historians. This poses a severe problem for objectivity, as it means that *the victims* – in this case, Serbs – and the crimes they perpetrated receive less – sometimes negligible – attention.

On the other hand, it is worth noting that most leading Serbian historians do not address the reverse applicability issue. For these reasons, historians tend to overlook the crimes of fascism-communism. The explanation for the latter is that many of them are ideologically motivated.¹¹¹ Another shortcoming of Serbian historiography, according to Bjelajac, is the lack of comparative analyses with foreign historiography. He also sees the scarcity of comprehensive, general works and the lack of methodological and theoretical discussions as a problem. Closely linked to the latter is the steady decline in the number of round-table meetings and the downward trend in the presentation of academic critiques. Still, there is also a problem with the small number of historiographical works.¹¹²

It is essential to point out that, according to the Serbian historians' community, by the end of the 20th Century, Serbian historiography started to lag behind the

countries of the world in terms of theory and methodology. It is also worth noting that Serbian historiography is predominantly positivist. For example, it focuses primarily on the collection of sources. This is problematic because the main characteristic of positivist historiography – and Serbian historiography – is that it mainly accumulates facts and data without formulating hypotheses and conducting analyses. In addition, its lack of multidisciplinaryity is a significant deficiency.¹¹³ Meanwhile, Bjelajac points out that even the global historical literature is not up to standard for South-Eastern Europe, as criticism is inadequate.¹¹⁴ The lack of works on the region's history is a particular challenge, but so is the lack of research on ethnic and religious groups without prejudice.

Furthermore, as in many other countries, research is plagued by mistakes and atrocities committed in the country's name. The latter problem was already present nearly two centuries ago. The example of Vuk Karadžić best illustrates this. Karadžić, the father of the Serbian language, was also superficially involved in history. He described the killing of the Ottoman Turks in Serbia in 1809, for which he received heavy criticism. His critics believed that by doing so, he shamed the Serbian nation. In his response, Karadžić argued that silence leads to a misinterpretation of history, adding that while what he wrote is a shame for Serbs, the real scandal is that these murders took place, and since it was an actual event, there is no point in hiding the facts.¹¹⁵

Considering the above, we can conclude that the Yugoslav-Serbian historiography missed many opportunities, such as the writing of microhistory, the methodology of oral history was not appropriately applied. Still, progress is becoming more and more noticeable nowadays, as multidisciplinaryity is becoming more evident. In the author's opinion, the biggest problem today is that Serbian historical studies do not sufficiently include an assessment of their responsibility so that responsibility for mistakes and crimes committed in the course of history remains unacknowledged.¹¹⁶

SUMMARY

Looking back at the literature on the First World War, which spans almost a century, we can conclude that although the prisoner of war issue spanned a more extended period than the war itself, the subject has remained obscure almost to this day. As a result, the POW ordeal is still only partially understood today. The historiographical overview, however, contains additional information. Thanks to the summary, we can establish the development and evolution of the historical literature on the POW question, and we can discover the priority given to the subject in a given period and discover the purpose of works written on the topic.

After the First World War, texts were published mainly by people who had served in the POW apparatus, and their writings show that the main aim was to avoid possible prosecution. By the 1930s, this had changed somewhat, with a greater emphasis on raising public awareness. However, despite promising progress, the process stalled with the outbreak of the Second World War and remained obscure until the 1960s. It was not until the 1990s that the issue received greater attention. However, it was not until the centenary of the Great War that there was a significant surge of interest in the subject.

Despite all the above, there are still many unanswered questions to be resolved today. The fate of Austria–Hungary’s soldiers, captured in Serbia, is an almost entirely untouched area. Similarly, until today, the fate of the Monarchy’s prisoners of different nationalities is still only partially known.

In the second part of the work, we tried to summarize the historical development of Serbian historiography to get closer to the understanding of the POW issue. This has proved to be an essential step, as it has partly shed light on which topics enjoyed priority in the South Slavic state in each period and which issues were considered taboo for the Serbian state. These works include research on World War I prisoners of war, which Serbian historians only began to address in the 1990s. Unfortunately, these works have hardly grown, and their often nationalist interpretations mean that their use requires strong source criticism. Nevertheless, the publication of these works can be seen as a positive development, as research on the topics gained a cautious momentum which is slowly but surely bringing us closer to unraveling the mysteries that have mystified us for more than a century.

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- 67 Ferguson, Niall: *The Pity of War 1914–1918*. London, Penguin Books: 1999².
- 68 A munka hiányossága a mi szempontunkból, hogy csak a Nagy Britanniával, Franciaországgal és Németországgal foglalkozik.
- 69 In January 1917, there were a total of 97,072 Serbian prisoners on the empire's register.
- 70 Especially when examining the issue of prisoners of war, we encounter nationalist views that the central powers were seeking to exterminate the Serbian people.
- 71 Raška
- 72 Niederhauser Emil: A történetírás története Kelet-Európában. Budapest: História – MTA Történettudományi Intézete, 1995. 422–423.
- 73 Stephen IV Uroš or Stephen Dusan, Stephen „the Great” (1331-1355), was a member of the Nemanjić dynasty, who reigned as king of Serbia from 1331-1346 and was the first crowned tsar of the Serbian state until his death in 1346-1355.
- 74 Stefan Uroš V (1355-1371), Serbian tsar. His rule was weak: the Serbian governors were independent from him.
- 75 Niederhauser Emil: A történetírás története..., 422–423.
- 76 Györe Zoltán: *Serbian Historiography...*, 89.
- 77 Niederhauser Emil: A történetírás történetec..., 424.; Györe Zoltán: *Serbian Historiography...*, 89.
- 78 Niederhauser Emil: A történetírás történetec..., 430.

- 79 Niederhauser Emil: A történetírás története..., 431.
- 80 Serbian poet, playwright, high school teacher (Versec, 16 January 1806 - Versec, 24 March 1856).
- 81 Serbian historian and Orthodox priest, member of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts. Ruvarac introduced the critical method into Serbian historiography (1 September 1832 - 8 August 1905, Grgeteg monastery)
- 82 Györe Zoltán: Serbian Historiography..., 97.; Antolović, Michael: Modern Serbian Historiography between Nation-Building and Critical Scholarship: The Case of Ilarion Ruvarac (1832-1905.) *The Hungarian Historical Review* Vol. 5 (2016) No. 2. 332–333.
- 83 Antolović, Michael: Modern Serbian Historiography between..., 335.
- 84 Jovan Rajić: *Istoria raznych slavenskykh narodov naipace Bolgar, Chorvator, i Serbov iz trny zabvenija izjataja*. Kovilë: Cvjato Archaggelsko Monastyřé, 1794.
- 85 At this time, Ivan Gundulić's epic poem „Osman „, which also proclaims the unity of the Slavic peoples and calls for common action against the Turks, had already been in existence for a century.
- 86 Antolović, Michael: Modern Serbian Historiography between..., 334.
- 87 Ibid. 336.
- 88 A hosszú tizenkilencedik század alatt.
- 89 Györe Zoltán: Serbian Historiography..., 89., 96.; 99.
- 90 And later, the socialist and Milošević era.
- 91 Györe Zoltán: Serbian Historiography..., 101–102.;
- 92 Niederhauser Emil: A történetírás története..., 461–462.
- 93 Györe Zoltán: Serbian Historiography..., 103–104.
- 94 Ibid. 104.
- 95 The army of the Monarchy consisted of a large number of South Slavic soldiers who often came into direct confrontation with the Serbian army. Based on this, Serbian historian Momčilo Zečević wrote – quite rightly – of fratricidal attacks between the Yugoslav peoples.
- 96 Banac, Ivo: Historiography of the Countries of Eastern Europe: Yugoslavia. *The American Historical Review*. Vol. 97 (1992) No. 4., 1086.
- 97 Vaso Čubrilović jugoszláviai szerb politikus, történész, akadémikus. Diákként csatlakozott az Ifjú Bosznia szervezethez, majd 1914. június 28-án részt vett a Ferenc Ferdinánd osztrák–magyar trónörökös és felesége, Chotek Zsófia elleni merényletben. Mivel fiatalos volt, a bíróság nem ítélte halálra, hanem 16 év börtönbüntetést kapott, amit egy szarajevói fegyintézetben kezdett el letölteni. 1918-ban, az Osztrák–Magyar Monarchia széthullása után kiszabadult és Szerbiába költözött, ahol történész diplomát szerzett. A második világháború után a rendszert teljes mértékben kiszolgálta, így karrierje is felfelé ívelt. Emellett több miniszteri tárcát is kapott. A délvidéki vérengzéseket követően Čubrilović volt a tervezett kitelepítések egyik ideológiai értelmi szerzője. Úgy vélte, hogy miután e „kisebbségek a háború alatt bűnöket követtek el a jugoszláv nemzetek ellen, nem tűrhetők meg Jugoszlávia területén.”
- 98 Banac, Ivo: Historiography..., 1087.
- 99 Božić, Ivan – Ćirković, Sima –Ekmečić, Milorad – Dedijer, Vladimir: *Istorija Jugoslavije*. Beograd: Prosveta, 1972.
- 100 Pl.: a szlovén katolikusok szerbellenes sajtója 1914-ben, szerb népiértés Bosznia-Hercegovinában és Horvátország egyes területein az első világháborúban, stb.
- 101 Banac, Ivo: Historiography..., 1090–1098.
- 102 In english: Yugoslavia in the April War, 1941
- 103 In english: Serbo-Croatian relations and the Yugoslav idea
- 104 Banac, Ivo: Historiography..., 1096–1101.

- 105 Ibid., 1103.
- 106 More about the disintegration of Yugoslavia:: Juhász József: *A délszláv háborúk*. Budapest: Napvilág, 1997.
- 107 Nielsen, Christian Axboe: Serbian Historiography after 1991. *Contemporary European History*, Vol. 29. (2020) No. 1. 90.
- 108 The opinion of historian Srđan Milošević, shared by the author. Cited from: Nielsen, Christian Axboe: *Serbian Historiography...*, 90.
- 109 Ibid., 92.
- 110 Ibid., 93–94.
- 111 Nielsen, Christian Axboe: *Serbian Historiography...*, 99., 101.
- 112 Bjelajac, Mile: Srpska istoriografija danas – tematski razgovori. *Tokovi istorije* 26. god. (2018) 1. br. 164.
- 113 Jovanović, Miroslav: Savremena srpska istoriografija: karakteristike i trendovi. *Istorija 20. veka* 28. god. (2010) br. 1. 181–190.
- 114 Bjelajac, Mile: Srpska istoriografija danas..., 165.
- 115 Nielsen, Christian Axboe: *Serbian Historiography...*, 102.
- 116 Nielsen, Christian Axboe: *Serbian Historiography...*, 107., Marković, Predrag J.: Kako (ni)smo pronašli „pravu istorijsku istinu”? Srpska istoriografija posle 1991. godine. *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino (before 1960: Prispevki za zgodovino delavskega gibanja)*. 44. god. (2004) 2. br. 49–50.