

ИЗМЕНЕНИЯ ПАМЯТИ О ВЕЛИКОЙ ВОЙНЕ В ВЕНГЕРСКИХ ДНЕВНИКАХ И МЕМУАРАХ

В статье рассматривается значимость дневников и мемуаров в исследовании Первой мировой войны. Автор подчеркивает особую ценность источников личного происхождения для создания научной картины крупных событий мировой истории, в частности Первой мировой войны. Если официальные документы помогают раскрыть ее политические, дипломатические, социальные аспекты, то частные служат пониманию личных мотивов и человеческих переживаний, связанных с участием в военных действиях. Автор приводит важнейшие, представляющие исследовательский интерес сюжеты из военных дневников и мемуаров, в которых раскрываются особенности национального менталитета, соотношение индивидуального восприятия действительности и официальной пропаганды, образы «своих» и «чужих», новый социальный опыт, полученный во время войны, как опыт войны воспринимался людьми с различным социальным статусом, возрастом или образованием. Отмечена динамика настроений, которая прослеживается в личных свидетельствах с развитием военных событий. Автор отмечает, что консолидация и анализ сведений, приводимых в личных свидетельствах, способны компенсировать недостатки других источников для полноты исторического материала.

Первая мировая война; военные дневники; мемуары; социальный анализ; военная антропология

An important part providing new information on WWI is the search for unpublished private papers. Individual viewpoints and experiences are contained in sources that incorporate individual views, and the relevant personal reflect experiences of people living ordinary lives. These include WWI era diaries and memoirs. Several cultural, social, psychological, and strategic historical themes can be discovered by their use, as they can be excellent sources regarding relations between nations living side by side or waging war against each other. The lecture seeks to show the special historical value of such sources by highlighting several wartime diaries and memoirs.

“In contrast to earlier professional literature, which focused mostly on exploring the military-diplomatic and political-economic background of the two armed conflicts and their consequences, the general emphasis has now shifted to more broadly interpreted social and cultural (intellectual and mental) aspects. This qualitative change in research perspective is partly due to the fact that the attention of history writing has turned from political history via social history to cultural historical aspects and modern socio-historical considerations.”

Slovak historian Gabriela Dudeková made the above statements in one of her articles, in which she discusses the survival strategies of families during the First World War.¹ Her claim is hardly disputable. In this way, the examination of the role of diaries and memoirs in Hungarian research on the “Great War” could be of scholarly interest.²

The occasional love affairs that evolved during the war also constitute an independent topic — just like war propaganda and its impact.³ An equally intriguing question is the change and strengthening of national consciousness during the war,⁴ the phenomenon in which nationalisms become more intense and

¹ Gabriela Dudeková, “Család és túlélési stratégiák az I. világháborúban. Hosszú távú változások a szlovák társadalomban,” *Világtörténet*, 37, no. 2 (2015): 312.

² Gabriela Kiliánová, “Divided Memories: The Image of the First World War in the Historical Memory of Slovaks,” *Sociológia*, 35, no. 3 (2003): 229–246.

³ David Welch, *Germany and Propaganda in World War I: Pacifism, Mobilization and Total War* (New York ; London: I. B. Tauris), 2014.

⁴ Vanda Wilcox, “Encountering Italy: Military Service and National Identity during the First World War,” *Bulletin of Italian Politics* 3, no. 2 (2011): 283–302.

impatient, and the image of the enemy is extended to entire nations based on stereotypes.⁵ That is how the symbolic images of the Russian bear⁶ and the German hydra appear in private wartime documents — in accordance with official propaganda — as a collective enemy, while pity for the foe (the Italians) can also be detected.⁷

At this stage of research, the above questions are among the most important issues connected to wartime studies. This historical research, which takes a much broader perspective than before, has elevated into focus sources of a personal nature, hence memoirs, diaries, letters, and the various narratives of contemporaries in general.

The investigation of private documents as historical sources is strongly motivated also by the fact that although more than 100 years have passed since the outbreak of the First World War, the history of everyday life during the “Great War” has still not been completely written and most likely will never be. One would have to consider as many wars, sentiments, stories and personal experiences as there are people. “The experience of the world war crisis slowly submerged among the existential troubles of the individual, and there it deepened into a personal problem. The expression of this personalized complex is memoirs literature among others, which has been promoted by postmodern historiography.”⁸ This may produce new outcomes with regard to issues that were previously indisputable, such as the question of whether the war was unanimously and enthusiastically welcomed in the individual countries.⁹

Diaries, private correspondence, autobiographies, and memoirs, just as the outcomes gained from oral history, capture the viewpoint of the individual as the documents of individual and personal remembrance. The worldview of their authors, and often the changes thereof, unfolds before the eyes of the researcher. We can have a look into the (permanent or occasional) social network, relations and value system of the individual. At the same time, we can interpret the information thus obtained within a broader context. It is not surprising that First World War diary and memoir literature is burgeoning in the Euro-Atlantic region — in the United States, Great Britain, France, Germany, Austria and so on. Private documents of this kind are being published in print or online one after the other, placing the issues outlined above into focus, examining how soldiers and those in the background experienced the war and mainly, the impact of this experience. Below I will examine this question in the Hungarian context: does the Hungarian research on First World War diary and memoir literature fit into this international trend?

At this point, we should take a look at the Hungarian professional literature that has recently been published on the subject. The work of fundamental research entitled *Naplók, emlékiratok annotált bibliográfiája* (The annotated bibliography of diaries and memoirs) is connected to the name of György Kövér, who published a volume of studies dealing with egodocuments in 2014. The aim of this research was to compile a register of diaries from the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries that have been preserved in manuscript in Hungarian public collections.¹⁰ Within the enormous international literary production related to the centenary of the First World War, many have been inspired by the extraordinarily successful digital projects that have made available hundreds of diaries and masses of letters written by soldiers and other private sources. It is enough to cite one example to demonstrate how general the international embeddedness and acceptance of the above is. The website *Europeana 1914–1918* set the objective of summarizing as many wartime documents as possible and making them digitally available. This huge quantity of documents includes numerous private documents as well. In fact, one of the goals was to make documents and sources of historical value in the possession of private individuals available for

⁵ According to Michael Mann, “Most of the populations participating in World War I already felt to some degree a sense of national identity.” (See Michael Mann, “The Role of Nationalism in the Two World Wars,” in John A. Hall and Siniša Malešević, eds., *Nationalism and War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 172–196.)

⁶ Beáta Kulcsár, “Az 1914/15-iki harcunk az oroszsal,” *Foris Géza háborús visszaemlékezései*, *Pro Minoritate* 23, no. 2 (2014): 62, 70; Sylvain Minault, ed., “In the Trenches: A First World War Diary by Pierre Minault,” *Not Even Past* 5 (2014): 18.

⁷ Csaba Katona, “Poor Dago! What Have You Sinned against Us, and What Have We Sinned against You?” *The War Diary of László Kókay*, in Tancredi Artico, ed., *From the Front. Zibaldone della Grande Guerra* (Rome: Aracne editrice, 2017), 205.

⁸ Imre Attila Kovács, ed., “Egy jó magyar katona. Vitéz Balogh Sándor feljegyzései a Nagy Háborúból,” in Péter Miklós, ed., *Harc és hadifogolytábor. Bakanaplók a Nagy Háborúból* (Hódmezővásárhely: Tornyai János Múzeum és Közművelődési Központ-Emlékpont, 2017), 11.

⁹ Marcel van den Linden and Gottfried Mergner, “Kriegsbegeisterung und mentale Kriegsvorbereitung,” in van den Linden and Mergner, eds., *Kriegsbegeisterung und mentale Kriegsvorbereitung: Interdisziplinäre Studien* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1991), 9–23.

¹⁰ György Kövér, “Én-azonosság az ego-dokumentumokban. Napló, önéletírás, levelezés,” *Soproni Szemle* 64, no. 3 (2011): 219–242.

international scholars just as much as for citizens interested in the past.¹¹ All of the above has compelled numerous authors to begin examining the history of the everyday life — of soldiers and hinterlands — during the war.¹²

Despite the above, many still find it strange that the historical approach has left its conventional stream of event-, military-, and diplomacy-centered history. Nevertheless, it is this approach that is capable of surpassing the canonized narratives of the national histories — inexorably opposed to each other due to the static position of winners and losers — and their frameworks. Relying on personal sources, this approach discusses the war and its consequences from a fresh socio-historical angle. Naturally, private sources have received some sort of interest ever since their creation. In Hungary, the first such publications appeared already during the war.¹³ In addition to the lack of interest on behalf of historians, the belatedness of their more thorough investigation can be attributed to the fact that the majority of these diaries and memoirs were (or still are) in the possession of private individuals and thus could not really be exploited by historians.

Thus diaries and recollections (i.e., the narratives of everyday life and individual destinies) serve as a mirror of the big whole. To some extent, they are similar to literature presenting war topics. They surpass the individual, and become part of the collective memory: “they become group narratives that... make it possible for both the narrator and the listener to identify with the community emotionally; the individual can enter the world of tradition, thus acquiring a stable identity.”¹⁴ Besides family traditions, this is the reason why these diaries and letters written by soldiers have survived after so many years and have been carefully preserved.

Researchers studying the private history of the First World War are thus in a fortunate position when it comes to unraveling the emotional and spiritual conditions of individuals. Handled with appropriate criticism, the huge quantity of sources about private life can open the way to understanding individual life stories. It is quite evident that the more widespread literacy is, the more written materials are produced and the easier it is to comprehend a topic based on these kinds of sources. The inclination to keep diaries and write memoirs, which was already widespread at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, became even stronger between 1914 and 1918. “As mushrooms sprout in the forest after rainfall, so do battlefield diaries in the bloodshed. Everybody keeps a diary out there.”¹⁵ This was a period when people felt compelled to write down what happened to them and to the people living around them, or later on, to note down their lasting memories.

War situations are always like that: when life departs from its normal track, logically, it generates events different from those of everyday norms. If this kind of situation evolves and continues for years under conditions in which most strata of the population are literate, it is quite natural that diaries and private documents are produced in great quantities. It is true for most authors that “in addition to the desire to commemorate, they must have also been spurred by the effort to maintain their memory and literacy in a totally different cultural environment.”¹⁶

In the case of battlefield diaries, the starting point is the peculiar situation of their authors (as previously mentioned), which inevitably determines the topics discussed in the diary. Because even if the author is not strictly interested in them, military events, information about the troops, troop movements and camp life all crop up in the descriptions. The manner of describing military (or other) events depended on the narrator’s personality type, character, fields of interest, education and so on. Another crucial factor with regard to battlefield diaries was the extent to which the war situation allowed for continuous diary-keeping. Those who had less time or opportunity to write focused on the essentials and detailed only those circumstances that mattered the most to them. With regard to diaries written on the front, the degree to which the author had to worry about his own security and the safety of his diary was decisive, while it was

¹¹ URL : <http://www.europeana1914-1918.eu>

¹² Csaba Katona and Eleonóra Kovács, “A személyes emlékezet dokumentumai,” *Turul* 87, no. 2 (2014): 41–47; Csaba Katona and Eleonóra Kovács, “A személyes emlékezet forrásai,” in István Kollega Tarsoly, Eleonóra Kovács and Gábor Vitek, *A történelem segédtudományai I. Genealógia 3* (Budapest: Tarsoly, 2015), 157–179.

¹³ Zoltán Oszkár Szóts, “Volt egyszer egy évforduló — válogatás az utóbbi két év első világháborús szakirodalmából,” *Múltunk* 61, no. 2 (2016), 122.

¹⁴ Gábor Gyáni, “Kollektív emlékezet és nemzeti identitás, in Gyáni, ed., *Emlékezés, emlékezet és a történelem elbeszélése* (Budapest: Napvilág, 2000), 89.

¹⁵ Miklós Berend, *Berend Miklós hadi önkénytes honvéd törzsorvos Harctéri naplója. Adatok a magyar honvédség, főképp az 5. h. huszárezred történetéből* (Budapest: Singer és Wolfner, 1916), 6. Quoted in Beáta Kulcsár, “Az 1914/15-iki harcunk az oroszokkal. Foris Géza háborús visszaemlékezései,” *Pro Minoritate* 23, no. 2 (2014): 59.

¹⁶ Gyöngyi Nagy, ed., “Aszalai Kálmán emlékei a Nagy Háborúból,” in Miklós, ed., *Harctér és hadifogolytábor*, 104.

also important whether his superiors frowned on his writing, for they might even punish soldiers for his activity. Thus the extent to which the author could openly write his diary also represented an important factor.

Although the battlefield and frontline diaries focus predominantly on the events of the military arena, they may also contain reflections about civilian life, or internal, spiritual happenings. Generally speaking, diaries can be thematic due to their author's field of interest, and battlefield diaries belong to this category since their creation was motivated by an unprecedented and extremely tense situation. The content noted down by particular authors depended on a number of factors, just as the content of general diaries is determined by the personal interests, well-informedness, education and state of mind of the authors as well as the general atmosphere in which they wrote and so on. That is why Peter Burke's observations are so essential: "Neither memories, nor histories seem objective any longer. In both cases historians are learning to take account of conscious or unconscious selection, interpretation and distortion. In both cases they are coming to see the process of selection, interpretation and distortion as conditioned, or at least influenced, by social groups. It is not the work of individuals alone."¹⁷

Nevertheless, it should be remembered that there are some diaries that were very much written in a conscious, cold-headed manner, the authenticity of which is questioned precisely by the audience for which they were intended. There is a broad-ranging scale from diaries written strictly for private purposes to works clearly written for outsiders. Therefore, the reading of diary entries requires intense source-criticism with an eye to that aspect as well.

It depends on the author's intentions whether he or she focuses strongly on his or her own life path, or adopting the role of an eyewitness, chronicles the events happening around him or her. There is one more simple explanation regarding intentions: when the author simply "wishes to leave a mark with his or her diary, to create the memory of the situations experienced by him or her."¹⁸ Let me invoke the famous thesis of Pierre Bourdieu regarding biographies: namely, that life is a story, and it is also the totality of the events in relation to individual existence, so it can be conceived of as a story and also as the narration of a story.¹⁹

Far from offering an exhaustive list, the above go to show what a plethora of hitherto unexplored sources await scholars interested in researching the "Great War." They also set an example with their diverse perspectives regarding the topic of the war. Private documents also carry the potential to make the events of the "Great War" known to broader groups of society, and instead of offering a bird's-eye view of this period, they allow us to provide people of today with a greater understanding of the most pertinent issues of the First World War era.

Here are some examples how war appears in the diaries of some people of different social backgrounds, ages, and cultures. The first is an elderly aristocrat who wrote his diary away from the front. Count Teleki Sándor (1861–1919) was born in Paris. He attended a law university and later became a member of parliament. In his old age he loved to relax in the Tatra Mountains, where he developed mountain tourism. In 1917, he wrote about his Tatra holiday: "I worked hard on the heat and drought. I was out in the sun all day. My nerves rested for now. I pulled myself out. <...> These are ten days of real miracles. When I think about it for the third year, I am making myself in the stinky city because of others, that I only get for a few days where it is best for me because of others. <...> I began to heal the destroyed garden. <...> The four prisoners of war with my gardener worked so nicely, so glad. During the holidays, we progressed beautifully. It was a great pleasure to work, improved my health. My nervous condition has improved. Tatra is Tatra!"²⁰

This detail shows how subjective things are in the diary. If someone reads just these few lines from Teleki, might think the war is not important because Teleki didn't write about it. This is obviously not the case. But in the mountains Teleki was less affected by distant events. He did not deal with the war.

We could also think that Teleki was an insensitive man. But for example he has serious merits in the care of the wounded people. When in the Elisabeth Queen Hospital of the Red Cross Ward was organised lectures for the injured soldiers, Count Teleki was the organiser, because from 1914 he was a Red Cross deputy high-representative. A few words from his diary in 1916 show his empathy: "A lady made a beautiful Christmas tree. We gave money, a young girl sang and I talked to the soldiers. They were all sensitized. One sobbed, ran to me and kissed my hand. The rest began to cry. I protested in vain, but they kissed my hands. It's

¹⁷ Peter Burke, "History as Social Memory," in Burke, *Varieties of Cultural History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 44.

¹⁸ Eleonóra Eöry, "Főszolgabírói mulatságok. Társasági élet és szórakozás Olchváry Pál naplójában," *Aetas* 23, no. 3 (2008), 65.

¹⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, "L'illusion biographique," *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 62, no. 1 (1986): 69.

²⁰ Annamária Szakács, "A király meghalt!" — Ifj. Teleki Sándor első világháborús naplója, *ArchivNet* 16, no. 6 (2016) <http://www.archivnet.hu/a-kiraly-meghalt-ifj-teleki-sandor-elsovilaghaborus-naplója> (2019.02.02.)

not a festivity. This is the evening of tears. when everyone thinks of the home, the orphanage, the deteriorated health, the lost hands and feet, the interrupted life. <...> Those who burn their Christmas tree lights in their quiet home with their happy children do not know how was the soldiers' Christmas in the year 1916.”²¹

Soldier Gyula Vágovits (1895–1986) was much younger than count Teleki. He volunteered for military service in 1915. It was fought on the Russian and Romanian fronts. In 1918 he went home because of his illness. In his memoirs, he wrote about the naive enthusiasm in 1914, which surrounded the soldiers in the battle. In Hungary, which has not fought since 1866, lived a romantic idea for the war: the glorious Hungarian soldier defeats the enemy and then returns home and the girls celebrates him. The reality was completely different, but in 1914 the Hungarians didn't know it. Vágovits wrote this: “The mobilization has changed the peaceful image of the city.”²² “Thousands of men hurried to the soldier. Enthusiastic masses were flying down the streets under national flags and glorified the war. <...> There is a parade of enthusiastic crowds could be encountered, or a family man, with a manly seriousness, said goodbye to his bitterly crying wife and little children. There were masses at the station. Several speakers spoke fiery and enthusiastic about the platform and glorified the war, excited the patriotic crowd. I have never seen and heard so many patriotic songs in my life, so many war-waving shouts, so much crying, and so much wailing. The enthusiasm for the war took place in the late hours. <...> The town's inhabitants enthusiastically followed the soldiers on the front of the station beside Gypsy music. Poor, handsome soldiers on an equestrian attack almost all died of Russian machine guns. But still the enthusiasm for the war was so great. Disappointment appeared when the first wounded arrived. They were placed in military hospitals transformed from schools. The first sad notifications for the relatives of the dead also arrived.”²³

I close my examples with the memoir of a Dominican monk, called Kornél Bőle. Bőle wrote a diary at first. Decades later it was transformed into a memoir. Bőle did not fulfill his service on the front. He wrote his memories of the war as a Christian. His astonishment was noticeable when he realized in 1915 that the war would last for a long time: “We always got into the world war. There is less hope that it will end soon. There is fear in Hungary, because the Russian attacked the Austrian and Hungarian armies, distracting the German forces from the anxious French. The Austro-Hungarian Command and Konrad Hötendorf, the brilliant Chief of Staff, stopped the terrible Russian war, but the Russian attacks still hit Hungary in Maramures.”²⁴

It is felt that the propaganda of war, the proclamation of a heroic fight had a profound effect on the writer of the diary. It is very biased when Franz Conrad von Hötendorf is described as a genius and the Russian army as a horrible horde. This conviction has changed a little bit when the monk saw the suffering of the people: “The spiritual and psychic care of the blind soldiers on the hospital was our task in these terrible times. I have seen many suffering and many pains in these times, and lots of pain.”

Bőle also saw the raw reality of the war when he went to the city of Ózd. At that time he experienced what the ongoing war prepared for: “The armies fought for Przemysl's castle in those weeks. The iron-spiked lances that our soldiers put down around the castle were made in the town of Ózd. The gendarmerie was therefore very attentive to who went to this city. When I walked at the station in my unknown monastic dress, the on duty gang was certified. I just verified myself, I showed the invitation letter.”²⁵

However, these experiences did not completely change Bőle's view. He still believed that in the war the good and the bad would fight. Even decades later he said that the Russians had suppressed Galicia.

The memoir retained some very insignificant details, perhaps due to the earlier diary, perhaps due to memory play: “...when the German and Austrian-Hungarian troops break through Görlitz and the Russian troops reversed, a good old man said that if we take back Lemberg, he pays a barrel of beer. Lemberg was recaptured, so he bought the beer, although it was hard to get.”²⁶

As a Christian, he hoped for help and comfort from God: “That is why, on May 30, a huge crowd escaped from the Franz Joseph Bridge with the St Stephen's relic to the Basilica. Maybe there were 300,000 people.”²⁷

²¹ Ibid.

²² Érsekújvár, now Nové Zámky in Slovakia.

²³ Gyula Vágovits, *Parasztfigura a sakktáblán*. Vágovits Gyula visszaemlékezése, Nagy Háború Blog. http://nagyhaboru.blog.hu/2016/03/21/parasztfigura_a_sakktablan (2019.02.19.).

²⁴ Kornél Bőle, *Utaim. Egy domonkos szerzetes visszaemlékezései, 1887–1961*, Gilányi, Magolna ed. (Budapest, Vasvár: Magyar Napló Kiadó-Domonkos Rendtörténeti Gyűjtemény, 2018), 48.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid. 49.

²⁷ Ibid. 50.

The data, the descriptions of military operations and the analyses of trials often partially or entirely conceal the human tragedies, individual destinies and thoughts behind them. However, if we evoke the war years through the impressions of specific people, series of data, columns and troops are replaced by individuals and personalities who had emotions and passions. It is the stories and lives of specific individuals which those interested can learn about through these private documents, while they also present how these life paths were broken. The “anonymous” characters of large-scale narratives recover their identity that had been blurred by the historical perspective, and again they “will” have a name, a face and an individual destiny. For it is easier to identify with a specific person with whose appearance and customs we seem to be familiar, and in this way, it is easier to understand the given period and everyday life during the war —both on the front and in the hinterland — because “the variety of the conceptions of history can refute the homogeneity of the present implications of past events.”²⁸

At the same time, generalizing and oversimplifying concepts such as “the enemy,” “the army,” “the Romanians,” “the Russians,” “the Hungarians” and so on may well perhaps be pushed into the background. For instance, Italian propaganda kept referring to the Austrians as “the centuries-old enemy.”²⁹ Instead of unilateral and adversarial nationalist narratives churning up nationalistic feelings and remaining unresponsive to one other, the commonly experienced history of the devastating war and the polyphonic approach drawing on dialogue, criticism and empathy may, in this way, come to the fore. This opportunity must not be squandered.

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THE TRANSFORMATION OF MEMORIES OF THE GREAT WAR IN HUNGARIAN JOURNALS AND MEMOIRS

The article treats the significance of journals and memoirs for the research of World War I. The author underlines that private journals and memoirs are an important source of reliable information about significant events in history, World War I, in particular. While official documents unveil political, diplomatic, and social aspects, private documents enable a researcher to understand people's motives, the feelings they experienced finding themselves dragged into military actions. Analyzing military journals and memoirs, the author focuses on events which reveal people's national mentality, the clash of individual perception and official propaganda, the images of “friends” and “enemies”, new social experiences imposed by the war and viewed through the prism of different social status, age, and education. The author highlights changes in mood associated with military successes and failures. The author maintains that the analysis of journals and memoirs enables a researcher to get a more comprehensive view of historical processes.

World War I; military journals; memoirs; social analysis; military anthropology

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