

Romanians in Austria-Hungary in the Years of “The Great War”. The Perspective of Visual Sources

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Article history: Received 20.11.2020; Revised 20.02.2021;

Accepted 15.05.2021; Available online 03.02.2022.

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Abstract: The present article is based on two research experiences that were resulted in the printing of two volumes that included visual documents. In the present article, our aim is to present the content categories that can be found in the photographs and postcards with and about the Romanians from the Austrian-Hungarian monarchy who took part in the traumatizing experience of World War I. Thus, a first theme that is rich and varied included the “faces” of the officers, soldiers and, last but not least, the civilians, in different situations, contexts and stances imposed by the war’s developments. There are group photographs that contain a varying number of soldiers, from two – three persons, up to several dozens, along with individual photographs; in all of these photographs, there are soldiers and officers, together or separate. Next, there is a distinct category of visual materials, concerning propaganda; they are mostly illustrated postcards that circulated as correspondence between the firing line and the “home front”. The symbolism of the state authority, along with the image of the emperor and that of the imperial family, were a recurring presence in the imagistic content with which the Austrian-Hungarian postcards printed during the war tried to send a loyalist message or to consolidate it in the community’s mentality. The materials that are related to the course of the daily life near the front, as well as behind it, are particularly interesting; the photographs taken during the war usually depict non-fighting moments, the moments of rest, containing with varied and diverse themes. There is a special category of visual documents that have been preserved from the time of the war, depicting the suffering that was inflicted upon the participants and the manner in which it was “handled”. Thus, among the photographs that fall in this category, we encountered those of the wounded and hospitalized soldiers, the field hospitals and the personnel with medical attributions that served near the

units. Another theme section directly connected to the previous one is represented by the physical embodiment of death along the front line: photographs of funerals, graves and military cemeteries.

There is a category of visual sources, from both public and private collections, that related to the war “on the seas”, photographs and postal cards of the marine troops serving in the Empire; they were stationed at Pola, in the Adriatic Sea. The photographs taken during the Great War that depict soldiers alongside civilians are of particular interest. Mostly, they are soldiers together with their own family members (mothers, wives, children etc) that are depicted in photographs that were taken far from the front line, during leaves, when the soldiers could briefly re-join their native communities. The Romanians that served in the war, wearing the military uniform of the double monarchy and who left its sphere of loyalty, either by becoming prisoners or by voluntary desertion, is a theme that was not overlooked by the visual sources that have survived from that period. These photographs of prisoners and Romanian volunteers from the time of the Great War are also relevant for the geographic coordinates, very far from one another, where the course of the events carried the Romanian soldiers, from France to far-away Siberia, at Vladivostok.

The document images from the time of the Great War allow for a *sui generis* dialogue with those “who are no more”, over a temporal gap of a century. The camera lens often captured expressive faces, whose identity is known in the cases in which the photographs include markings and notes, along with those that offer no additional information concerning those who took the photos or their subjects; in the latter case, we can say that these images are the anonymous bearers of war’s memory. These materials offer us today the unique privilege of visually “communicating” with our forbearers from a century ago, with the representatives of the humanity that plunged into the terrible adventure of World War I.

Keywords: “The Great War”, Romanians, Austria-Hungary, visual sources, cultural history.

Rezumat: Românii din Austro-Ungaria în anii „Marelui Război”.
Perspectiva surselor vizuale. Pornind de la două experiențe de cercetare, finalizate prin valorificarea editorială a unor documente de factură vizuală, articolul de față își propune să prezinte categoriile de conținut care se regăsesc în fotografiile și cărțile poștale cu și despre români din monarhia austro-ungară, participanți la epopeea traumatizantă a Primului Război Mondial. Astfel, un prim tronson tematic, de mare bogăție și varietate, conține „chipuri” de ofițeri, soldați, nu în ultimul rând populație civilă, în cele mai diferite situații,

contexte și ipostaze impuse de desfășurarea războiului. Sunt fotografii de grup care conțin un număr variabil de militari, ce merge de la două-trei persoane până la câteva zeci, alături de fotografii individuale; în toate acestea regăsindu-se soldați și ofițeri, împreună sau separat. În continuare, o categorie distinctă de material vizual este de factură propagandistică, sunt în special cărți poștale ilustrate, care au circulat ca piese corespondență între linia de foc și „frontul de acasă”. Symbolistica autorității de stat, alături de imaginea împăratului și a familiei imperiale erau o prezență recurentă în conținutul imagistic cu care cărțile poștale austro-ungare din perioada războiului încercau să transmită un mesaj de tip loialist, sau să-l consolideze la nivelul mentalității comunitare. Deosebit de interesante sunt, apoi, materialele care se referă la desfășurarea vieții cotidiene din proximitatea liniei frontului și din spatele acestuia; fotografiile făcute în perioada războiului surprind de regulă momente non combative, clipe de răgaz, cu o tematică de asemenea variată și diversificată. O categorie aparte a materialului vizual rămas din vremea războiului vorbește despre suferința pe care a provocat-o marele conflict participanților și despre modul în care a fost „gestionată”. Găsim, astfel, în fotografiile din această categorie, militari răniți și spitalizați, spitale de campanie și personal cu atribuții sanitar-medicale pe lângă unități. O secțiune tematică direct legată de precedentă, care se poate individualiza în rândul imaginilor rămase din vremea războiului prim mondial, este reprezentată de întruciparea fizică a morții pe front: fotografii cu înmormântări, morminte și cimitire militare.

O categorie de surse vizuale disponibile în fonduri publice și deopotrivă în colecții private, are în vedere războiul purtat „pe mare”, fotografii și cărți poștale cu trupele de marină ale imperiului, care și-au avut baza de operațiuni la Pola, în Marea Adriatică. De un interes aparte sunt fotografiile din vremea Marelui Război, în care apar militari alături de populație civilă. Este vorba de cele mai multe ori de militari surprinși alături de membri ai propriilor familii (mame, soții, copii etc.), care apar în poze făcute departe de prima linie, cu ocazia unor permisii, când militarii puteau reveni pentru scurt timp în comunitățile de baștină. Ieșirea românilor care au luptat în uniformă dublei monarhii din zona acesteia de loialitate, prin căderea în prizonierat sau prin dezertare voluntară, este o temă care n-a scăpat surselor de natură vizuală rămase de atunci. Aceste fotografii cu prizonieri și voluntari români din vremea războiului sunt relevante și pentru traseele și coordonatele geografice foarte îndepărtate unele de altele, în care mersul evenimentelor i-a aruncat pe ostașii români, din Franța până în îndepărtata Siberie, la Vladivostok.

Documentele imagistice din anii Primului Război Mondial permit un dialog sui generis, la distanță de un secol pe firul timpului, cu

„cei ce nu mai sunt”. Obiectivul aparatului de fotografiat a surprins fizionomii adesea expresive, cu identitate cunoscută în cazul pozelor însoțite de înscrisuri și însemnări, alături de altele care nu oferă nici un fel de date privind autorii sau destinatarii, situații în care se poate spune că aceste imagini sunt purtători anonimi ai memoriei războiului. Aceste materiale ne oferă nouă celor de astăzi privilegiul unic de a „comunica” vizual cu antecesorii noștri de acum un veac, cu reprezentanții unei umanități care se aruncase în aventura teribilă a primei conflagrații mondiale.

Cuvinte-cheie: „Marele Război”, români, Austro-Ungaria, surse vizuale, istorie culturală.

In a world which makes it possible for images to be generated and transmitted quickly through social networking sites, there is a certain understanding of a statement that has come to be taken almost as an axiom, according to which “an image is worth more than a thousand words.” In the last decades, the communication revolution – the Internet in particular – has made the image a more present component of the [post-]modern man’s daily life, tending to replace written word, the printed text as a means of communication, socialisation and entertainment. From that perspective, it would be interesting to reflect on the role and the meaning played by the image a century ago in a special historical context, like that of the First World War, and to investigate what visual sources convey to us about “the Great War” and the people that caused it, went through it and bore its consequences.

Visual sources and representations have not been fully exploited in the Romanian historical writing, as compared to other cultural and historiographic spaces. The coming of a century since the First World War and the Centenary of the Great Union have created a cultural and historiographic sensitivity which facilitated the retrieval of visual records, especially in the form of exhibitions of public and private collections of photographs and postcards,¹ followed by papers focused partly or exclusively on the exploitation of images relevant to the events that

¹ A few examples in this regard: Rudolf Dinu et al., *I Romeni e la Grande Guerra 1914-1918. Mostra foto-documentaria in occasione del centenario della Grande Guerra (1914-2014)*, (București: Institutul Cultural Român, 2014); Cornel-Constantin Ilie (editor), *România în Marele Război/Romania in the Great War [Romania in the Great War]* (București: National Museum of Romanian History, 2016); Bianca Pîrvulescu (scientific coordinator), *Campaniile militare din 1917 [The 1917 military campaigns]* (București: Arhivele Naționale ale României, 2017).

happened a century ago.² Thus, Romanian historiography has been trying to fit in with the Western historical writing and to focus its attention on a topic about which much has been written during the time between the Great War and the first decade of the 21st century. Albums and websites, along with numerous publications³ host the results of a major endeavour, whose goal is – historiographically – a better understanding of the 1914-1918 period, whilst for the self-conscience of mankind, it should be a memento, an exhortation to reflect on the disastrous consequences of a “useless massacre”, as Benedict XV, the Roman pontiff at that time called it.

What do visual sources convey us about the Great War? Our contribution will attempt to answer that question, starting from the two research projects in the area of visual records which we have recently completed.⁴ We would like to present the types of content found in

² Here is a brief, selective review of papers published on this topic in our country in recent years: Marius Cristea, Smaranda Cutean, *Memorie și onoare, românii în primul război mondial. Album. Volum dedicat aniversării a 90 de ani de la Marea Unire din 1 Decembrie 1918* [Memory and honour, Romanians during World War I. Photograph album. Volume dedicated to the anniversary of 90 years from the Great Union from 1st of December 1918] (Alba Iulia: Editura Altip, 2008); Ioana Rustoiu, Gabriel Rustoiu, Cutean Smaranda, *Corpul voluntarilor români din Siberia (1918-1920). Album* [The Romanian volunteers from Siberia (1918-1920). Photograph album.] (Baia Mare: Editura Marist, 2010); Christophe Prochasson, Florin Țurcanu (coord.), *La Grande Guerre. Histoire et mémoire collective en France et en Roumanie*, (București: New Europe College-Institut d'études avancées, 2010); Dorin Giurgiu, Marius Cristea, Ioana Rustoiu, Smaranda Cutean, *Regii României Mari la Alba Iulia. Album* [The kings of Great Romania at Alba Iulia. Photograph album.] (Alba Iulia: Editura Altip, 2013); Carol Bereczky, *Album cu fotografii din Primul Război Mondial. Album mit Fotos aus dem Ersten Weltkrieg. Első-Világháborús fénykép-albuma. World War I. Photos Album*, (Reșița: Frontul Democrat al Germanilor din Județul Caraș-Severin [The German Democratic Front from Caraș-Severin county], Asociația Germană de Cultură și Educație a Adulților Reșița [The German Association for Adult Culture and Education, Reșița], „Banatul Montan” Printhouse, 2014); Alin Ciupală, *România în timpul Primului Război Mondial. Aliați, adversari și propagandă. O istorie în imagini* [Romania during World War I. Allies, adversaries and propaganda. A history in images] (București: Monitorul Oficial. Editură și Tipografie, 2018); *Albumul Marii Uniri, Samoilă Mârza* [The photograph album of the Great Union. Samoilă Mârza.], text introductiv de Radu Mârza, (București: Monitorul Oficial. Editură și Tipografie, 2018); Adrian Onofreiu, Cornelia Vlașin (coord.), *Chipuri din Marele Război. Viața în imagini a combatanților din Bistrița-Năsăud* [Faces from the Great War. The life of the combatants from Bistrița-Năsăud in images] (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Argonaut, 2018); Felicia Aneta Oarcea (coord.), *Arad. Prima capitală a Marii Uniri. Valorificarea patrimoniului cultural mobil al Complexului Muzeal Arad* [Arad. The first capital of the Great Union. Capitalizing on the mobile cultural heritage of the Arad Museum Complex] (Arad: Complexul Muzeal Arad, Editura Gutenberg Univers, 2018).

³ Among the recent issues is the volume Andrea Ciampani e Romano Ugolini (eds.), *La Grande Guerra. Un impegno europeo di ricerca e riflessione. Atti del convegno internazionale, Roma, Vittoriano, 9-11 novembre 2015*, Istituto per la Storia del Risorgimento Italiano, Collana „Prospettive/Perspectives”, vol. VI, (Soveria Mannelli: Editrice Rubbettino, 2018).

⁴ Ion Cârja, Lucian Vaida, Loránd L. Mádlly, Dan Prahase (eds.), *Un ardelean în Marele Război: Albert Porkoláb (1880-1920)* [A Transylvanian in the Great War] (Cluj-Napoca: Editura

photographs and postcards of and about Romanians from the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, who participated in the traumatic epic of the First World War. Romanians in Transylvania, Banat, Crișana, Maramureș and Bukovina paid a heavy bloody tribute on the battlefields of the first world clash, having been compelled to enrol once they received their call-up and to go “to battle” “under the Austro-Hungarian emperor’s flag”. The total number of Romanians from the historical provinces that participated in the war was about 490,000, or even 650,000, according to other estimates.⁵ It is well-known that the large majority of Romanian soldiers were enrolled in common military regiments (*K.u.K.*). However, the Romanian ethnic element was also present in Honved troops. While historical papers on the subject traditionally speak of 12 Austro-Hungarian regiments with a Romanian ethnic majority, in recent works the number has risen to 16. To those we must add a few others, in which the Romanian presence was relatively small. Thus, we can speak of a total number of 20 military units with Romanian soldiers. Moreover, about 2000 Romanians fought in Austro-Hungarian marine troops.⁶ During the war, a large number of Romanian soldiers, privates and officers were captured by the enemy in Serbia, on the Russian and Italian front. These prisoners formed the basis of the volunteer corps recruitment, in accordance with the Romanian general interests of that time.⁷ This complex journey, marked by the permanent and

Argonaut&Editura Mega, 2016) (henceforth: *Un ardelean în Marele Război*); Ion Cârja, Benkő József, Maria Alexandra Pantea, Julian Boțoghină (eds.), *De la „amurgul imperiilor” la România Mare. Românii din Austro-Ungaria în Primul Război Mondial-documente vizuale* [From the “twilight of empires” to Greater Romania. Romanians from Austria-Hungary in the First World War. Visual documents] (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Argonaut, 2018) (henceforth: *De la „amurgul imperiilor” la România Mare*).

⁵ Liviu Maior, *Soldați români în armata austro-ungară 1914-1918* [Romanian soldiers in the Austrian-Hungarian army 1914-1918] in Nicolae Edroiu, Aurel Răduțiu, Pompiliu Teodor (eds.), *Civilizație medievală și modernă românească. Studii istorice* [The Romanian medieval and modern civilisation. Historical studies] (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Dacia, 1985), 356-358; Ioan I. Șerban, *Românii în armata austro-ungară în anii Primului Război Mondial* [The Romanians in the Austrian-Hungarian army during the years of World War I], in *Annales Universitatis Apulensis. Series Historica*, II-III (1998-1999): 206-207.

⁶ Liviu Maior, *Doi ani mai deoreme. Ardeleni, bucovineni și basarabeni în război 1914-1916* [Two years earlier. Transylvanians, Bukovinians and Bessarabians in the War 1914-1916] (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Școala Ardeleană, 2016), 191-194.

⁷ From a vast literature on this topic, two works stand out: Vasile Dudaș, *Voluntarii Marii Uniri* [The volunteers of the Great Union] (Timișoara: Editura Augusta, 1996); Ioan I. Șerban, *Voluntarii transilvăneni și bucovineni din Rusia în războiul pentru întregirea neamului 1916-1919* [The Transylvania and Bukovina volunteers from Russia in the war for the unification of the nation 1916-1919] (Alba Iulia: Editura Aeternitas, 2003). For more extensive evidence of Romanian historiographic contributions to the subject, see Ion Cârja, *Românii în armata austro-ungară 1914-1918. Considerații istoriografice* [Between history and historiography:

atrocious threat of death, but also by the hope of survival, is found in the records which have given us the terrifying narrative of the Great War: journals, autobiographies, memoirs, letters etc. Found in the same register of meaning and relevance as the narrative sources, the visual sources have a stronger, additional power of suggestion, through their own way of "mirroring" reality and their capacity to reflect the direct human experience of participating in war.

Going over these documents of our collective memory, which are more "alive", more expressive, and bear greater power of suggestion and impact than the written records, we must note that a first thematic section of great value and variety contains "images" of officers, privates, civilians in different situations, contexts imposed by the unfolding war. There are group photos of soldiers, ranging from two-three people, to a few tens, alongside individual photos; in all of these photographs, privates and officers are found both together and separately. There are photos that circulated to a greater extent, as pieces of correspondence between the front line and "home" communities along with postcards proper. All this visual material made on the front or in specialised photo studios in the great cities that troops were passing through, depict soldiers in the Austro-Hungarian army before or after battles and seldom during military confrontations. While there is usually no artistic value, they offer a rich record content that allows us to "see" and understand, at a century's distance, what "the days of war" meant to those people. The notes that accompany these photos and postcards, written on the back and sometimes on the front, are of extreme importance. They allow us to identify the ethnic origin and nationality of the immortalized soldiers. More often than not, the "images" of officers and privates in the Austro-Hungarian army that have been passed down to us, through the photographs of the Great War, are marked by the expressive human physiognomy. Thus, these visual sources transmit emotions along with the intrinsic information they possess. The state of preservation often suffers, the photographs bearing the marks of time. The visual material presents different levels of deterioration – lower legibility of images and partial or total blurring of the notes on the back. The extra knowledge that these documents offer – as compared to the narrative sources of that time (journals, memoirs, autobiographies, letters) – consists in a unique

Romanians from the Austro-Hungarian Army serving on the front during the Great War], in Valentin Orga, Ottmar Trașcă, Liviu Țărău, Virgiliu Țărău (eds.), *Din modernitate în contemporaneitate. Studii istorice dedicate lui George Cipăianu la împlinirea vârstei de 75 de ani* [From modernity to contemporaneity. Historical studies dedicated to George Cipăianu at the age of 75...] (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Argonaut, 2017), 204-209 and the following.

possibility to visualize “at a one-to-one scale” - so to speak - mankind involved in the Great War.⁸

Modern wars put employ not only weaponry and fighting techniques aimed at physically annihilating the enemy, but also a propaganda apparatus whose purpose was to convey, to the battling troops and civilians, messages of political-ideological content favourable to the regime, to support beliefs and loyalties and to combat the messages that came from the enemy. The countries involved in the war used propaganda on a large scale, transmitting this kind of messages through different channels, such as churches, schools, the press etc. Written texts, as well as images, became a means of propaganda. Thus, we could say that the war was fought “with words and images”, beside classic weaponry. The Austro-Hungarian army made no exception in this regard. Images and the visual language were ways of spreading ideas such as: the bravery and heroism of front-line soldiers, the projection of an idyllic view of everyday life around the front, the illustration of the exemplary way in which the wounded were cared for in military hospitals, the comradeship within the troop and so on. The most utilised were illustrated postcards, which circulated as correspondence pieces between the battlefield and the “home front”. The symbolism of the state authority, alongside the image of the emperor and that of the imperial family, were a recurrent presence in Austro-Hungarian postcards during the war, which sought to convey a loyalist type of message and to consolidate it at the level of community. This was extremely important, as the war led to an unprecedented crisis of loyalty to the dualist regime and to the emperor-king.⁹ Frequent were also the visual representations that ridiculed the enemy by depicting it in caricature form, or by diabolising the opponent, portraying the opposing side in an exaggeratedly negative manner, as an embodiment of absolute evil. The visual language propaganda wished to transmit, to circulate feelings, states of mind. That is why the thematic content of Hungarian postcards contains not only men, but also women and children, for a stronger emotional impact on the viewers.¹⁰

⁸ A group of photos with numerous “faces” of officers and privates from the Austro-Hungarian army during the First World War can be seen in *De la „amurgul imperiilor” la România Mare*, 39-86.

⁹ See, in this regard, Liviu Maior, *Habsburgi și români. De la loialitatea dinastică la identitate națională* [Habsburgs and Romanians. From dynastic loyalty to national identity] (București: Editura Enciclopedică, 2006), 127-135 and the following.

¹⁰ For visual records suggestive of this, see *De la „amurgul imperiilor” la România Mare*, 87-98.

Visual records were an excellent source for understanding everyday life near and behind the front. Photos taken during the war usually capture highly diverse moments of peace: preparation of food, mending of boots and clothing of the soldiers, different activities of maintenance, consolidation of positions and even entertainment activities, games (chess, backgammon, cards), consumption of alcoholic drinks, smoking, reading of newspapers etc. The "heroes" of these entertainment activities are usually officers. The memoirs that we have from the front-line participants speak about the different ways of life with regard to officers and privates. The former usually benefitted from better food, larger portions of wine or rum etc. Such images are surprising upon first glance, given the context of the war. They suggest leisure, holiday, relaxation rather than conflict. This only goes to show the extent to which reality was mystified through visual language: the transmission of such images was encouraged and supported by the official propaganda. Home communities were to receive a serene image of those who had gone to battle. However, these moments of calm were an intermezzo between two military charges. With a very real prospect of being killed by a bullet, canon ball or shell, such moments of calm were perceived and experienced by the soldiers caught in the war with greater intensity than in times of peace. Another reason why non-combative activities prevail in the visual sources is the fact that it was - technically speaking - impossible to record a fight with a photo camera.¹¹

One category of extant visual material speaks of the distress that the great conflict inflicted upon the participants and the way it was "managed". Thus, we find, in some photos, wounds and disabilities, wounded and hospitalized soldiers, military hospitals and health care personnel. Surgical operations performed in such difficult circumstances with minimal medical tools are also present.¹² They are meant to depict the real face of the war, impossible to cover up by the propaganda. Group photos with various numbers of soldiers prevail. Medical personnel appear bearing the Red Cross emblem. Finally, as we have already mentioned, the first-line medical act was the object of propaganda, which found its expression in the numerous postcards that circulated during the war.¹³

A thematic section causally linked with the previous one is represented by the embodiment of death on the battlefield: photos showing funerals, graves and graveyards. There are hundreds of military

¹¹ Ibid., 119-131.

¹² In Ibid., 136 we included a photo that shows the leg amputation of a soldier of the Austro-Hungarian army in a military hospital (22nd March 1915).

¹³ See, for example, Ibid., 91 (right) and 135.

cemeteries in the cardinal points of the Great War which swallowed up large masses of people, some of which are well preserved and accessible to visitors and tourists, such as those from Galicia and Northern Italy, to cite two of the fronts where Romanian soldiers fighting under the Austro-Hungarian flag now rest in peace. Also present are clerics, military priests and chaplains, as well as celebrations of religious services around or outside the front. In Austro-Hungarian regiments with important Romanian participation, we can find priests of the two denominations, Orthodox and Greek-Catholic.¹⁴

The collection of visual sources that reflect the participation of Romanians from the dualist monarchy to the First World War also contains images (in public or private collections) of the war "at sea". We are talking about photos and postcards of imperial marine troops which had their operations base at Pola, in the Adriatic Sea. We have found postcards of ships that belonged to Austro-Hungarian war marine, different group photos that show Romanian seamen, individual photos of sailors of Romanian and other ethnic origins. Visual records have also been preserved from the twilight of the dualist monarchy, when marine troops went into dissolution, separated based on nationality, as was also the case of the land army. Thus, the images of the members of the National Guard of Romanian Mariners at Pola and its commander Valeriu Seredan have long been part of scientific circuit.¹⁵

Of particular interest are photographs from the Great War in which soldiers appear alongside civilians. Most times, they were soldiers together with members of their own families (mothers, children, wives etc.). They appear in photos taken in locations far from first line, when on leave, when soldiers could briefly return to their local communities. Equally interesting photographs are those of soldiers and their brides, which suggests that when men who had gone to war came back, marriages also took place. Dated and sometimes with identifiable characters, these records illustrate the great diversity of the preserved visual material that, today, reveals – at a temporal distance of a century – the memory of the First World War.¹⁶

The relinquishment of loyalty of the Romanians who fought in the Austro-Hungarian army – either by falling prisoners or by voluntary desertion¹⁷ is a theme that was not omitted by the visual records of that

¹⁴ Ibid., 145-158.

¹⁵ Ibid., 169-177.

¹⁶ Ibid., 161-166.

¹⁷ See, in this regard, Ion Cârja, *Opțiuni și dileme în vremuri de război. Emil Rebreanu la despărțirea de „bunul împărat”* [Options and dilemmas in times of war. Emil Rebreanu at the parting with

time. Thus, we have photos of prisoners and Romanian volunteers in Russia, Italy and France, disparate pieces or richer collections, such as the lot of photographs depicting the activity of the second corps of Romanian volunteers from Russia, who were active in Siberia in 1918-1919. The lot was published a few years ago.¹⁸ Among the records preserved from the Romanian prisoners in Italy, of special interest are Petre Ugliș Delapeșca's memoirs, which, alongside the handwritten notes, contain extensive visual material.¹⁹ These photos of Romanian prisoners and volunteers from the Great War are also relevant for the great distances that these events put between the Romanian soldiers, from France to the faraway Siberia at Vladivostok. Given that the vast majority of Romanians in the Austro-Hungarian army came from rural areas, a more static cultural universe, we could say that after the emigration "to America", the war gave them a second opportunity to broaden their horizon, in that for those involved in volunteering, geographic space and its cultural dimension were considerably re-scaled. One of the many examples of this kind was that of the military priest Gheorghe Rista, who, after having been sent to battle with the Honved regiment no. 8 Lugoj, was taken prisoner by the Russians and would then activate in the second corps of Romanian volunteers on the Eastern front. The photo and letters he sent to his family (in the village Ohaba Sârbească from Banat) from Irkutsk on 25th January and 21st July 1919 are relevant for this space dilation that the war caused for Romanians. The experience of being prisoners and then volunteers, which Romanians from the former dualist empire had during the First World War, is explicitly found in the narrative sources of the time, as well as the visual records that, with their language and expression, thus complete the contribution of documents with regard to the Romanians' contact with the first world clash. The issue of prisoners and volunteers between 1914-1919 is evidently convergent with the preparation and achievement of the Great Union, to which these men brought their contribution on remote battlefields, as well as at home. In the Romanian

"the good emperor"], in vol. Ioan Lăpușneanu, *Emil Rebreanu, eroul de la Ghimeș-Făget* [Emil Rebreanu, the hero from Ghimeș-Făget], second edition by Ioan Pinteș, (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Școala Ardeleană, 2018), 5-28; Ion Cârja, Cecilia Cârja, *Marele Război și redimensionarea loialităților. Români ardeleni și bănățeni după despărțirea de „bunul împărat”* [The Great War and the resizing of loyalties. Transylvanian and Banat Romanians after parting with the "good emperor"], in *Revista Bistriței*, XXXII (2018): 225-231.

¹⁸ I. Rustoiu, G. Rustoiu, S. Cutean (eds.), *op.cit.*, passim.

¹⁹ See, in this regard, Petre Ugliș Delapeșca, *Jurnal de război din anii 1914-1919* [War journal from 1914-1919], editors: Ioana Rustoiu, Smaranda Cutean, Marius Cristea și Tudor Roșu, (Alba Iulia: Muzeul Național al Unirii Alba Iulia/Seria „Memoriale”, I, Editura Altip, 2015), passim.

territories of the former Austria-Hungary, where the campaign of the Romanian army took place in 1919, many Transylvanians joined the troops from the Old Kingdom, some of which had returned from the front. Even though they are not as numerous as other source types, visual records capture this thematic section in chronology: Romanians as prisoners in Russia, Italy or France, subsequently volunteers and fighters for the achievement of the Great Union.²⁰

Visual sources, in their very particular way, reflect the terrible experience of mankind during the First World War. For the Romanian historiography, their importance and relevance are higher, as their use is of rather recent date. Practically, a more systematic approach became noticeable around the centenary of the war. These visual materials regarding the Romanian participation in battles under different flags, which have been published so far, are from what exists - and awaits publication - in public and private collections; this should go beyond the Centenary of the Great Union, because they are as important as narrative sources. The photos and postcards from 1914-1918 are privileged records of a "cultural history" of the Great War.²¹ If, traditionally speaking, historical writing in the countries that participated in the conflict had a polemic dimension - more or less obvious - often marked by national bias, recent approaches of international historiography has focus on a supranational history or a transnational history of the First World War,²² which aims to surpass the polemic level and the vindicative approach and focuses on the participation in war as an experience of mankind, on what soldiers truly experienced on the battlefield, in and out of the trenches, regardless of loyalties, political ambitions and projects that were behind military conflicts. Distress, drama, all kinds of deprivation, from food and hygiene, to long-term separation of soldiers from their families, proximity and long-term exposure to the horrors of war, impending death, psychological terror of a modern war that used technology borne out of the 19th century industrial revolution, capable of "producing" death on the battlefield on a monstrous scale, unseen in the past wars, all these represented a common dimension of the war experience that

²⁰ Visual records in this regard in *De la „amurgul imperilor” la România Mare*, 179-192.

²¹ Odyle Roynette, *Pour une histoire culturelle della guerre au XIX^e siècle*, in „Revue d'histoire du XIX^e siècle” [En ligne], 30 (2005), mis en ligne le 12 juillet 2006, accessed 11.04.2019, at <https://journals.openedition.org/rh19/1003>; Bruno Cabanes (sous la direction), *Une histoire de la guerre du XIX siècle a nos jours* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2018), see considerations from 7-36, 401-407.

²² Nicola Labanca, Oswald Überegger, *La guerra italo-austriaca (1915-18)* (Bologna: Società editrice il Mulino, 2014), 7-35.

transcended national and political limitations, or the official ends of commitment to the conflict. Such a "dispassionate" view on war seen as a global phenomenon²³ allows for a novel research approach that goes beyond the mere event and fact and lays emphasis on other aspects, like everyday life in times of war, history of suffering and mourning,²⁴ propaganda and manipulation on the front and among civilians, celebrations and commemorations of the Great War after 1918²⁵ and so on. The fact that life in its deepest aspects did not allow itself to be banished by the horrors of war, is demonstrated by the letter and postcard exchanges of soldiers with their loved ones at home, soldiers who got married in those short moments of peace when they were on leave,²⁶ examples like the sentimental testament written by Dimitrie Zgriban on the back of a photo sent home to his wife in Banat from the Italian front²⁷ and especially the collection of photos and postcards of the officer Albert Porkolab, which is an excellent demonstration of the survival of the feelings of deep human affection in a time of rattling of the guns.²⁸ Last but not least, visual records are illustrative alongside narrative sources of what was called "ground-level memory of war,"²⁹ the view of simple soldiers, of the mass level of the fighting troop and not that of the "commandment": major state, officer elite, politicians and diplomats. Photographs taken on the front line contain many scenes from everyday life, bits of the daily lives of the troop outside war operations. Visual sources accessible for our research depict soldiers and officers from the Austro-Hungarian army involved in daily activities: food and eating, clothes mending, leisure time. They show that these primary sources were able to convey this "human dimension" of a major conflict like the First World War.

A history of the participation of the Romanians from Austria-Hungary in the First World War, seen from the viewpoint of these sources, illustrates another component: the need for communication, amplified by the exceptional context of the conflict. On a European scale,

²³ Jay Winter, *The Cambridge History of the First World War*, vol. I. *Global War*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

²⁴ Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, Annette Becker, *Războiul redescoperit 1914-1918* [The rediscovered war 1914-1918] (București: Editura Corint, 2014), passim.

²⁵ An Italian publication on this topic in Lorenzo Cadeddu, *La leggenda del soldato sconosciuto all'altare di Patria* (Udine: Gaspari editore, 2005).

²⁶ See photographs published by us in *De la „amurgul imperiilor” la România Mare*, 162-163.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 107.

²⁸ *Un ardelean în Marele Război*, passim.

²⁹ Doru Radosav, "Memoria „de jos” a războiului. Câteva considerații" [The "Ground Level" memory of war. A few considerations], in *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie Orală*, XIV (2014): 5-54.

communication between the front line and the home communities received unprecedented proportions. Only in the case of Italy, it was estimated that over 4 billion letters were exchanged between the front line and home, in the years between 1915-1918.³⁰ The correspondence piece played the role of a symbolic substitute for the one that went to war³¹ in the same way as for soldiers sending and receiving letters was a form of symbolic emotional relation with the “good times”, from before their enrolment and with their loved ones at home, where the rhythm of life went on without them just the way it did before “the lads” were sent to “battle”. For the recipients, the contents of the letters were of secondary importance. That is because the receipt of a letter was a sign that the departed was still alive. At that time, photos also circulated in the form of postcards – a practice now gone – which allowed for the long-distance transmission of feelings and emotions, along with the written content, usually placed on the back or next to the pictures. A photograph sent from the front had the advantage of containing the visual identity of the sender. Correspondence between the front line and the civilians was poignantly assumed, more than the letters sent in times of peace, as each letter or postcard received from the departed for war could be, in fact, the last one.

As far as the content is concerned, these pieces of correspondence that left the front line had an almost standard format: they had “few words”, briefly giving information about the sender, followed by references to the weather and inquiries about those at home. All correspondence underwent strict war censorship, a fact well-known by the soldiers, who tried to leave out political comments or hints to how the war was going. In a letter from the front line sent to his wife in Câmpeni (today in the County of Alba) on 7th December 1916, Alexandru Săvuț pointed out that his situation as soldier in a combatting troop did not allow him to present reality as it was: “we live in such a way that we can’t say anything”.³²

War correspondence, which was never the object of systematic research, is important for the literacy level of the troops, given the well-known fact that the armies that clashed in the Great War had large numbers of illiterate soldiers. Battalions and regiments of the Austro-Hungarian army made no exception. The need for communication was as real and urgent for the illiterate (privates) and literate (officers) alike.

³⁰ Lucio Fabi, *Una guerra sulla carta*, in Roberto Todero (a cura di), *Stasera andremo in fuoco. Iddio me guardi. Lettere di un Honvéd fiumano dal monte San Michele*, collection (Gorizia: “Sentieri di pace”, no. 2, Grafica Goriziana, 2013), 5.

³¹ Frédéric Rousseau, *14-18, penser le patriotism* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2018), 137-150.

³² *De la „anurgul imperiilor” la România Mare*, 112.

Epistolary pieces that contained the phrase "epistle made" come from illiterate soldiers who asked their fellows for help. War was a time when the exercise of correspondence became very important, as a result of the need for long-distance communication and relations. This was felt as vital by soldiers and civilians alike. In this regard, another category of war correspondence comes from people who used writing for the first time, which transpires from writing irregularities and lack of neatness, grammar mistakes and a style of expression that bears the clear mark of oral communication. In a totally different category was the correspondence of officers, which was well written, neat, richer in content and expression. Based on our research, we may note that war censorship was less strict when it came to the officers of the Austro-Hungarian army, as compared to lower-rank soldiers, especially when the latter came from among the "nationalities" of the dualist monarchy.³³

Postcards and photographs from the Romanian soldiers of the Austro-Hungarian army belong to a general typology of war correspondence in the years 1914-1918. This category of documents intersects (as far as the content and the cultural levels of their authors are concerned) with narrative sources: journals, memoirs, autobiographies, which had as their object of expression the world war. As documents that circulated via mail, these visual sources are in close proximity to war sources of epistolary character. The correspondence of the time, visual or classic, also represents an indicator of the learning capacity of the fighting troop, especially in the case of the men that came from rural areas. In the proximity of these cultural "practices", the form of correspondence between peasant-soldiers and their loved ones was called "minor memoirs" and consists of writings by rural people of poor cultural level.³⁴

The impact of war and the transformations it triggered stimulated participants to become the narrators of their own experience on the battlefield, regardless of their education level or literacy. Concretely, that meant that apart from the oral channel, which was specific to them, many soldiers of the rural world tried to certain aspects of their own war experience into writing, in the form of memoirs. Like the letters dispatched from the front, a considerable number of texts came into being, which bore the strong mark of oral communication. They are extremely interesting as a cultural history phenomenon, in that a world of peasants returning from the front was shyly entering the realm of

³³ *Un ardelean în Marele Război*, 234, 237, 238.

³⁴ Valeriu Leu, Carmen Albert, *Banatul în memorialistica „măruntă” sau istoria ignorată* [Banat in the "minor" memoirs or the ignored history] (Reșița: History Museum of the Caraș-Severin County, 1995).

memoirs. The journal written by Constantin Hegheș of Boian (today part of the Cluj County), which contains a short account of his “troubles at the Galician border”, is an illustrative example of the way in which a rural soldier of poor literacy wished to put pen to paper and recount bits of his war experience.³⁵

The notes that accompany these images of war, which travelled predominantly by military post, make it possible to identify the nationality of the senders, even though this fact was not an absolute rule. That is because the presence of Romanian soldiers can also be seen in photos and postcards written in Hungarian or German.³⁶ Among the pieces left from Romanian soldiers we can find, in some cases, words or expressions borrowed from Hungarian or German, as a result of the inter-ethnic communication in an army which had a multi-ethnic composition (just like the dualist empire), where the two languages were official in all troops.

Finally, these visual records from the time of the Great War allow for a *sui generis* dialogue, a century back in time, with those “that are no more”. The camera often caught expressive physiognomies of people with known identities, in the case of the pictures that are accompanied by notes and writing, alongside others that do not offer any information about their authors or recipients. Here, we are dealing with the anonymous bearers of the memory of war. These materials offer us the unique privilege of visually “communicating” with our ancestors from a century ago, with the representatives of a mankind that had taken the leap into the terrible adventure of the First World War.

³⁵ *De la „amurgul imperiilor” la România Mare*, 113.

³⁶ See in this regard *Ibid.*, 73, 125.