

Oto Luthar, ed., *The Great War and Memory in Central and South-Eastern Europe* [Balkan Studies Library, Volume 17] (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2016), 191 pp.

In an effort to revive the study of the Great War in postwar memory, a group of scholars led by Oto Luthar and Nikolai Vukov has delivered a monograph on everyday life on the South-Eastern front, a topic often “hidden” or “overlooked” in European historiography. The opening chapter (“Introduction: Beyond a Western-Centric Historical Interpretation of the Great War,” pp. 1–17) explains the theoretical approach and directions pursued in the book. The contributors have tried to place the study of everyday life of individuals, families or groups who came from, fought or died on the territory of Southeastern Europe in the general and familiar context of the Great War. Drawing on personal documents (memoirs, autobiographies, letters, and literary works) they have chosen to focus on the personal rather than the political. Writing from their respective national viewpoints, they have analyzed the stereotypes in which war memoirs were (ab)used as postwar political weapons. They were, of course, mindful of the fact that, despite the abundance of available evidence, the memorialization of the Great War as the individualized expression of suffering has been wrought with controversy, contention and collective oblivion in the postwar period and beyond. The ten chapters of the book address all of these topics and more.

Using biographies and autobiographies by Slovenes (usually intellectuals) who had not succumbed to the “infectious mood of euphoria” of war propaganda, Oto Luthar reconstructs the motives of “dobrovoljci” and “prostovoljci” (volunteers) who traversed Balkan trenches or Russian expanses to join the Serbian army (“Men Who Marched Away: WWI in the Memories of Slovenian Soldiers,” pp. 18–37). Analyzing archival evidence, Luthar concludes that the perception of the other—the enemy—was always one-sided and stereotypical. The closer the author of the document had been to direct warfare, the more he was able to render a realistic, humane and poignant view of the enemy. Luthar also concludes that fighters from Bosnia were looked down upon in the multiethnic Austro-Hungarian army and that the opinion of the Western-European allies of the Balkans was not particularly flattering.

As the largest social group in the Hungarian army, the Hungarian peasantry—focused on safeguarding their own landholdings, distrusting and isolated from state politics—was unwilling to join the war effort. However, along with pain and suffering, the war years brought an increased sense of self-worth and taught them new agricultural and military techniques. The losses and suffering of the Hungarian peasantry ultimately led to the revolutions of 1917–1919, concludes Ignác Romsics (“War in Puszta: The Great War and the Hungarian Peasantry,” pp. 38–54).

Examining wartime “ego-documents,” Daniela Schanes offers a comparative study of the views held by Austro-Hungarian and Serbian officers (“Between Reality and Imagination: Changing Memories of the Serbian Theater of War,” pp. 55–70). Focusing on the stereotypical cognitive notions about the Serbs and the Balkans among Austro-Hungarian officers, she details the devastation of the country and the emergence of resistance against the occupiers. On the other hand, there were cases of fraternization between enemy soldiers, humane treatment of locals by some officers and friendly Serbian civilians.

Olga Manojlović Pintar and Vera Gudac (“An Ugly Black Night: Remembering the Austro-Hungarian Occupation of Serbia, 1915–1918,” pp. 71–84) point out the need

for a new simultaneous assessment of the past that could transform “monochrome interpretations” into a “simultaneity of different views” to avoid stereotypical notions of “us vs. enemies” and establish a new way of provocative thinking as a simultaneous process of remembering and forgetting the past. This could help us find a balance between the meticulous reconstruction of military operations and the overlooked domain of civilian life under occupation.

During the Great War, the Bosniaks were known for their courage and loyalty among allies and enemies alike. At the same time, however, they were seen as crude, uneducated and immature. Ahmed Pašić’s research suggests that the victims of this preconception were mostly Muslims who served in four regiments of the Austro-Hungarian army and often fought in the critical parts of the front. Their graves are scattered on almost all Austro-Hungarian battlefields (“Bosniaks in WWI: Loyal, Obedient, Different,” pp. 85–96).

In a long and bloody conflict such as the Great War, even cities that lay far from the battlefield had to take in and help the wounded. In Zagreb, at the time a provincial town, another 18 hospitals were added to the existing four in late 1914. Schools and factory facilities were adapted to serve as hospitals and many volunteers were trained to work as medical assistants. These local, hastily trained medical workers compensated the lack of professional medical staff and equipment (Vijoleta Herman Kaurić, “Caring for the Wounded: Zagreb Military Hospitals in WWI,” pp. 97–110).

Internment in the interior of the Austro-Hungarian Empire was a separate segment of life behind the frontlines. Katharina Wesener gives insight into the life of refugees, internees and POWs at the Thalerhof internment camp near Graz (“Internment in WWI: The Case of Thalerhof,” pp. 111–122). Although Austro-Hungarian nationals, internees suspected of being Russophiles were treated as enemies even though the majority had been accused of transgressions they hadn’t committed or even considered a crime.

The postwar use of memorialization and the provision of solace to bereaved families played into the hands of the emerging fascist ideology in Italy. Fabio Todero examines the erection of commemorative monuments (“the return of heroes”) and museum complexes (“sacred areas”) as a phenomenon. By celebrating acts of sacrifice, memorialization became a tool in the hands of the new regime and its cultural policy, which strove to educate the young to see their homeland and ethnic group as supreme values. The same tendency was reflected in art and literature (“War and Memory: The Fascist Instrumentalization of the Italian Front,” pp. 123–136).

The memorialization of WWI was directly tied to the iconography and the erection of various war monuments before the Great War. Silviu Hariton examines the phenomenon of “monumentomania” and assesses the role of numerous monuments and commemorative locations in the Romanian state policy of war commemoration. By celebrating “a generation of sacrifice,” their commemorative nature had a far-reaching social and cultural impact on the rise of national feelings. Some interwar Romanian literature shared the same sentiment (“War Commemorations in Inter-War Romania: Cultural Politics and Social Context,” pp. 137–161).

Bulgaria fought both world wars in complex inter-ethnic, economic, social and political circumstances. Citing numerous examples, Nikolai Vukov delivers a chapter on the commemoration of battlegrounds and the erection of monuments to the fallen in Bulgarian wars 1878–1945 (“Commemorating the Dead and the Dynamics of For-

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getting: Post-mortem Interpretations of WWI in Bulgaria," pp. 162–187). Analyzing Bulgarian casualties in these wars and the tragic postwar fate of both the glorified fallen and the survivors, Vukov addresses the question of blame for Bulgaria's defeat and assesses the political purpose of and need for commemorative monuments. The numerous unmarked battlegrounds in and outside Bulgaria, the derelict state of old monuments and the erection of new ones is explained in the context of Bulgaria's international position and its internal turmoil. The contents of the dedications on monuments—the dedicatees ranging from anonymous soldiers of various nationalities to the reconciliatory formulation "to all who died for Bulgaria"—were determined by social and political circumstances.

Every chapter draws on extensive bibliography as well as personal documents relevant to the subject of research. The lesser known aspects of the Great War are here elucidated by scholars who have delivered a compact contribution to contemporary scholarship despite their diverse backgrounds and topics. Pointing out the overlooked, suppressed or distorted aspects in the memorialization of the Great War, this book marks a step forward in the assessment of Europe's violent past and opens up new possibilities for future research.

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