

University Doctor (PhD) Dissertation Thesis

**THE 1944/45 PARTISAN REPRISALS IN
MAGYARKANIZSA AND ENVIRONS, AFTER
REVIEW OF ARCHIVE DOCUMENTS**

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Objective of the thesis, delimitation of the topic

Already known to today's historians is that, at the end of 1944 and the beginning of 1945, the OZNA (the Department for Protection of the People – formed in 1943 under the leadership of Aleksandar Ranković. Its mission was the creation of an information-gathering service, in order to discover and punish spies and the fifth column). The units of OZNA, partisan forces and some local citizens who were Serb nationals, committed genocide among the local Hungarian communities in the Southern Territories. This all occurred with the knowledge and acquiescence of the chief commander, Tito. I find it important to point out that the partisan powers carried out illegal liquidations not just against the Hungarians, but also against real or imagined political enemies living in Yugoslavia: Serbs, Croats, Slovenians, Germans and Albanians. As the reprisals were directed from the center of power, in many places the local Serb population, encouraged by the situation, took part in the reckoning. Public opinion in opposition to the minorities had grown so strong that it pushed the more empathetic Serb citizens, who might have otherwise tried to help those people who were in trouble, into passivity.

What was earlier open anti-Hungarianism in the Southern Territories was quickly replaced by a period of forced silence, and research into the issue could only begin in the early 1990s.

Based on the research, it has today become clear that the mother country (Hungary) also knew about the massacres in 1944/45 but, up until the time of the system change, with a few courageous exceptions, there were no serious written summaries of the events.

Research carried out after the beginning of the 1990s – especially using the oral history methodology – allowed a glimpse into the atrocities carried out against the local Hungarian population from 1944 to 1945, after the results achieved in the first 10 – 15 years, the research has been in a state of stasis and

did not succeed in producing any new, significant information. The resources of the archives operating at the time were missing.

The breakthrough occurred by the opening of the Serbian archives, which happened after the formation of the Hungarian-Serb academic committee. The mistaken belief that the partisans did not document the atrocities was finally and completely dispersed. Based on the knowledge we have now – even if document destruction did occur – we are aware that most of the written material survived. Only the archives of the Interior Ministry – allegedly because of failure to find a technical solution – cannot be researched into, although it is probable that those archives contain valuable documents about the subject.

After researching the liquidation lists found at the Vajdaság Archives and in the Vajdaság Museum (based on the summaries provided by Zsuzsanna Mezei, archives specialist, and István Fodor, archives director) the known numbers of victims identified by name could be increased. These documents contain, however – characteristic of the early partisan documents – many inaccuracies and typographical errors, so they cannot be used without reviewing origins and well-grounded research.

In the interest of accuracy as to the numbers of victims, micro-research must be carried out in the local settlements. The examination of the documents of a few settlements, extending to every detail, could produce new results in this research. It would be important that the documents applying to a few individuals would be separately examined in detail and compared. Together with my colleague Tibor Molnár, the acting director of the Zenta historical archives, we undertook to examine the written documents for the township of Magyarkanizsa. In this dissertation I report on the research which I myself carried out.

Resources used, methodologies employed

From the very beginning we followed the given demarcation lines of the districts, the district of Magyarkanizsa (Magyarkanizsa község, Opština Kanjiža) is a separated unit for public administration purposes in Serbia, I started my work by processing the events that occurred there. The district of Magyarkanizsa is in the area of the Vajdaság, geographically it is located in the historical Bácska region. Its land area is 399 km². The center of the district is the city of Magyarkanizsa (Kanjiža), and it also contains twelve villages: Adorján (Adorjan), Horgos (Horgoš), Ilonafalu (Vojvoda Zimonić), Kishomok (Mali Pesak), Kispiac (Male Pijace), Martonos (Martonoš), Orom (Orom), Oromhegyes (Trešnjevac), Tóthfalu (Totovo Selo), Újfalu (Novo Selo), Velebit (Velebit), and Völgyes (Doline). In 2002 its population was 27,510. I started the research off along several different lines. Using the oral history methodology, conversations were held with the witnesses that are still alive, which produced more than twenty hours of recordings. At the same time, I carried out research at the Zenta historical archives, and after the formation of the mixed Hungarian-Serb academic committee, at the archives of the Vajdaság as well.

Among the materials at the Zenta historical archives, I examined the documents concerning the region in question. One part of the archival documents for the present area of the Magyarkanizsa district can be found in the Zenta historical archives. The research is made more difficult by the fact that the earlier public administration divisions are not the ones used today, consequently, the materials on the village of Adorján can be found among the documents at Magyarkanizsa, while the materials for the villages of Martonos és Horgos can be found separately. From the historical archives at Zenta I examined the following materials:

- *Written Materials of the Committee for the People's Freedom in Magyarkanizsa, Horgos and Martonos.*

After the establishment of the military public administration, the committees for the freedom of the people only had a consulting role, consequently, this documentation is not full of precise information about the reprisals. After examining the records of the district's committees for the people's freedom, however, several interesting documents did come to light.

– *Documents of the Zenta City Command*

The city command centers formed military stations in the area under their control. Militias were also formed, like the local armed units, at the top of which stood the militia command. The militia was placed directly under the locally competent military command, as the armed organization which executed commands.

The city command center of Zenta started its operation on October 20, 1944. Its competency extended to the entire territory of the Zenta Processus (járás). Zenta and magyarkanizsa belonged to this territory, as did the settlements of Ada, Mohol, Horgos and Martonos.

– *Documents of the Zenta Processus Peoples' Committee*

The reports of disappearances that can be found in the materials of the Zenta Processus Peoples' Committee belong to an interesting type of document. For researchers these reports serve as an especially valuable material resource. The person making the report to the committee filled out a blank form about the circumstances of their relative's disappearance, or they were recorded in a minutes. In many cases they even state who the person or persons was/were who dragged away the victim.

– *Documents about property seizures*

The partisan power in the Magyarkanizsa district prepared somewhat precise lists, even if they were missing information in places, about persons on their territory who faced mandatory liquidation. One of the reasons for this certainly could have been that the law on property seizures was extended to include assets from people who had been liquidated illegally.

Records that arose as a part of property seizures are a very important resource for research, as they also quote people's recollections at the time. In appeals during the course of the property seizure process, from time to time, the relatives make statements about the circumstances of their relative's disappearance, as well as complaining that they received no order certifying the war crimes charge.

– *Death certificate records*

After the war, the Yugoslavian courts – first of all at the request of victims' relatives – certified those persons who disappeared during the war as legally dead. Between 1945 and 1952 these proceedings were carried out by the competent court based on the law concerning legal decisions outside courts, after 1952 the proceedings were based on a law passed on March 31, *on death certification for missing persons and evidence therefor*.

Despite the fact that the partisan power prepared lists of the liquidated persons, in the proceedings to certify death, these documents of evidentiary strength were not used. The proceedings, besides allowing witnesses to testify, were run as if in reality they knew nothing about the whereabouts of the victims.

In the Vajdaság archives, I examined the contents of registry (“fond” in Hungarian) 183, which was the materials of the War Crimes Investigation Committee, which reviewed the crimes of the occupiers. Registry 183 reflected those procedures used by the partisan power to create its own enemies (whether war criminals or enemies of the state) as well as explaining why the revenge or reprisal occurred to them. The registry even allows a glimpse into those crimes which were carried out by Tito's partisans all over the Vajdaság area. The mentioned registry at the Vajdaság archives contains the records of the committees that investigated war crimes, which can now be researched by historians. Among the documents, besides the records of the committee investigating war crimes in Novi Sad, the materials for the settlements in the

area can also be found, some with more deficiencies, some with less. In the materials of the registry's records, despite the deficiencies, there are many items that can be found concerning the locality about the lists prepared about liquidated persons. Besides the lists of names, there is other interesting and valuable information. Such are, for example, the files dealing with the question of what is a war crime. After examining the documents it can be concluded that the determination of the categories of "war crimes" and "treason against the people" occurred similarly throughout the entire region.

It comes out from the records that the mechanisms of partisan justice allowed tendencies to prevail which were in opposition to today's practice of justice, as well as European norms of justice. In the vast majority of the cases, liquidation preceded evidentiary proceedings, so, in any case, it can be said that the reprisals effected innocents, or persons who should have had the right to defend their innocence.

The committee divided what they considered to be crimes into the following groups:

- 1.** Invasion (ulazak) – the crimes committed by the local Hungarian population during the time when the Hungarian army invaded;
- 2.** Army (armija) – crimes committed by the Hungarian army;
- 3.** Raids (racija) – Crimes committed in Novi Sad and its surroundings in 1942;
- 4.** Camps (logori) – crimes committed at the various camps;
- 5.** Violent mobilization (prisilno mobilisanje) – crimes committed during mobilization of soldiers;
- 6.** Forced labor (prisilni rad) – crimes committed during forced labor;
- 7.** Relocation (iseljivanje) – crimes committed connected to relocations;
- 8.** Crimes against property (protiv imovine).

Enemies of the people were put into a separate category. The list of names of the persons deemed Enemies of the People can be found in a register, with 8640 names. The names and data – name, remarks, perhaps sentence – were

recorded on a card, which is the foundation to create the two-volume work already mentioned. The partisan power, for its part, started its subsequent self-justification by collecting the *reports* and compiling the name lists according to groups based on the “crime committed.” Following this the *minutes* were created, and then the *declaration* of the person as a *war criminal* (declaration form F), and in some cases there was a court hearing.

One of the biggest parts of the registry records – in 284 boxes organized by locality in alphabetical order – are the boxes of reports. The committee investigating war crimes collected them in almost every settlement of the Southern Territories, and they were used as the basis for declaring local residents war criminals, or enemies of the people. A significant part of registry 183 is made up of these reports. Broken down by settlement, the vast majority of the reports can be found, one part of the missing reports have been lost, another part is attached to other documents and may be discovered during research, some have, for example, been relocated to the records of the declarations/court sentencing group.

After gathering up the reports, the local committee would assemble the list of names, in groups based on crime committed, of those persons thought to have committed war crimes, and then sent those to the administrative body above it, in the case of Martonos, Magyarkanizsa and Horgos, this meant to the Zenta Statistical Office.

As a part of the procedure above, for those persons who the committee felt required further investigation, “zapisnik,” or official minutes, were prepared by listening to witness testimony, in which the actions of the accused citizens were reviewed in greater detail. Characteristically, not every name of the accused can be found in these minutes, so the number of minutes is actually much greater than the numbers of accused persons. Occasionally, names appear in the minutes who are not even accused of a crime.

The biggest part of registry 183 of the Vajdaság historical archives is made up of these records. Of the numbered minutes, from 1 to 33,94 – corresponding to the time period between 1944 and 1947 – one part is missing, but even still, there are 94 boxes to be researched. The research is made more difficult by the fact that on one part of these documents, there are two types of numbering systems. One is according to the filing number, another is according to date, making some documents difficult to find. The fact that there is a list broken down by locality helps the research.

The next type of document is the so-called “F-odluka,” which is to say the declarations. In the Vajdaság archives, they have 7900 individual declarations in 19 boxes. In these files, referring to the minutes and the reports, they essentially declare persons to be war criminals. Typically, not every named contained in the minutes has its own declaration, so the decision as to which name would receive a declaration, and which would not, was done on the basis of a selection process. With these documents, production of documents after the fact was also typical, given the fact that the declarations against those liquidated happened well after their deaths. Those named in the declarations were registered in the War Criminals Registration with the same number as that in the declaration. In the two books, there are 7739 names.

Among the materials of the archives, the so-called “karticák” can be found, the files of the war criminals. The names, and perhaps personal information, of the war criminals for the regions of Bácska, Bánság and Szerémség were written on these 10 x 7 centimeter cards. They are divided into three groups. The “I” group, which meant under investigation (pod istragom), the “O”, which meant convicted (osuđen) and the “P”, which meant liquidated without a court order (presuđen). On the cards of the group liquidated without a court order, there is normally no information other than the name and the locality. In rare cases, the number of the F declaration may also be present. There is more information on the cards of the “under investigation” and

“convicted” groups, for the convicted group, even the conviction number can be read on most of the cards.

There are also those persons brought to court on the basis of the declarations, or in their absence – in many cases after their liquidation – a case is filed against them. In most of these cases there is no court order, rather, the case simply stops at that point. In some cases there was only a *conviction*; often the court case material cannot be reviewed, only the conviction, in many of these cases there is only a reference to the fact that a given person was convicted.

Further documents that should be examined include those reports that include the name list of the liquidated persons. There are many of these reports, and many types thereof, with the disorganization characteristic of the early years of partisan document management, with many typographical and other errors. These documents were probably not prepared for future generations, but rather, to provide a foundation for the seizure of the assets of persons who had been killed.

The liquidation lists for the area we have examined – the Magyarkanizsa district – went through several stations before finding their way to Novi Sad.

After a thorough investigation of the abovementioned records, I have managed, on the area I researched, to increase the number of unidentified victims.

Listing of results for the thesis

After finishing the micro-research regarding Magyarkanizsa District, I succeeded in adding 39 new names of victims to the 198 victims that had been discovered by research to this point – mostly by using the oral history method – and thus the district’s number of victims identified by name increased to 237.

In the case of Magyarkanizsa itself, I succeeded in identifying 21 new names to add to the 51 names recorded until now. The number of victims

increased thereby to 72. Out of this number, 52 were locals, 14 were from Oromhegy, 3 were from Tóthfalu, 2 were registered in Orom, and one 16-month-old baby was a victim of the Járek camp.

In the case of Adorján, the name of a new victim was discovered. The name István Tóth exists on the OZNA liquidation lists, as a resident of Magyarkanizsa. He was therefore counted as a resident of Magyarkanizsa by researchers until now. The document mentioned above, however, clearly shows that Adorján had not 56, but 57 victims in the anti-Hungarian atrocities.

In the case of Horgos, to summarize the documents found in the Vajdaság archives: I succeeded in finding 9 new names to add to the 66 registered names presently on the list, so the number of liquidated persons identified by name increased to 75. From this number, 62 were from Horgos, 5 were from Királyhalom, 1 was from Törökkanizsa, and 7 were from the surrounding area.

In the case of Martonos, to summarize the documents found in the Vajdaság archives, I succeeded in finding 8 new names to add to the 25 registered names, so the number of liquidated persons identified by name increased to 33.

Locality	Number of known victims before the micro-research	Number of victims identified by the micro-research	Number of victims identified to date
Magyarkanizsa	51	21	72
Martonos	25	8	33
Horgos	66	9	75
Adorján	56	1	57
Total	198	39	237

During the research, besides the actual results, a possibility occurs to determine further facts.

– The partisan power attempted to provide reasons for its acts after the fact; it only started producing certifications of death after the liquidations had

occurred. Of course the extent of this depended in great part on the zeal of the local committees. On the area we researched, starting in Martonos, it would be enough to refer to the numbers of reports. Having reviewed the reports, however, we would have to say the fact is established, that most of the reports were made by people who earlier took part in the torture of the local Hungarians. Clearly, the veracity of these reports can be called into question, as it is a way to excuse their earlier acts.

– It isn't correct to only talk about partisan reprisals, as the examined documents unequivocally show that there were places in the area I reviewed in which the local monarchist Serbs took part in the liquidations, as well as Chetniks in some cases. Because of the murders which occurred in Magyarkanizsa and Adorján, many partisan convictions were brought against those cruel individuals. It's an interesting fact that while the death squads of the OZNA went through the villages, and liquidated people without convicting them of a crime, those "civil" persons who committed similar crimes were, from time to time, punished. The clear ideological component of these convictions can be tracked. Naturally we understand that, in order to sway the opinion of the local Serb population, it was necessary for the partisan power to make such a thing possible. In the newly-forming Yugoslavia, it would have been almost impossible for these things to happen without Tito and the other members of the top Yugoslav leadership at the time having knowledge of it, and giving their assent.

– It is also a mistaken theory which states that the partisan power would not try to cover up the liquidations. While the committees, in correspondence between one another, speak openly of executions and liquidations, the documents which could be seen by the populace, for example death certifications, asset seizures, were composed in a more subtle way. What's more, some of these "civilian" documents were completely false. Especially in the death certificates, it is common to see the terminology of "missing" or "fled"

used when the power in authority knew perfectly well what happened to the given person, since their name appeared on the lists of the liquidated. In the asset seizure documents it is also common to see the terms “enemy of the people” or “war criminal” and only the bravest of the wives or relatives dared to say that their husbands or loved ones were not missing, did not flee, but were murdered in the time period following the change of political systems. Consequently, we can determine that after the atrocities committed against the Hungarians, the period of time thereafter, which was one of silence, occurred very quickly, and lasted almost 50 years, all the way to the end of the 1980s.

– It also must be stated that of course earlier – in the period between 1941 and 1944 – atrocities occurred against the Serb population as well. In the area we researched, there were murders in several places where the victims were Serb citizens. These killings were, however, in most cases caused by the army. It is also a common occurrence to make the forced relocations, in documents produced later, appear to be the crimes of the local population. Normally the members of the city leadership are accused of being behind the state measures that afflicted the Serb population. As it is known, it was the Hungarian government that was responsible for the expulsion of the settlers. An order of the Supreme Defense Council contained the general rules and principles for relocation, and the Hungarian soldiers had already received the order for the relocation of the settlers at the time they invaded. It is irrefutable that, as a part of the execution of this process, the local national guard, various committees, and even the local population took part, as it was from them that the army knew who were the Serbs that couldn't be trusted from the point of view of national loyalty, as well as who had moved to the locality after October 31, 1918. After having reviewed the documents, however, we can determine that the vast majority of the persons who took part in these events, fled with the Hungarian army when it pulled out, and in their place innocent people paid the price.

– In the (prosecution) documents, it is normal to see the aggrandizement of the crime committed. Those who can remember back on the events often give testimony about what occurred that is very different from the documents. Of course it happens that there were cases of which they had no knowledge, but such a large, one-sided discrepancy is not possible. Often the authenticity or lack of credibility of the documents can be refuted with simple statistical data.

– Among the documents produced after the fact, after the murders were committed, and attempting to certify war crimes against the Hungarians, we find crimes that were believed to have been committed, or were committed, against the local Jewish population. The events that occurred to the local Jewish population are ignored not only in regards to documents about the local Hungarian population, but in regards to documents about the Hungarian army as well. With very few exceptions, only those atrocities that were believed to have been committed, or were committed, against the local Serb population were considered a crime, and were recorded in the evidentiary documents produced after the fact.

– After review of the documents, there is one other concept that should be reinterpreted. The murder of the Hungarians and other ethnicities should not be described by the oft-used word “execution.” In our opinion, and we hope in the pages above we illuminated this, in most cases the murders preceded the criminal proceeding, and without an order from a court it isn’t possible to discuss “executions,” ergo the term “liquidation” seems more properly applicable to the situation.

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