

Theses of doctoral (PhD) dissertation

**KARCAG DURING THE WORLD WARS
PUBLIC LIFE, POLITICS, INSTITUTIONS
AND MILITARY HISTORY**

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I. Aims of the dissertation

My essay is monitoring the history of hinterland through the example of Karcag concerning the 30 years between 1914 and 1944. The settlement's society spent about 9 years out of the 30 in wartime condition – first from late July, 1914 till the beginning of March, 1920, then from June, 1941 till the middle of October, 1944. The hinterland – the supporting region – played a primary role concerning wartime events during the two world wars. Though this event wasn't projected the same way within the different social groups, not only in the separate wars but regarding the same wartime period. In the first world war, the early euphoria and volunteer supporting attitude towards the wartime notion were rapidly changed because of the first lists of losses, economic charges and abstractions. The population was out of joint from the *bellum iustum et pium* platonic notion by the financial and mental charges of the first months.¹

It is extremely difficult to sort out the exact time of change in the war notion because of the disingenuous category and topic web. The process in the written media is difficult to conceive due to the censorship, the memoirs are intending to colour the grey years of the Great War because of the counter-revolutionary role. From 1915 – recognizing the failure of the early wartime plans and joining to the would-be quick war – the signs of anti-war notion start in Karcag, a town of being reformed, Great Cumanian place. They considered the war as a necessary bad thing within a patriotic idea and from the end, it was a totally unknown and a burden opposing the power, a war of the Austrian–Hungarian Monarchy. The wartime charity had various forms and they – together with the financial exhaustion, political crisis and shifts, and the occupations – played a primary role in the change of notion and the existential situation of the town's population.

The period between the two world wars were the years of consolidation concerning Karcag. Finding a place in the new political system was dominant. Between March 1920 and July 1941 though there was now threat of foreign armies or the noises of weapons, there were events that affected the town. That's the reason why this period – its political and economical history, institution and notion, archontology and elections – became the topic of my essay together with the history of the wartime hinterland. Without these we can't get a clear and full picture of the local effects. I found it relevant to deal with the public condition of the town between 1920–

¹ „Nincs azon mit röstelkedni, hogy a háború első heteiben olyan költeményt írt a költő, amiben az foglaltatik, hogy: » ... csak előre a szörnyű tusákban és hozzátok vissza a hősök korát ...«. Istenem, a háború első hetei! Akkor még alig akadt köztünk olyan nagy- okos, akit meg ne csapott volna a menetszázados, virágos mámor!” – wrote Árpád Tóth, the famous hungarian poet.

1941 since these chains of events had great effect on the history of this settlement. Besides there were urban changes as well, mainly the handover of the barrack buildings of Karcag, in 1936. From that time on, there were more corps to be quartered – like the 10th regiment, 10/III. batalion of Gábor Bethlen, that became the local troop of the town filling them with local or neighbouring residents, soldiers.

In the main chapter of my essay – dealing with the second world war – I monitored the local events and their effects from 1938. I also depicted the wartime charity phenomena after joining the war in 1941 until the foreign occupation. The history of troops stationing in this town and the extent of the losses and wartime failures were also analysed in this chapter. At the beginning of this period the exclusion progress of the Jewish people started and the first Jewish law was set in 1938. From then on, the constitutional equality of law was weakened and the israelitish segregation began in a fast way. The process of segregation changed the local economy, ownerships and political life as well as the denominational proportion of the town and the reformed secondary grammar school. The monitored period ends with the battles of 1944, when the town became owned by the occupying soviet Red Army. It was also in this section where I made a list of the losses originating from this time (military and civil victims, fights and plunders). This period of more than 6 years is burdened with accusation of mneumonic-political reasons. The town was homogenous ethnically though there were various denominations. It was the typical example of „living next to each other peacefully.” From 1930 the nationsocialist notions rose, but without any shift towards that direction.

The relations between the Reformed Secondary Grammar School and the war has a separate chapter in my essay. Monitoring the wartime history of our school is extremely important and knowing the sources of the topic, a coherent picture can be shown. After 1910 the denomination proportion of the institution was mainly Jewish and the wartime charity movements and volunteering based on wartime or military final exams concerning students showed the same processes as the town. Finally it was the changes of the school's denominational proportion where the effects of Christian-conservative educational policies had symptoms of social segregation, starting from 1938. During the 2nd World War, the fate of school's students and teachers were closely connected to the far away war events and from October, 1944 to the history of urban fights, battles. By understanding the institutional hinterland role of the school, the urban processes can be seen more clearly.

II. Sources, bibliography and the methods of the research

The hinterland events are closely related to the history of certain settlements or regions – on the levels of spatial, time or social background. According to the Taine milieu theory, the events of Karcag hinterland can't be seen separately from the local political processes, the economic power and notion-historical changes. That's why the examination was based on localization. It's methodologically a wide range of detailed pictures concerning the topic and the time. Besides the archives and journals, I examined not so well-known written media sources and stating information on oral history base.

The number of national archive collection is quite limited so they didn't really support the depiction of the town's history between 1914–1945. The files of the War Office Military History Institute and Museum is outstanding though. They served a really good base for examining the levied military troops and personnel relations in the case of the two wars. Not to mention such important materials as files, reports, military diaries or map parts between the traumatic period of October 9 to 12 in 1944. Monitoring the life and work of a local soldier, the War Office in Vienna gave really useful information from the files of Kriegsarchiv. I also got help from online data bases with up-to-date information concerning the political and social events of the town or archive data bases with digitalized projects and collections. The sources of my essay were the regional archives or the local ones in Karcag. Reconstructing the history of events was done with the help of the Jász–Nagykun–Szolnok County's Archives with its organised files of town-history and the Debrecen Archives with its congregational reports or second copies of its archives. Locally, the István Györffy Great Cumanian Museum (with its files and pictures) and the library's materials (even in digitalized versions) were a great help. As a teacher in the local Reformed Secondary School supported by the Reformed Congregation, I had a free access to the closed archives of the Congregation. They kept practically every document originating from the two wars and the Horthy era. Many events could be reconstructed only with the help of these notes. Mainly, my sources were the regional archive materials and press documents.

My essay is an immense analysis created methodologically strictly on a source-critical basis. My methods mainly consisted of using a wide range of archives influencing the public and also exploring press materials on the official voice of power or its opposition. Observing the formal requirements only the main text is about 250 pages, including more than 730 footnotes providing professional accuracy and the roots of my project go back 10 years. Using the possibilities of sources regarding the hinterland role of the town I tried to give a wide view –

including necessary local, regional, national – and where possible – the international targets of source. Besides exploring the essential economical and political events I put a great emphasis on showing the particularities of regional public thinking and their changes, the motion of war, the examples of social cohesion and also the turning of the conservative tenurial-agrarian society prospering locally. Another important aspect was showing the interlacking of the towns institutions with the war. The chapters concerning the wartime role of the Reformed Grammar School's students and teachers are especially outstanding as well as the effects of the occupation and local struggles on this micro-community. One of the strengths of my essay is showing the detailed events of the struggles of 1944 October and methodology of wartime research. Great emphasis is put on analysing the effects on local and national events and also showing the status of the local Jew Community and Holocaust.

In summary, my essay is a gap-stopping monitoring of an eventful period, which – as a genre – is a historical hinterland research within the local history of Karcag. Science – historically, it's a modern essay involving all the sources available and observing the formal and scientific norms of professional requirements.

III. The theses of the dissertation and the results of the research

In the 3 main sections of my dissertation I wanted to find answers to the following questions:

In „Karcag and the Great War” chapter:

- Is there any relationship between the economic burdens of the local wartime charity and the notion towards the war?
- What are the tolerance limits of society within wartime conditions?
- What changes started in the public life of Karcag during and after the war?
- Did the local society changed irreversibly or preserved its pre-war characteristics?
- In what extent has the students of Karcag – involved in war – anything to do with the methods and results of the christian-patriotic education?
- Was the cohesion of the dominant Reformed Church strong enough during the 51 months of the war?

In „Karcag between the two world wars” chapter:

- Were there any signs of nationwide consolidation and recession in Karcag between the two world wars?

- Were there any significant political or social events, phenomena with the first World War as an origin that had effects on the political events of the country?

In „Karcag in the 2nd World War” chapter:

- What were the symptoms of the social segregation within the town and to what extent can the nation socialist shift in a reformed society be measured?
- Can the economic realignment due to the Christian–Jewish possession be identified?
- Were there any rebellions against Jews, anti-fascist and/or Jew-saving activities in Karcag? If yes, in what ways?
- What was the role of the political and public life leaders in wartime activities after 1941? Can we recognize any wartime charity movements like in the first World War?
- Can we reconstruct the battle of the armoured troops in October, 1944 near Karcag?
- Can we make a list of the losses concerning the town during the 2nd World War?

During the first World War Karcag did a lot of wartime charity work throughout the 51 months which created new, scary processes not only nationwide, but locally – in an untouched, developing, all-hungarian reformed settlement. The strong measures – concerning military charities – made the first World War really difficult and unbearable for the population of the hinterland. The parallel movements of that period took away all the economic resources, means of production and savings from the local people.

The local society supported the wartime charity programs from the beginning. This success proved that the inhabitants didn't seclude from that military matter. All these characterized the extent of efforts made for the victory. However, the traces of exhaustion was recognized and was mirrored in the press as well. It's important to monitor the local characters of mobilization mechanism. Taking away all the active men population – whole generations – and their deaths changed the general public thinking. Reconstructing this with source-critical and statistical means gave a clearer picture of the political changes caused by exhaustion and disunity.

The counter productive organization of civil service after November, 1918 caused new problems, like the 1-year-occupation by the Rumanians. The focus of the economical exhaustion and other burdens (losses, foreign notions, or occupations) was the war itself. All these totally changed the frames of the local society. The population of being independent-opponent became the supporters of the new counter-revolutionary upper-class after the war. There were signs of foreigner-alienation and by 1930, antisemitism in a settlement that used to be tolerant before.

It was really useful to monitor the military roles of the Reformed School's students, teachers and the institution itself. On the one hand, the Reformed Grammar School showed the social aspect of the inhabitants, on the other hand the youthful enthusiasm and serving the military matters started loads of smaller-bigger wartime charity movements inside and outside the school. Students volunteered to the army through military final exams and it proves the methods and aims of national-Christian education. The leaders of the Karcag Reformed Congregation also supported the wartime charity work and by this trying to alleviate the wartime conditions. Reconstructing the capacity and characters of the military hospital – supported partly locally, partly by the Red Cross – and the list of soldiers died there can be paralleled to the history of many other nationwide institutions.

In the second section of my essay I depicted the public states within Karcag between the two world wars, mainly concentrating on their binding roles.

After the March, 1920 a slow but strong political and economic recruitment can be seen in the settlement which I depicted in the main chapter of „Karcag between the two world wars”. Though this main chapter has a binding role, the events during this period had great effects in the late 1930s, early 1940s. In the beginning of this period an old-new political upper-class started. With my project I believe that this recruitment of public power was not linked to the first part of the 1920s but later, during the years when dr. István Hajnal was the mayor. He made long, urban developments and widened the central role. The town shifted in to a political consolidation and the visits by Governor Horthy, Prime Minister Bethlen and many other ministers led to good governmental relationships which were missed from the history of the town before 1914. A very important part was a speech of Governor Horthy made in 1923 in Karcag, which led to an international political scandal and wasn't considered as a local home affair, but rather a national event. It was also significant to monitor the archontological features of Karcag. In this scientific work I paid special attention to the scandals of elections and other, not so glorious official events. I also emphasized the characteristics of antisemitism starting from the 1930s locally. Later on, it was more dominant and supported politically. It wasn't due to the significant sweep of the Nationsocialist Party with Zoltán Meskó but rather the extrusion of Jewish tradesmen from big, local investments, the execution of Jewish laws or exceeding them and later the total extrusion of Jews from the economy. However, these events didn't show the whole town's way of thinking and conscience. Mózes Hersko – born in Karcag and an authentic cronical – admitted that the tolerant „old world” was not anti-semite. In my essay there are sections about these smaller efforts of trying to save and help the local Jewish people, their

cultural treasures and existence. Widespread and strong anti-semitism in Karcag didn't play any part from the first Jewish law in 1938 until the end of the monitored period.

The other processes of the hinterland showed sharp opposition to those similar initiations during the Great War. The financial situations of the society and the first World War experience made these movements impossible. There were identified initiations to support the war, but the civilian participation was not dominant contrary to the state or official ones. The Reformed School played a more passive part in organizing the events to support the military economy.

This is the main chapter where I demonstrated the battles of the Soviets and Germans in Karcag and in the neighbourhood based on files from the Reformed Congregation. The chapter listing the losses of the war is closely related to this part, as it not only demonstrates the extent of human loss but also recording other losses originating from economy, animal stock, personalty and real property back in 1944.



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List of publications related to the dissertation

Hungarian book(s) (1)

1. **Pintér Z.Á.**: Kun emlékhelyek a Kárpát-medencében. Kunszövetség, Karcag, 62 p., 2015. ISBN: 9789631217261

Hungarian book chapter(s) (1)

2. **Pintér Z.Á.**: Tanulmány a karcagi városháza centenáriumához.
In: 100 éve épült a Városháza, 1912-2012. Karcagi Nagykun Városvédő Egyesület, Karcag, 6-26, 2012.

Hungarian scientific article(s) in Hungarian journal(s) (1)

3. **Pintér Z.Á.**: Az 1944 októberi alföldi páncéloscsata Karcag környéki harcai.
Hallg. Műhtanulm. 1, 215-238, 2012. ISSN: 2063-6024.

Hungarian conference proceeding(s) (3)

4. **Pintér Z.Á.**: Hadsegélyező tevékenység az I. világháború alatti Karcagon.
In: Tavasz Szél 2014 Konferenciakötet III. Szerk.: Csiszár Imre, Kőműves Péter Miklós,
Doktoranduszok Országos Szövetsége, Debrecen, 291-298, 2014. ISBN: 9789633956071





5. **Pintér Z.Á.**: Hadsegélyező tevékenység az első világháború alatti Karcagon.

In: Tanulmányok a magyar történelemből a kora újkortól a legújabb korig. Szerk.: Döbör András, Zeman Ferenc, Egyesület Közép Európa Kutatására, Szeged, 55-62, 2014. ISBN: 9789638972477

6. **Pintér Z.Á.**: A Karczagi Református Főgymnásium és a világháború.

In: Az I. világháború református tábori lelkészeire, tanáraitra, diákjaira emlékezve. Szerk.: Baráth Béla Levente, D. Dr. Harsányi András Alapítvány, Debrecen, 23-41, 2014. ISBN: 9789631217001

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