

SUMMARY OF THE HABILITATION THESIS*

TITLE : Romanian Prisoners of War during the Great War. From Captivity to Repatriation and Memory of the WWI in the Interwar Decades

FIELD OF EXPERTISE:HISTORY.....

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*În cazul în care teza va fi redactată într-o limbă străină, textul în limba română va fi adaptat



SUMMARY

The habilitation thesis is structured into two sections, which comprise seven distinctive chapters, with the the first section dedicated to Romanian prisoners of war during the *Grand Guerre*, while the second section of the thesis is dedicated to their repatriation and memory of the WWI, during the interwar years. The text also includes a section dealing with the previous research activity and major scientific achievements, while at the end of the thesis, a distinctive section is dealing with the future career plans and envisaged research dimensions, for the years to come.

It is widely known that historians and researchers have dealt with various issues and areas of research concerning the First World War. Although the Great War by definition implies confrontations on the battlefields, destruction, huge loss of human life and significant geopolitical re-configurations, with all of the above being the main research themes targeted over the decades, other facets of life were often omitted or forgotten. Among others, besides battles and confrontations *per se*, life under occupation, social and cultural evolution, everyday life and activities, all of the above continued throughout the years of war, as soldiers, civilians, and also prisoners of war, which were all caught up in war, tried to manage their wartime existence. As mentioned above, the present thesis focuses on a particular facet of the First World War, namely the issue of the (Romanian) prisoners of war, by examining the context of their fall into captivity, everyday life experience of the prisoners of war, by trying to examine not only the blunt facts of the captivity, from legislation, state-actors involved, data and numbers of POW's, but also the routine of captivity in the midst of a catastrophic war, the POW's and their struggle to survive the Central Powers camps, and after the end of the war and repatriation, the difficulties faced by the former prisoners of war in terms of dealing with a civilian life, in a different society, the memory of the Great War, the cult of war heroes and missing WWI soldiers and officers.

The thesis dealt with Romanian POW's, going from the segments and groups of prisoners and continuing with their treatment in various camps of the Central Powers, the experience of the everyday life in the camps of military prisoners, as seen on the main dimensions, such as the context of becoming a prisoner and managing the

fear, the issue of food and shelter - probably the main facets of survival experience, the so-called *camaraderie* experienced within the POW camps of different nationalities, the ways of virtually *escaping* the burden of captivity through literature, sports and artistic endeavors, the (postal) correspondence with the outside relatives and friends of the POW's. As seen throughout this research, depending on their location and status (particularly the soldiers, but exceptions occurred) the prisoners worked, under surveillance, inside or outside the camps for pay or in a voluntary capacity. As mentioned before, the place where food security mattered the most to everyday life was in prisoner of war camps, (both military and civilian), as the inmates were at the mercy of local camp guards and camp administrations; thus the prisoners had little control over basic needs such as food, clothing, beds, bathing, water and medical care. Camp conditions varied greatly over the course of the war and from country, site to site and by nation, military rank and social class, but in places where prisoner care was poor, the daily life was dominated by the fight for survival, which led to catastrophic death toll, particularly among the POW soldiers, as the officers were better treated and benefited, (to some extent) from their status.

The research is mainly based on archival sources, as well as on various books, studies, papers, and also memoirs or war journals of the former combatants (some of them published during the interwar period, while others have been kept in various family archives and private collections) that had survived WWI captivity; the analysis comprised several indicators and factors, starting from the international legislation (at that time) on the rights and duties regarding the POW's status, as perceived, interpreted and applied by the authorities of the two belligerents, and continuing with the context of falling into captivity; the treatment associated with the *per se* captivity, across the prisoner of war camps, the official initiatives and efforts conducted in order to improve the status of the POW's, including the issue of the appropriate sum of the military payment for the officers, according to their rank, the involvement of international humanitarian and relief organizations such as the International Red Cross (and the *International Prisoners of War Agency*); the process of repatriation of the former prisoners of war. As seen throughout the paper, the poor and rather harsh conditions existing in the POW's camps, particularly at the beginning of the captivity, which were experienced by the Romanian POW's, have improved, to some extent, mainly due to the bilateral negotiations (with the help of third party, such as the Royal Legation of Spain in Constantinople), but also due to the involvement of

International relief entities, which helped the POW's by offering support (especially regarding their correspondence) and providing food supplies, in order to ameliorate their medical (health) condition.

The second major research facet of the thesis dealt with the life of the former POW's, after their repatriation in their native country and the re-insertion in their communities, as well as their place in the policies of WWI memory embraced by Romanian leadership after the war.

As known, a particular dimension of the Great War memory in Romanian post WWI society, had to do, on one hand, with the various policies and strategies of the Romanian state regarding the honoring of the First World War Romanian heroes, including not only the soldiers and officers fallen on various battlefields, but also the wounded and, of course, the former prisoners of war, those of them who survived and were repatriated at the end of the war. On the other hand, another facet, perceived almost as a leitmotiv during the interwar decades, had to do with the vengeful attitude of large segments of Romanian society, when it comes to those individuals considered as guilty in various ways. This kind of attitude, targeting various segments and layers of population, with special emphasis on the individuals blamed for their so-called collaborationism, included not only former Romanian high ranking officials and politicians, people who decided to remain in the occupied territory when the Romanian Administration and Army retreated to Moldova, but also some of the former Romanian prisoners of war, often blamed for their allegedly non-combat attitude and/or for their supposedly lack of loyalty towards the Romanian Army. The research tries to investigate on their status after the end of the war, analyzing also their place and status within the policies of memory initiated and implemented by the Romanian governments and other various entities, during the interwar decades.