

Eötvös Loránd University  
Faculty of Humanities

Doctoral Thesis

**Zoltán Oszkár Szóts:**

**The First Generation**  
Interpretations of the First World War  
in the pre-1945 Hungarian Historiography

*Thesis Booklet*

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## ***Goals and Research Methods***

1. The literature review shows that a thorough and comprehensive research on Hungarian historiography has not been yet written concerning the Great War. Moreover, not only did the First World War remain absent from historiographic summaries, but also did its respective war history. Additionally, besides few collections of studies no historiographic summaries have been produced on Hungarian war history in this regard. What is more the overview of historiography has been absent from the works of Hungarian historians writing on the Great War likewise. My doctoral thesis pursues to fill the gap in scholarship regarding the Hungarian historiography of the First World War, while also setting the goal to produce a work which could be a valuable source for the future researchers of the Great War.
2. The co-written work of Jay Winter and Antoine Prost divided the researchers of the Great War into four generations in view of their assessment of the First World War. In these works, the work of Hungarian researchers remained unmentioned, hence the question arises whether the ‘four generation model’ could be applied on Hungarian historiography. Ferenc Pollmann and Attila Pók suggested in 2015 that the characteristics of Winter’s first generation fit the Hungarian case. Nevertheless, owing to the post-war socialist political environment in Hungary, Hungarian researchers showed dissimilarities with Winter’s other generations. The dissertation strives to confirm these views.
3. To prove the argument established under Point 2, I compared the Hungarian and international historiographies, while also devoted pages to introduce the first generation of researchers as well.
4. Gergely Romsics typified the memoir literature of the Great War and their narratives based on the social background and whether the author rejected, accepted or was neutral to the Horthy regime. The dissertation proves that the narrative categories of Romsics could fit the contemporary interwar narratives of Hungarian historiography as well.
5. The primary sources of this dissertation cover the publications of the pre-1945 era, including materials published in the course of the Great War, the memoir literature produced in the interwar period, contemporary works in history, war history and economy. The existing or former collections of the Institute and Museum of War History and the Hungarian National Library (Országos Széchényi Könyvtár) were significant primary source for the dissertations. Undoubtedly, both collections attested a high-standard scientific achievement of the contemporaries.

## ***Conclusions***

1. In the Winter-Prost generation model, the first generation is put into a time span beginning with the Great War and concluding with the Second World War. Diplomatic and military approach towards the First World War were apparent in the works of this generation. Works in history and the various recollections of the war were often mixed, and focused on the question of responsibility. Regardless of their nationality, contemporary historians set to confirm the views of their respective war-time cabinets. As a result, the war was portrayed as a crime with identifiable perpetrators and victims. Their approach also centred around the developments and events of the Great War, thus solely focused on the four and a half years of the conflict. In the meantime, a great variety of war diaries and memoirs were published, which told the story of the war *per se* rather than telling the story of the frontline or the hinterland. All these characteristics proved to be fitting to the first generation in Hungary as well. In regard to pre-1945 Hungary, the following types of publications on the Great War can be distinguished: 1. contemporary writings (published during the war), 2. memoir literature, 3. the works of historians pursuing to evade the war blame on Hungary, 4. the works of war historians written specifically for a readership with military background, 5. the works of war historians written for the general public, 6. economic analyses, 7. history of units, 8. history books used in public education, 9. the recollections of the general public either published or materialized in some sort of physical creation.

2. In the Winter-Prost generation model, the works of the second generation – produced after 1945 – focused on the social aspects of the Great War, simultaneously taking into consideration the viewpoints of the upper and lower classes as well. Their studies marked a departure from the war blame-game of the first generation, and argued that the misconceptions of European nations and their leaders stimulated the outbreak of the First World War. In the meantime, few works were devoted to discuss the Great War in Hungary between the period of 1945 and 1989. Moreover, these studies examined the questions of the war based on the axioms of Marxist historiography, which unconditionally accepted Lenin's explanation on imperialism as the source of the conflict. In this dissertation, I prove that in regard to Hungarian historiography, Lenin's explanation belongs to the narratives of the first generation. Consequently, Hungarian historiography on the First World War consisted of miscellaneous, extended viewpoints and themes of the first generation spanning until 1989.

3. The third generation – emerging in the 1990's – focused on the cultural aspects of the Great War, including identity, memory, behavioural and emotional patterns, and psychological effects. Concurrently, the topic of the First World War has been rediscovered for both the

academia and the public discourse in Hungary. The fourth generation – since 2010 – set to explore the Great War through a transnational comparison. This approach has just reached Hungarian historiography.

4. Gergely Romsics typified the memoir literature of the Great War and their narratives based on the social background and whether the author rejected, accepted or was neutral to the Horthy regime. The narrative categories of Romsics can be applied on the pre-1945 Hungarian academic narratives – embracing the works of military or economic historians and experts, history book authors – as their explanations and arguments were similar as outlined by Romsics in regard to memoir literature and their authors' assessment on the Horthy regime.

5. As the documents of the First World War were classified as 'materials in use' during the interwar period, they were not archived and researchers could not access them before 1945. However, the institutional predecessor of today's Institute and Museum of War History was established in November 1918, which received all the documents of the Ministry of War. Eventually, a separate department was created within the institution to research the materials of the Great War. During the interwar period, the majority of scientifically classified studies devoted to the war belong to military history, and even these contributions followed one of the narrative patterns discussed under point 4. The dissimilarities of civil and military historiography can be exemplified through the comparison of *Hadtörténelmi Közlemények* and *Századok*: while the first published fifty-three studies concerning the Great War prior to 1945, the latter released only one.

6. Another collection dedicated to study the First World War was established under the Hungarian National Library – institutionally belonging to the National Museum – in August 1914 with the intention to collect all printed documents in the course of the war. By the time this agenda was concluded in 1922, the collection had already consisted of 176.000 archive groups. Due to institutional restructuring in the National Library, the collection was divided among several departments. Nonetheless, the data concerning the collected materials could be still found in the National Library, which enabled me to overview the nature of publications during the Great War.

7. The Treaty of Trianon partially put the blame on Hungary for the war. Similar to other countries who had ended the war on the losing end, it was the utmost important to shape the narrative to evade their countries' responsibility for the war by establishing scapegoats. As a result, all authors loyal to the Horthy regime strived to explain the outbreak of the war as a long process, blaming Serbia for the Sarajevo assassination and the Entente Powers for their poor handling of the July Crisis.

8. The overwhelming majority of the authors loyal to the Horthy regime explained the defeat in the Great War by overemphasizing the effectiveness of the Entente Powers' propaganda – instead of focusing on their advantages in resources – and by proclaiming a group in the hinterland – such as Jews, workers, Communists – as inside traitors. Contemporary authors who identified themselves with the view of Dolchstoß underlined that national disunity fostered the defeat in the Great War. Therefore, it was important to maintain national unity at any costs in another war.

9. The same narrative discourse claimed that the group leading the Aster Revolution was responsible for the destruction of the Habsburg Empire, the disarmament of the army and the proclamation of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, for which Hungary was furthermore punished by the strict provisions of the Treaty of Trianon.

10. Concurrently with the consolidation of interwar Hungary, the question of treaty revision emerged. As there was a possibility that such endeavours could not be realized peacefully, the 'remilitarization' of the Hungarian society became a necessity. For this reason, the narrative of the groups loyal to the Horthy regime reshaped the image of the Hungarian soldiers, praising them for their bravery and high values in combat. This image was supplemented by the cult of fallen brave soldiers. The gallantry of Hungarian soldiers was resembled in the grieving of the Hungarian public, and was utilized in commemorations, statues, education and even in the foundation of Museum of War History, which *per se* merged science with public grief and politics of commemoration.

11. Studies produced in the interwar period predominantly focused on the military history of Austria–Hungary in the Great War, and usually avoided or explained the developments of other theatres of war briefly. Remarkably, this resembles the approach of British historians, who devoted considerable attention to the Western front at the cost of other theatres of war.

12. The dissertation examines a wide range of resources concerning publications on the Great War as marked by the 862 entries, which alone make up a subject bibliography. This list of publications goes beyond the works of the first generation and extends to 2018.

### ***Secondary Literature published in regard to the topic of this dissertation***

1. Az Országos Széchényi Könyvtár első világháborús hősi halottja: dr. Hupka Ödön. LYMBUS - MAGYARSÁGTUDOMÁNYI FORRÁSKÖZLEMÉNYEK, pp. 449-457. (2011)
2. Könyvtárosok frontszolgálatban: Az Országos Széchényi Könyvtár munkatársai és az első világháború. In: Bárdosi Vilmos (főszerk.), Faragó Gábor, Háda Béla, Konecz István, Krajczár

Melinda, Schmid Róbert (szerk.): Tanulmányok: Történelemtudományi Doktori Iskola. 230 p. Budapest: ELTE Bölcsészettudományi Kar, 2012. pp. 223–227. (Asteriskos; 2.) (ISBN: [978-963-284-254-7](#))

3. „Az élő és jövő nemzedékek örök okulására”: Az első világháborús katonai tábori lapok jelentősége. In: Boka László, Földesi Ferenc, Mikusi Balázs (szerk.): Az identitás forrásai: hangok, szövegek, gyűjtemények. Konferencia helye, ideje: Budapest, Magyarország, 2012.01.30 Budapest: Bibliotheca Nationalis Hungariae; Gondolat Kiadó, 2012. pp. 90–98. (ISBN:[978-963-693-450-7](#))

4. Egy elfelejtett kísérlet: Az Országos Széchényi Könyvtár volt első világháborús gyűjteménye. In: Keresztes Gábor (szerk.): Tavasz Szél, 2013: Spring wind, 2013. 659 p. Konferencia helye, ideje: Sopron, Magyarország, 2013.05.31–2013.06.02. Budapest: Doktoranduszok Országos Szövetsége, 2013. pp. 126–131. 1-2. kötet. (ISBN:[978-963-89560-2-6](#))

5. „Szerencsém van a tekintetes parancsnokságot felkérni...”: Az Országos Széchényi Könyvtár levelezése az első világháborús katonai tábori újságok beszerzése tárgyában. In: Kötél Emőke, Rainer M. János (szerk.): Esemény és narratíva: történetiség, elbeszélés(ek), interpretáció. 320 p. Konferencia helye, ideje: Budapest, Magyarország, 2013.01.21, Budapest: Bibliotheca Nationalis Hungariae; Gondolat Kiadó, 2013. pp. 252–269. (Bibliotheca Scientiae & Artis; 4.) (ISBN:[978-963-200-606-2](#))

6. A magyar történettudomány jellemző megközelítésmódjai az I. világháborútól 1989-ig. HONISMERET 42:(6) pp. 62–65. (2014)

7. Az Országos Széchényi Könyvtár egykori első világháborús gyűjteménye. Budapest: Bibliotheca Nationalis Hungariae; Gondolat Kiadó, 2014. 356 p. (Nemzeti Téka) (ISBN:[978 963 200 623 9](#))

8. Haupttrichtlinien in der Historiografie des Ersten Weltkrieges in Ungarn. In: Róbert Fiziker, Csaba Szabó (szerk.): Der Erste Weltkrieg aus ungarischer Sicht: Az első világháború magyar szemszögből. 436 p. Wien: Balassi Intézet, 2015. pp. 13–33. (Publikationen der ungarischen Geschichtsforschung in Wien; 14.) (ISBN:[978-615-5389-14-6](#))

9. Propaganda vagy reális szemlélet?: Az egykorú történettudomány és az első világháború a Századok folyóirat cikkeinek tükrében. In: Püski Levente, Kerepeszki Róbert (szerk.): A „Nagy Háború” és emlékezete. 268 p. Konferencia helye, ideje: Debrecen, Magyarország, 2014.09.17-

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10. Az első világháború értelmezései a magyarországi historiográfiában 1914-től napjainkig. In: Barta Róbert, Csiszár Imre (szerk.): Vidék és város: Az első világháború és a magyar vidék. Hajdúnánás: Hajdúnánás Város Polgármesteri Hivatala, 2015. pp. 127–144. (ISBN:978-963-12-2594-5)

11. Balkáni gyűjtemény a nemzeti könyvtárban?: Egy meg nem valósult tervezet az első világháború árnyékában. In: Zsupán Edina (szerk.): Interpretációk interpretációja: Tudós bibliothecariusok, tudós elődök. Konferencia helye, ideje: Budapest, Magyarország, 2014.11.24 Budapest: Bibliotheca Nationalis Hungariae; Gondolat Kiadó, 2015. pp. 116–128. (ISBN:978-963-200-641-3)

12. Témaválasztások az első világháború alatti magyar nyelvű könyvkiadásban. In: Majoros István, Antal Gábor, Hevő Péter, M Madarász Anita (szerk.): Sorsok, frontok, eszmék: Tanulmányok az első világháború 100. évfordulójára. 786 p. Budapest: ELTE BTK, 2015. pp. 487–500. (ISBN:[978-963-284-582-1](#))

13. Hősi emlékművek: kultusz és emlékezet. In: ifj. Bertényi Iván, Boka László (szerk.): Propaganda az I. világháborúban: Az Országos Széchényi Könyvtár kiállítása 2015. október. - 2016. április 9.. 372 p. Budapest: Országos Széchényi Könyvtár (OSZK), 2016. pp. 297–300. (ISBN:[978-963-200-651-2](#))

14. Sajtóhadiszállás, sajtóirányítás. In: ifj. Bertényi Iván, Boka László (szerk.): Propaganda az I. világháborúban: Az Országos Széchényi Könyvtár kiállítása 2015. október 16. - 2016. április 9.. 372 p. Budapest: Országos Széchényi Könyvtár (OSZK), 2016. pp. 211–216. (ISBN:978-963-200-651-2)

15. Hétköznapi élet, a tárgyak propagandája. In: ifj. Bertényi Iván, Boka László (szerk.): Propaganda az I. világháborúban: Az Országos Széchényi Könyvtár kiállítása 2015. október 16. - 2016. április 9.. 372 p. Budapest: Országos Széchényi Könyvtár (OSZK), 2016. pp. 133–146. (ISBN:[978-963-200-651-2](#))

16. Az Osztrák-Magyar Monarchia felbomlása a modern historiográfiában. PRO MINORITATE 25:(4) pp. 51–58. (2016)

17. „...szeretnék már a fenébe menni - de nem lehet”: Három levél az Országos Széchényi Könyvtár Irattárából. ARCHIVNET 6: Paper <http://archivnet.hu/szeretnek-mar-a-fenebe-menni-de-nem-lehet-harom-level-az-orszagos-szechenyi-konyvtar-irattarabol>. (2016)
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20. Katonai tábori újságok az első világháborúban: 16-os honvéd, Négyes honvédek háborús lapja, Cibo viccek. In: Z Karvalics László (szerk.). Az első világháború információtörténetéhez. 336 p. Konferencia helye, ideje: Szeged, Magyarország, 2014.10.08 Budapest: Gondolat, 2016. pp. 323–336. (Információtörténelem; 8.) (ISBN:[978 963 693 630 3](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-963-693-630-3))
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25. Hungarian Sources Concerning the Prisoners of the First World War. In: Marge Berth (szerk.): 1914–1918, документы о военнопленных и репатриированных первой мировой войны в архивах Европы: 1914–1918, Records of Prisoners of War and Repatriated Persons of the First World War in the European Archives. Moszkva: International Committee of the Red Cross, 2018. pp. 54–55.
26. Венгерские источники информации о пленных первой мировой войны. In: Marge Berth (szerk.): 1914–1918, документы о военнопленных и репатриированных первой мировой войны в архивах Европы: 1914–1918, Records of Prisoners of War and Repatriated Persons of the First World War in the European Archives. Moszkva: International Committee of the Red Cross, 2018. pp. 13–14.