

„Galician refugees during the First World War in the Habsburg Empire”

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This dissertation examines the problem of Galician refugees in the Habsburg Empire during the Great War. The dissertation contains four main chapters with thematic subchapters. Following the introduction, each of the main chapters outlines a different topic of research: I – the escape and evacuation, II – the everyday life of a refugee, III – state politics, state and private support for the refugees, IV – returning home and repatriation.

This vivid study depicts the inhabitants of the crown land on the outskirts of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, which was inhabited by Poles, Jews and Ruthenians (Ukrainians and another ethnic groups like Lemkos, Bojkos etc.). During the First World War Galicia became a battlefield. At first, its inhabitants had no idea what the ‘war’ meant, however, increasing rumours about Russian invaders created a frantic atmosphere. For this reason, some of Galicia’s inhabitants began to flee their homeland into the unknown. This type of escape was often spontaneous and people left without knowing where they were going, or how long they would be gone. State authorities attempted to bring order to the unruly fleeing by arranging official evacuations by train. Their attempt however, was not sufficiently organized and only adding to the chaos. In all, half a million people were directed into the interior of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. They started a new, but temporary life among an unknown people, most of whom thought of Galicia as a “God forsaken land” (‘Half-Asia’), full of betrayers and ‘Russians’, like the autochthons thought about refugees. Even though they were citizens of the same state – under one Emperor, Franz Joseph the First, an enormous barrier existed between refugees and natives, and a dozen or more stereotypes gained strength during the war.

Another research problem analysed in this dissertation, focused on the cultural and family life of refugees living in: refugee camps, as well as cities, towns, hamlets, and in interactions in public spaces. Several sources of help for the refugees - from the Austrian State and various other sources such as, the church and Jewish community, Galician politicians, and charities led mostly by women – are discussed here.

The final section of this dissertation examines the procedure of refugees repatriation, which began while the war was still ongoing, as the Russian invaders were expelled from the West and Central parts of Galicia (after the Gorlice-Tarnów military Campaign on May 1915). This caused an opportunity for those who had been forced out, to begin returning

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home. However, the economic state of the crown land and destruction caused by the war, made this a gradual and difficult process. What is more, some of the refugees took advantage of staying inside the Monarchy, which had collapsed in the Autumn 1918. The case study from Vienna show that during that time, there were many Jewish Refugees in the Habsburg Capital (the majority undoubtedly from Galicia), who remained in their new country after the war, (German-Austrian Republic leaded by Karl Renner). Similar situation, on a smaller scale, can be observed in in Budapest – a capital of Hungary, or in Prague – a capital of Czechoslovakia after 1918. As a result, the refugees started a long way for receiving a new citizenship. However, most of them came back to Galicia, which in November 1918 became a part of Independent Poland.

