

Abstract of PhD thesis

**HUNGARY AND THE SECOND ANGLO–BOER
WAR**

László Pap

Supervisor: Dr. Róbert Barta



UNIVERSITY OF DEBRECEN

PhD school of History and Ethnography

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I. Introduction and the aims of the research work

The topic of my thesis is the connection between Hungary and the Second Anglo-Boer War, a well-known and important historic event.

In the last years of the nineteenth century the world's most powerful nations were racing for the last "free" territories on the globe, which had not been colonised by any of them. Meanwhile, they were preparing for the great war the winners of which could get the territories previously conquered by the losers. With the Compromise of 1867 Hungary became part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, after which great economic developments started, and these changes were still present at the turn of the century. In spite of the economic growth, the political tension in Hungary got more serious from the 1890s. This was caused by a lot of different facts, for example, the agrarian-mercantile conflict, the renewal of the custom- and trading treaty between Austria and Hungary, the joint army and its commanding language, as well as the increasing national eagerness.

No wonder that in the atmosphere of growing tensions in the international as well as in the Hungarian politics, the outbreak of the Second Anglo-Boer War got a great echo and was followed and watched by the Hungarian press, the politicians and the public. Although the events took place on the other side of the globe, the news from the theatre of operations, thanks to the developing communication, arrived to Europe and to our country quite quickly. Readers hankering for the news from the battlefields did not have to wait for long weeks or months. People were very interested in the war, partly because it was not between a Western conqueror and natives somewhere at the back of beyond, and it was not a "punishing expedition" either, but it was between two European (one European and one of European origin), Christian, white people, the English and the Boer. Due to the traditions from 1848, Hungarians felt sympathy for the Boer, who fought against England, an oppressive power.

The area I studied consists of three aspects, which can be seen in the contexture of my thesis. The first important aspect is the relationship between the Boer war and the Hungarian political life. The second and most important one is the appearance, the presentation of the war in the Hungarian press (in nationwide newspapers and in those of the capital, and in the leading weekly magazines), and this aspect is the most emphatic one in my thesis. The third aspect deals with the Hungarian participating in the war, including Hungarian volunteers in the Boer army, as well as the volunteers and soldiers (from Hungary or of Hungarian origin)

in the English army.

II. The sources, methods and the structure of the thesis

My thesis is divided into three main modules. In the first part I deal with the relationship between the Boer war and the political life of Hungary, in the second part I analyse how the Hungarian press presented the war, while I devote the third part to the Hungarian participants of the war (on both sides).

In the first module I analyse the effect of the Second Anglo–Boer War (1899–1902) on the Hungarian political life, whether – and if yes, how – the questions of the war appeared in the political life (in the Hungarian National Assembly), was the war dealt with on higher forums (in Austro–Hungarian committees, or in the Austro–Hungarian Cabinet Council). My research work is based on published sources (records of the committees, minutes of the Cabinet Council, etc.). The other important part of this module is the presentation of how the problems of the war appeared in the communication between the three chosen missions (the most effected ones: the consulate of the Monarchy in Cape Town, the embassy in London, and, touched in brief, the embassy in Berlin) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, what the consul and the two ambassadors informed the Ministry in Vienna about, what they considered to be important enough to mention, where they got their information from, what sources they used. I primarily try to show the reports of the general consul in Cape Town, because he was the closest to the events. That is followed by the reports of the Austro–Hungarian ambassador in Britain, then I briefly deal with the relation of the Boer war and Germany – a(n officially) neutral European super power –, on the basis of the reports of the Monarchy’s ambassador in Berlin. In the case of the reports of the consul and the ambassadors I used sources from archives. I studied the Cape Town consul’s reports in the Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv in Vienna, but in the case of the ambassadors in London and Berlin I could only use the microfilm copies in the archives in Székesfehérvár and in the National Archives of Hungary in Budapest.

The main topic of my thesis is the relation between the Boer war and the Hungarian press. My research in this topic is based on the articles of eleven newspapers and weekly magazines published either in the capital or nationwide (*Magyar Nemzet, Pesti Hírlap, Budapesti Hírlap, Magyar Állam, Magyarország, Magyar Hírlap, Népszava, Pesti Napló, Budapesti Napló, Vasárnapi Újság* and *Új Idők*). In the main topic I defined subcategories on

the basis of what the different articles emphasised, so the module consists of three subsections as of sympathy and influence, introduction of the persons, and emphasis (political or military events, useful information).

I devote the third part of my thesis to the Hungarian participants in the war. The topic is very interesting in itself, and I wanted to deal with it because the available articles and sources are rather incomplete, and in some cases they indicate false data (e. g. how many Hungarian participants and victims were there in South Africa). For this section I mostly use memoirs of Hungarian volunteers in the war, as well as autobiographies by foreign participants, articles from the period, and of course, specialist literature on the topic.

III. The results of the thesis. The most important statements.

Though the Second Anglo–Boer War is one of the most important historic events before the First World War, the topic rarely appears in the Hungarian specialist and informational literature. This statement is true not only for the Hungarian connections of the war, but in general as well. Of course, there are exceptions, for example, István Zicherman’s work about the Boer war, the press-historic researches of Zoltán Tefner, or Gábor Szabó-Zsoldos’s researches in connection with Tibor Péchy’s years in South-Africa. But so far, there has not been an overall synthesis dealing with the effects of the Boer war on Hungary, the Hungarian political life, the public opinion, as well as the Hungarian participants on either side. With my thesis I wanted compensate this shortage.

In the first part of the thesis I dealt with the Boer war’s effect on the Hungarian political life. Compared to the intensive interest for the war in the major daily papers, politicians rarely dealt with the topic. The two most important cases of these, as I show in the related chapter, were the interpellations in the National Assembly, and the Prime Minister’s answers (English newspapers reported on one of them). The war, or the effect of that on Hungary, appeared on the agenda of the Austro–Hungarian committee and its foreign sub-committee twice. But the question did not attain the Cabinet Council, the only item on the agenda in connection with South-Africa has little to do with the South-African conflict.

I studied the reports sent by the embassies and consulates of the Monarchy to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Vienna. The reports from the consul in Cape Town and the ambassador in London are in the focus of my research, since one of them was the closest to the events, while the other was in touch with the involved sources. Besides, I tried to attend to

the attitude of the German Empire to the Anglo–Boer conflict, and for that I used the reports sent by the ambassador in Berlin to Vienna. After studying the reports I have the impression that the consul in South-Africa usually tried to watch the events as an objective, impartial observer, while the ambassador in London seemed to be pro-English (for clear reasons).

In the second part of the thesis I dealt with how the Hungarian press presented the Second Anglo–Boer War. Because of the huge amount of the articles in capital and nationwide papers I used a thematic classification. The first aspect was to see how the articles and their writers pronounced for or against one of the participants, which side they felt sympathy or antipathy for, how much they tried to convince the readers about their own truth. The continental Europe and its press at the time was usually against England. Ordinary people in Hungary felt sympathy for the Boer, and that originated in the traditions of 1848, but, of course, there were a lot of others who supported the English. Nevertheless, most Hungarian newspapers tried to be neutral (even if the authors, secretly or openly, sympathised with the Boer), though it was not exceptional that the conservative, or pro-government papers released articles, opinions against the English. The social-democratic, anti-imperialist *Népszava* was strongly against the English from the beginning, and it took every opportunity (e. g. in connection with the English military failures) to express its antipathy for the English imperialism, or the sympathy for the Boer.

The second aspect of the press history part dealt with the question whether the newspapers introduced the most important military and political leaders of the two parties, and if yes, how they described them, and how much the author's sympathy or antipathy can be detected by the readers. I found that the introduction of the Boer leaders was more general, although the papers dealt with the English ones as well. They tried to be objective, though, they wrote more about Boer leaders, which indicated a (secret or open) sympathy for them.

The third area of the press-historic part showed which aspect of the war was emphasized in the articles. I studied three sub-categories such as political events, military events and informational writings. Right after the war broke out, the political aspect was the most frequent, which is understandable, and the information of the articles were mainly from English sources. The explanation of that is that only a few English newspapers had South-African correspondents at that time, so the news about the military actions (which were already present at the beginning of the war) came slowly to Europe, in spite of the developing technology (telegraph).

At the end of the war the political aspect got emphasized again, on the one side because there were fewer military actions, and on the other side Hungarian press paid high attention to

the peace talks.

The articles in connection with the military events (mainly at the beginning of the war) were based on news taken over from foreign, mostly English newspapers. Editors, journalist often criticised the lack of objectivity of the news published in English papers, which used the information of the *War Office*. After a while the news from foreign agencies (Reuters for example) became more and more important, and in the last stage of the war some of the Hungarian papers had their own local correspondents.

Informational articles could be found in daily papers and in weekly magazines as well, but we can say that those were the specialities of *Vasárnapi Újság*. This was mainly because the magazine had no opportunity to report about the political and military happenings day by day, although, there were articles about them. But its informational approach with historical and geographical background information, the introduction of the most important military and political figures amplified the articles of the daily papers which dealt primarily with political and military events.

In the third part of the thesis I dealt with a little-known topic, the Hungarian volunteers and soldiers (or those of Hungarian origins) in the war. The subject is quite interesting in itself, and it could be the topic of a whole thesis. However, since the main topic of my thesis was the interpretation of the war in the press, I had the chance to deal with it only in some extent.

It is already known that Hungarian volunteers fought on the side of the Boer in the Second Anglo–Boer War. The available sources, including specialist literature, informational articles and websites usually mention about a dozen of volunteers, however, there were much more Hungarians in South-Africa, either in the Boer or in the English army. They mention the names, but do not deal with the “Boer–Hungarians” in details, or why they were in South-Africa. Thanks to the research of Gábor Szabó–Zsoldos, we know a lot about Tibor Péchy, but there are still a lot of volunteers about whom we know nothing except their names. Furthermore, there are a lot of errors, inaccuracies in the printed and electronic scientific literature, for example, the mentioning of Lajos Szigethy as a Boer hero killed in action. Szigethy fought in the war, but he returned safely to Hungary and later he released his war memoirs.

At the same time, very few sources mention Hungarians in the English army, and they write mostly about one Hungarian, Lajos Vadász. Actually, at least two Hungarians and one Hungarian-born soldier fought in the English (or colonial) army, and we should not forget that a Hungarian scientist served in the English army, and a Hungarian painter joined the English

security forces.

Several volunteers, after returning to Hungary, gave lectures about their South-African experiences, and some of them published their war memoirs. The memoirs of Károly Bulyovszki and Vilmos Simon are well-known among historians, but it is not true for the work of Lajos Szigethy. In my thesis I tried to present the participants' war experiences based on their published memoirs (of which, as far as I know, none has been shown in details so far).

I would like to mention that during my research I came across a French memoir that Hungarian historians had seemed to overlook. The author is unknown (historians think that the author of the memoir is Olivier d'Etchegoyen), the title is: *Dix mois de campagne chez les Boërs / par un ancien lieutenant du colonel de Villebois–Mareuil* [*Ten Months in the Field with the Boers by An Ex-Lieutenant of General de Villebois–Mareuil*]. Colonel Georges de Villebois Mareuil (1847–1900) was the commander of the French soldiers serving in the Boer army, but in his troop there were foreign soldiers, even Hungarians. At the end of 1899 he took part in the Battle of Colenso, he fought at Paardeberg and Kimberley, and in April 1900 it was he who helped to change the outcome of the Battle of Tweefontein that the Boer won, while the colonel was mortally wounded in the fight. For me it was very interesting that the author mentioned the name of Gyula Illés, a little-known Hungarian hero of the Boer war, twice.

As far as I know, there has not been a work so far, which dealt with the Hungarian participants (on both sides) of the Second Anglo–Boer War with details. Gábor Szabó-Zsoldos's works focus on Tibor Péchy, they only mention the names of the other Hungarian volunteers. Erwin A. Schmidl's extremely accurate work deals with the Hungarian volunteers, but his work is in German, and he devotes the whole work to the participants from Austria–Hungary (not only Hungarians, but Austrians as well), while in my thesis this is only an additional topic to the main one of the press-history. After my research it is clear that there were much more Hungarian participants in the Boer army than the usually mentioned 12 or 14 persons. In my thesis there are twenty-one volunteers, one of whom (Finifera) has never appeared before in any other work known by me.

The specialist literature has not paid attention to the Hungarian, or Hungarian-born volunteers and soldiers fighting in the English army, or those who could be considered as neutral participants. Tivadar Duka was a Hungarian who supported the English in his articles, but nobody knew that his son, Albert Duka, a military surgeon of the Australian army served in the fights in South-Africa. It was hardly mentioned that Pál Bornemissza the famous

Africa-explorer also took part in the war, and we could read nothing about the role of Adolf Zsakovszky, the photographer with a tragic fate.

As for Hungarians fighting on the side of the English, Lajos Vadász is the only one about whom we have a considerable amount of information, while we know nothing but the names of János Propper and Elemér Kéméndy who served in the gendarmerie in Natal. I hope that my thesis will inspire other historians and we can get more information on this aspect of the war in the future.



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Candidate: László Pap
Neptun ID: QR6D4H
Doctoral School: Doctoral School of History and Ethnology

List of publications related to the dissertation

Hungarian scientific article(s) in Hungarian journal(s) (5)

1. **Pap L.:** A második angol-búr háború és a magyar politikai élet.
Acta Acad. Paed. Agr. N. S. Sect. Hist. Megjelenés alatt, 2015. ISSN: 1785-3117.
2. **Pap L.:** Búrmagyarok, avagy magyarok az angol-búr háborúban.
Acta Acad. Paed. Agr. N. S. Sect. Hist. Megjelenés alatt, 2014. ISSN: 1785-3117.
3. **Pap L.:** Koncentrációs táborok az angol-búr háborúban.
Acta Acad. Paed. Agr. N. S. Sect. Hist. 40, 235-244, 2013. ISSN: 1785-3117.
4. **Pap L.:** Az angol-búr háború a magyar politikai közvélemény tükrében.
Acta Acad. Paed. Agr. N. S. Sect. Hist. 39, 237-252, 2012. ISSN: 1785-3117.
5. **Pap L.:** Churchill szerepe/jelenléte a brit gyarmati harcokban, különös tekintettel az angol-búr háborúra.
Acta Acad. Paed. Agr. N. S. Sect. Hist. 35, 131-148, 2008. ISSN: 1785-3117.





Non scientific journal article(s) (1)

6. **Pap L.**: Sebesültsorsok az I. világháború nyugati frontján.

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