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**RUSSIA FROM A HUNGARIAN PERSPECTIVE
LAJOS THALLÓCZY'S STUDY *RUSSIA AND OUR COUNTRY*¹**

In many respects, the work of the historian Lajos Thallóczy, published in 1884 under the title *Oroszország és hazánk* [Russia and Our Country],” stands out from the Russia-related studies and writings of his time. The great virtue of this volume is that, in addition to travel experiences, the author also draws on primary Russian archival sources and presents the Tsarist Russia of the 1880s from a wide variety of perspectives, while always keeping the Hungarian point of view in mind. The focus of his attention is the comparative presentation of Russian and Hungarian economic relations, with an emphasis on Russian-Hungarian competition in the grain market. Thallóczy sees the Tsarist Empire as a rival of concern from Hungary’s point of view, as well as a promising but untapped opportunity for bilateral trade relations. This method of analysis, which focuses on analogies and parallels, is a feature of the entire volume, including the chapters on travel experiences. The author has published comparative economic and social analyses that have opened up new lines of research and are still relevant today. A further interesting feature of the text is the separate chapter on Russian colonialism, which is also discussed in the context of the Austro-Hungarian occupation of the Balkans. There is a strong emphasis on comments on the Russian character, which abound in virtually every chapter. Mostly, this concerns the formulation of stereotypes that have become fixed in the meantime and which are also known from other travelogues of the time, that are echoed in the memoirs of Hungarian prisoners of war of the First World War and even in travelogues published between the two world wars.

Keywords: Lajos Thallóczy, Russia, travelogue, agriculture, grain trade, colonial policy, Balkans, Pan-Slavism, national characterology

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1 *Citation: JUDIT HAMMERSTEIN, “Russia From a Hungarian Perspective. Lajos Thallóczy's Study *Russia and Our Country*”, *RussianStudiesHu* 5, no. 2 (2023): 47–69. DOI: 10.38210/RUSTUDH.2023.5.13*

In 1884, historian Lajos Thallóczy,² founder of Hungarian Balkan studies, published his study *Russia and Our Country*, the first Hungarian historical work on Russia written from a Hungarian perspective, using primary sources and local experience.

The author's choice of topic was not at all accidental, so it is worth reflecting briefly on the international context of the era. Seen from the perspective of the Dual Monarchy, international politics put the Tsarist Empire firmly in the spotlight. In 1878, the Berlin Congress took place, only a few years before Thallóczy's 1883 study trip to Russia. As a result of the Conference, the European Great Powers had revised the Peace Treaty of San Stefano, signed on 3 March 1878, ending the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78 and securing excellent headway for Russia in the Balkans. This not only prevented the creation of Greater Bulgaria and Russian dominance in the Balkans, but also recognised Romania, Serbia and Montenegro as fully independent states. The Berlin Settlement (signed on 13 July 1878) created a favourable situation for the Dualist Empire: Austria-Hungary was able to gain influence over the newly created states and was given permission to occupy Bosnia and Herzegovina militarily, thus becoming, in one go, a quasi-coloniser herself. This was an important step in the process in which the Great Powers of Europe not only observed but also sought to influence aspirations for national independence in the Balkans,

2 Lajos Thallóczy (1857-1916) an outstanding academic and historian who became a public figure and occupied important state posts. Born as Lajos Benedek Strommer in Kassa (now Kosice, Slovakia), the son of a family of German officials from Upper Hungary (Felvidék), in 1877 he changed his name from Strommer to Thallóczy. In 1875, he obtained a degree in History and Latin and a doctorate in the Humanities at the University of Budapest, as well as a private teaching qualification in Hungarian Economic History. He worked briefly at the Hungarian National Museum and later at the Hungarian National Archives. In 1885, he was appointed Director of the Court Archives of the Viennese Court Chamber. From 1901, as head of department in the Common Ministry of Finance, he was put in charge of education and culture in occupied Bosnia and Herzegovina. In 1916, he was appointed Civil Governor of Serbia, which was occupied by Austro-Hungarian forces. A member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, from 1913 to 1916 he was president of the Hungarian Historical Society. At the request of Prime Minister István Tisza, he and Kálmán Thaly organised the repatriation and reburial of the remains of Ferenc Rákóczi II and his fellow emigrants in 1906. On the 1st of December 1916, on the way home from the funeral of Franz Joseph, Thallóczy became the victim of Hungary's worst railway accident, the Herceghalom tragedy. He was one of the most knowledgeable scholars of the medieval Balkans. It is not a coincidence by any means that in 2008, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the Academy of Sciences and Arts of Bosnia and Herzegovina jointly organised a conference in Sarajevo to discuss Thallóczy's legacy as a historian and politician on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of his birth.

which were developing as the Ottoman Empire, the ‘sick man of Europe,’ declined. From the Great Power perspective, the question arose as to how the Turkish Empire’s European territories would be partitioned and to whose advantage, and also who would dominate the Balkan peninsula. This is how the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Russia came to confront each other as rivals. The Tsarist Empire also used the idea of Slavic brotherhood to gain influence over the peninsula and the new states about to be born; it embraced the independence movements of Balkan nations, and this also gave it an opportunity to secure access to the Mediterranean. But the Monarchy had good reason to fear a fate similar to that of the Ottoman Empire, for the disintegration of the multi-ethnic Turkish Empire could encourage the nationalist independence aspirations of the ethnic groups within the dualist state. This was seen as part of Russia’s master plan, pan-Slavism. Moreover, Hungarians, in the course of their 1848-49 Revolution and War of Independence, had experienced, alongside the Russian bayonets, that their national aspirations could be confronted not only by Vienna, but also by the rising nationalism of the Serbs, Croats, Slovaks and Romanians. It seemed to be vitally important to the Monarchy to check Russia’s growing influence in the Balkans. Russia and the Balkans were thus a particularly pressing issue in terms of foreign policy during the 1870s and 1880s.³

In the light of the above, it is understandable that Thallóczy took a particular interest in Russia. The historian became well-known not only as an expert on Russian affairs, but as the founding scholar of Balkan studies and Albanology in Hungary. His research, source publications and studies on the history of the Balkans remain of the utmost importance to this day. He focused chiefly on the history of Hungarian-Serbian, Hungarian-Bulgarian and Hungarian-Turkish relations, and he also worked on the history of the Jajce Banate and Bosnia. It was by no means a coincidence that his expertise attracted the attention of Benjamin (Béni)

3 For more on this issue, see inter alia: EMIL PALOTÁS, *A Balkán-kérdés az osztrák-magyar és az orosz diplomáciában a XIX. század végén* (Budapest, 1972) and *Az Osztrák-Magyar Monarchia balkáni politikája a berlini kongresszus után, 1878–1881* (Budapest, 1982); ISTVÁN DIÓSZEGI, *Az Osztrák-Magyar Monarchia külpolitikája: 1867–1891* (Vince, Budapest, 2001); ANDRÁS JOÓ, “‘Perfidious Albion’ vs ‘Austria-Germany’: Aehrenthal, Cartwright and the Dual Monarchy: Great Power Policy through the Eyes of Diplomats’, in *Studi Finno-Ugrici 1999–2001*, ed. AMADEO DI FRANCESCO, (Dipartimento di Studi dell’Europa Orientale, 2001) 135–191.

Kállay⁴, the Monarchy's common finance minister, and later of Emperor Franz Joseph himself, who regularly sought Thallóczy's opinion on Balkan affairs. Thallóczy became a trusted advisor to the monarch and a regular visitor at the Court of Vienna. Both Kállay and Thallóczy believed that the Monarchy's main economic and political interests lay in reinforcing her presence in the Balkans, and Russia happened to be the major obstacle to this.⁵

As the title suggests, Thallóczy's book is not only about Russia, but also about Hungary. More precisely, it examines the Tsarist Empire of the era from a Hungarian perspective. Russia is presented as an economic competitor on the one hand, and as a country of untapped potential for economic cooperation on the other. His comparison of the economic conditions of the two states not only aims to provide a broader understanding of the specificities of Russian development, but also offers a number of lessons concerning contemporary economic trends of Hungary.

Thallóczy visited the Russian Empire in 1883. His book is the result of a long research trip to Russia, which lasted almost one year. The author's study trip was supported by Minister of Trade, Gábor Kemény, and the publication of the book was backed by State Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, Industry and Trade, Sándor Matlekovics. In his introduction, the author also refers to additional assistance he received from officials of the Ministry of Trade and Home Affairs. This determines the content and structure of the study, the main part of which (Chapters III-VIII) is a comparison of the agricultural, industrial and trade development of the two countries, supported by figures and statistics. (Thallóczy can thus be considered the first traveller to pay special attention to economic issues). These rather dry chapters are preceded by the author's introduction and a brief outline of the main events in Hungarian and Russian history juxtaposed with each other as well as the historical contacts between the two countries. This is followed by another brief outlook, entitled *Sketches*

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- 4 Béni Kállay (Benjámín Kállay) (1839–1903) politician, diplomat, historian, consul general of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy in Belgrade, later common finance minister. Until his death he served as governor of Bosnia. He worked for the economic and cultural prosperity of the province and for peaceful coexistence between Serbs, Croats and Bosniak Muslims. He saw the need to develop an independent Bosnian national consciousness. He was considered to be an outstanding expert and one of the most knowledgeable scholars of the Balkans. Between 1875 and 1878, he edited the political daily *Kelet Népe*.
- 5 FERENC GLATZ, "Lajos Thallóczy – Historiker der Habsburgermonarchie", in *Lajos Thallóczy, der Historiker und Politiker* (Hrsg.: Dževad Juzbašić, Imre Ress, Sarajevo-Budapest, 2010), 19–30., 25.

from *Russian Publicism*, which provides information on the birth of Russian national literature, intellectual debates in the press, the major newspapers and censorship, and also informs us about the beginnings and heyday of Slavophilism (introducing two influential characters of the Moscow intellectual world, Mikhail Katkov and Ivan Aksakov), the development of Russian national fanaticism and various other topics. In the last chapter (Chapter IX) we read Thallóczy's travelogue. Captured in colourful sketches of Russian life and illustrated by the excellent drawings of Tibor Dörre, it describes the cities he visited and the people he observed during his journey in an accommodating narrative style. At the end of the volume, statistical annexes containing data on trade between Hungary and Russia (1881-82) are attached. In the light of all this, the various sections, which are difficult to fit together either in terms of style or content (scientific study, statistical data, travelogue...etc.) make the book an unusual mixture of genres. In fact, it is difficult to understand why the author did not publish his travel experiences in a separate work. There is, however, one thematic element of the book that appears in practically every passage, namely, Thallóczy's descriptions and observations of the Russian character.

In his introduction, the author makes it clear that he considers study of Russia indispensable, because the Tsarist Empire is one of Hungary's most important and powerful neighbours. Hungary cannot, therefore, afford the so-called "luxury" of not having sufficient knowledge of the empire. Indeed, in Thallóczy's time, there was only limited available information on the Russian world in Hungary, and very few volumes or studies on Russia had been published from the pens of Hungarian authors.⁶ "For Hungary, Russia's development and political aspirations symbolised the sort of unknown whose solution regulates the equation of national existence"⁷, writes Thallóczy, elucidating the problem in an expressive style. In his view,

6 Among the few Hungarian published works on Russia, ISTVÁN LASSÚ's *Az Orosz Birodalom Statistikai, Geographiai és Historiai leírása* (Pest, 1827, 2nd extended edition, Buda, 1831) published in 1827, certainly deserves a mention here. Lassú's geographical, historical and statistical descriptions of several important European states (Great Britain, France, Prussia, etc.) are works that filled a gap. Thallóczy does not mention Lassú, but he does mention Béni Kállay and Mór Gelléri. Clearly, he was referring to Béni Kállay's work entitled *Oroszország keleti törekvései. Történelmi vázlat* (Budapest: Mór Ráth, 1878), in which the author, while analysing the background to Russia's growing influence in the Balkans, also discusses the civilisational characteristics of Russian development and the Russian spirit. In 1881, Mór Gelléri, a prominent figure in Hungarian industrial development, published a study on industrial conditions in the Tsarist Empire. (*Oroszország ipara*. Budapest, 1881).

7 LAJOS THALLÓCZY, *Oroszország és hazánk* (Atheneum R. Társulat, Budapest, 1984. III).

such ignorance was not acceptable, even though he himself was aware that the image of Russia in the Hungarian public mind was far from favourable, primarily due to the fear of the powerful militaristic empire generated by Russia's assistance in the suppression of the 1848-49 War of Independence.

Fear of lack of freedom and of authoritarianism was firmly embedded in the Hungarian public mind, and this had been confirmed by earlier experiences of Hungarian travellers to Russia before the 1848 War of Independence. István Nogel, for example, travelled to the East in 1842 on behalf of the Hungarian National Museum for botanical and ornithological research, and had visited the entire Caucasus. He compiled a remarkable account of his journey⁸, in which he describes not only Odessa and the landscape, but also the state of public affairs and the despotic system of governance. He arrived in Odessa by boat, where he was quarantined in a building and forced to wait for two weeks. It was there that he was confronted with what it meant to be suddenly deprived of one's freedom. He wrote: "It was there that I first felt the agony of losing golden freedom. Although the rules were made for the good of mankind, the most unpleasant sensations came over me when the servants of the institution closed the door behind us. My cheerful mood suddenly vanished, a fearful gloom came over me, my chest heaved as if the air of forced servitude surrounding the Russian throne were pressing on my Hungarian breath accustomed as it was to freedom, and the whole event had an effect on me from which I could not recover for many years..."⁹ Among the overwhelming experiences, he reports witnessing violence and corporal punishment everywhere: "I have often watched with the greatest sorrow of my heart the canings which are as common in Russia as wishing good day is with us, and I have pondered on this evil system." [...] Besides, there is no land of God where more blows are dealt out than in Russia"¹⁰

Politicians visiting Russia came to a similar conclusion. Unlike Nogel (who travelled with the purpose of doing research) statesmen like Ágoston Trefort (*Utazási töredékek*, [Travel Fragments]. Budapesti Árvizkönyv IV, k. Pest, 1840) and Baron Frigyes Podmaniczky (*Úti naplóból*, [From my Travel Diary], Pest, 1853) travelled to the country with the clear intention of gaining as wide a range of knowledge and experience there as possible.

8 *Nogel István utazása a Keleten*. Revised and published with appendices by the Schultz brothers in Pest, printed by József Beimel, 1847. In: Terebess Ázsia E-Tár, <https://terebess.hu/keletkultinfo/nogel.html>

9 *Nogel István utazása a Keleten*, 17.

10 *Nogel István utazása a Keleten*, 25–26.

Their travelogues, focusing on political power and the methods of the authoritarian regime, had already attracted the attention of the wider public. They both report on the cities, the magnificent palaces and churches of St Petersburg and the cultural institutions, in tones of praise. But they also report emphatically that the traveller feels an oppressive sense of the lack of freedom everywhere. The two travelogues vividly illustrate Historian Emil Niederhauser's observation that "the Hungarian attitude towards the great northern neighbour was one of bias and anxiety, of prejudice and aversion."¹¹ This fear pervades other news reports and articles on Russia in the Hungarian Reform Era periodicals.

The Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867 (the *Ausgleich*) created a new situation. Thereafter, fears of pan-Slavism and Russian expansionism threatening the Monarchy's position in the Balkans and Hungary's territorial integrity came increasingly to the fore. As Thallóczy wrote: "Russia, in the midst of her eastern ambitions, is steadfastly seeking to draw those other elements speaking a different language into her sphere of interest, and for whom the existence of Hungary as a state is a thorn in their side. The public opinion of Hungary instinctively looks with concern upon the diversified Slavic-Russian world which is developing in the East."¹²

In Thallóczy's view, despite these misgivings and bad experiences, the study of Russia is an inescapable task, and he himself would like to encourage it with his book. Already in his introduction, the author devotes considerable attention to a description of the Russian people's national character, in which many clichés and stereotypes are found. "The Russian people are in reality, regarding the so-called Little Russians of the West and the settlers of Southern Russia, a good-natured, comparatively industrious, excellently obedient and thus admirably disciplined race, incapable of independent action, and, though studious in enterprise, lacking courage and inclined to drunkenness."¹³ Thallóczy sees the Russians as passive, naming drunkenness as a salient character trait to which he returns several times throughout his study. He does so, for example, when describing the Russian peasantry: "the Russian *muzhik* is lazy, ignorant and, above all, a drunkard. [...] Drinking in Russia is a veritable pathological condition, not difficult to exploit heartlessly."¹⁴

11 EMIL NIEDERHAUSER, „Magyar utazók Oroszországban a XIX. században”, in *Magyar-orosztörténelmi kapcsolatok*. ed. ENDRE KOVÁCS (Művelt nép: Budapest, 1956), 131.

12 LAJOS THALLÓCZY, *Oroszország és hazánk*, 2–3.

13 *Ibid.*, 3.

14 *Ibid.*, 33.

Later, when describing his experiences in Kiev, he does not fail to draw our attention to how drunkenness, the sight of a drunkard, is deeply ingrained in the everyday life of Russians. “The police, according to a new *ukase*, can only touch a drunk man if he has already fallen down, and even then, they are only obliged to take him from the carriage road and lay him on the pavement. This is the people’s fun.”¹⁵

Like the French Marquis de Custine,¹⁶ Thallóczy is struck by the complacency and ambition of the Russians, combined with ignorance, which manifests itself, among other things, in their belief that Moscow and St Petersburg are the centre of the world, the quintessence of all that is desired, as if nothing else existed in the world beyond these cities.

The author attributes importance not only to the image Hungarians have of Russians, but also to how Russians think of Hungarians. According to his experience, Hungarians were not known too well in Russia. At the same time, he refutes claims in the Hungarian press that Russians would hate Hungarians. This, he says, is not true, even though negative articles portraying Hungarians as barbaric and oppressive appear here and there, mainly thanks to representatives of nationalities from Hungary visiting Russia. Similarly, one can come across the image of the brave, chivalrous, romantic Hungarian – which, in Thallóczy’s interpretation, is only to be taken as seriously as ‘admiration for Cooper’s Indians’. In all this, the author is actually pointing to the problem that, at that time, the image of a country was mostly based on superficial impressions and stereotypes, and was therefore not without surprising contradictions. He also returns to the Russian image of Hungary in the section on his travel experiences, pointing out the hypocrisy of the hostile critical stance of influential Slavophile intellectuals and politicians towards Hungarians: “The Russian only understands who the oppressor of the true believer is; whether it is true or not, he does not investigate. The masses have no insight, the leaders have Byzantine morals, they enjoy lying. They hate the German because he competes with and defeats them on their own soil, they hate the pagan Turk, and the “Asiatic” Hungarian – as Aksakov the Tatar calls him – because he oppresses the Ruthenian, whose singing is not even allowed here on his own soil because he oppresses the Serbian

15 *Ibid.*, 192.

16 Frenchman (Adolphe de) Marquis de Custine’s (1790–1857) major travelogue *La Russie en 1839*, published in 1843, had a major impact on the way foreigners thought about Russians, but also on the way Russians reflected on themselves. This influence is still felt even today.

Church, which is independent on Hungarian soil.”¹⁷ The above is vividly expressed by Aksakov’s remark, made in the company of Thallóczy: “You (i.e. the Hungarians), so to speak, are cleverly, I would say in an Asiatic manner, destroying your nationalities, our brothers, the Slavs. Your government gives the Ruthenian, Serb, Slovak etc., the right to shout, to enjoy a frivolous nothing, but really does nothing more than to refresh the dwindling Hungarian population proper, which is of course made up of the other nationalities.”¹⁸ In Thallóczy’s view, Russians with real experience, such as the Russian soldiers who were sent to Hungary in 1849, on the other hand, had sympathy for the Hungarians.

The main body of the study is a comparison of the two agrarian states, i.e. the conditions of Russian and Hungarian agriculture, respectively. The author devotes special attention to agricultural conditions, land tenure relations and the different, geographically distinct farming areas. The chapter entitled “Primitive Russia” also briefly describes the situation of the Jews, the general antipathy towards Jews and anti-Semitic movements. Thallóczy also mentions the conservative, strong-handed politician Ignatyev in connection with anti-Jewish measures, without explaining who he really was.¹⁹ It is worth mentioning here that news of the harsh treatment of Jews became known beyond Russia’s borders abroad, including Hungary. Another Hungarian traveller, Zsigmond Falk, who visited Moscow in 1898, invited as a guest of the International Congress of the History of Medicine, at least highlights in the introduction of his travelogue that, in addition to reports of the oppressive nature of the experience of crossing the border, news of the persecution of Jews would have deterred many from visiting Russia.²⁰

17 Ibid., 200.

18 Ibid., 23–24.

19 Nikolay Pavlovich Ignatyev (1832–1908) Russian diplomat, statesman, Minister of the Interior from 1881–82. During his time as minister of the interior, Jewish pogroms took place. Ignatyev significantly expanded the powers of the police in an effort to strengthen state authority. He drafted the so-called May Laws, which restricted the settlement rights and freedom of movement of Jews. Although, as Thallóczy notes, the fall of Ignatyev in 1882 brought an easing of the situation, the provisions remained in force until the fall of the Romanov dynasty in 1917, and a number of further restrictive measures were introduced after 1882. MIHAIL HELLER, *Az orosz Birodalom története* (Budapest: Osiris Publishing House – 2000, 1996), 561–562.

20 DR. ZSIGMOND FALK, *Oroszország Uti vázlatok* (Budapest: Kilián Frigyes M. Kir. Egyetemi könyvtár, 1898), 13.

Thallóczy addresses the phenomenon of serfdom emphatically, among other things, describing the ancient Russian farming institution of the *mir* in relative detail. He compares the Russian abolition of serfdom with the liberation of Hungarian peasants in Hungary, pointing out both the similarities and the essential differences. As a different element, he mentions that the Hungarian peasant is more educated than the Russian one and that his liberation in Hungary is carried out by the liberal nobility, the way for it being prepared by a serious and lengthy parliamentary debate, while in Russia nothing similar had happened before the imperial decision. Thallóczy describes the compensation process in detail, including the relevant legislation, and includes statistics on the specific compensation paid out in the 1850s, broken down by administrative district. He interprets the impoverishment of the Hungarian landed gentry, a phenomenon also observed in Russia, as a negative consequence of implementation anomalies following liberation. He compares the two countries' grain production, animal husbandry, industrial and commercial relations and presents statistical data. Thallóczy concludes that Hungary has a higher economic and technical level of grain production and animal husbandry, while Russia has not yet reached the limits of its development potential. In terms of grain production and exports, he points out, the Russian growth rate is far ahead of Hungary's, which is a source of concern for the author. A particular virtue of the analysis is that Thallóczy compares Russian productivity not only with that of Hungary, but also with that of the US and other European countries (France, Germany, Austria, England, etc.) in a broader international context providing an instructive picture of the Hungarian level of development, too. At first glance, the Russian figures are almost always impressive, but in terms of area and population, Thallóczy's comparative figures always show that many Western states, including Hungary, are ahead of the Tsarist Empire. However, in the context of the comparison of grain exports, he also draws attention to the significant Russian competitive advantage that is manifested in Russia's unhesitant implementation of reforms to make Russian grain trade more competitive (as opposed to Hungary). Thallóczy sees the lack of industrial skills and know-how in the Western sense and in the character of the Russian worker as the major obstacles to Russian industrial development. Here, again, Thallóczy is not sparing in his comments on national character. The Russian worker, is, in his view, more suited to obedience than leadership and lacks the capacity for innovation, the logical consequence of which is that the leaders are almost always foreigners. Nor is it a coincidence

that Russian trade is controlled by foreigners, primarily Jews. Although Thallóczy acknowledges the peasant craftsman's manual dexterity, his torpidity and lack of perseverance make him unfit to succeed in business.

Thallóczy points out the insignificance of Hungarian-Russian trade, which he also backs up with figures: "As far as the direct trade of our country with Russia is concerned, it is very small in both volume and value."²¹ He makes concrete proposals to change the situation. In his opinion, the situation would be greatly improved if Hungarian trade could establish direct links with Russia, independent of the Austrian intermediate railway lines. In addition, Hungary should explore opportunities in Russia with the help of seconded agents, while the reduction of Russian customs duties could also be a step forward in intensifying trade relations. He sees the greatest potential in strengthening exports of Hungarian machinery, furniture and wine.

Thallóczy devotes a separate chapter to the history of the Russian-Hungarian wine trade, noting that Hungarian wine exports to the Russian market were declining in the early 1880s, the reasons for which, he explains, were not only the high Russian customs duties but also the fact that Hungarian rail transport proved to be extremely expensive, especially by international standards.

One of the most remarkable chapters of Thallóczy's comparative economic analysis is his presentation of Russian colonial policy. In this respect, he is decidedly positive about the Russians: "The Russian can colonise. In the East, this talent is conspicuous."²² One of the driving forces behind this success, he says, is the ability of Russians to mix with other peoples, which of course proves most effective where Russians are in the majority. However, he also points to the negative consequences of the colonisation of Siberia, which include the destruction of the "Siberian Indians", i.e., the indigenous peoples, the local peasants, either through armed resistance or through venereal disease or alcoholism. "In commercial terms, Siberia today is to Russia what Hungary used to be to Austria in the time of Joseph II, what Turkey is now to England and France. It is an excellent place for husbandry, the production of raw materials, which is forced to buy the bad industrial goods of Moscow and Ivanovo".²³

21 LAJOS THALLÓCZY, *Oroszország és hazánk*, 164.

22 *Ibid.*, 171.

23 *Ibid.*, 176.

Concerning the subject of Siberia, Thallóczy also refers to political exiles (who, according to his figures, account for around 20% of the internal exiles), but is somewhat puzzled by the fact that Europe considers this to be a form of unprecedented torture, while he believes that the situation of political prisoners in Russia's central prisons happens to be a lot worse.

According to Thallóczy, the most successful Russian colonisation took place in the Caucasus. He explains this by the clever civilising measures and paternalistic behaviour of the Russians: 'Russian colonialism had its greatest triumphs in the Caucasus. The peoples of the Caucasus were not exterminated or subjugated by the Russians, but instead educated as if they were children.'²⁴ He did this so successfully that, in his view, the Armenians and Georgians became true Russian patriots. The successful mission included building infrastructure and administration and bringing Germans and Swiss settlers to the area. Thallóczy considers this colonialist attitude, combined with introducing the attributes of civilisation, to be particularly instructive, and in many respects a model to be followed in the Monarchy's 'cultural mission to the south', in its policy, that is, towards Bosnia and Herzegovina occupied in 1878. He points out, however, that while the Russians were civilising Asian peoples, eliminating the Armenian and Tatar Caucasus and the Kingdom of Georgia through Russification, the dualist state had to adopt a more prudent and cautious form of governance in order to gain lasting influence. At the same time, Thallóczy notes that Russian expansion has become complicated by the circumstance that it has often aimed at conquering peoples more advanced than the Russians (the western and northern "periphery", for example), which has often led to a violent form of expansion. As a further obstacle, he also mentions nihilism, which he says was spreading among Russians like a kind of 'social cancer'. When presenting Russian colonialism, Thallóczy focuses primarily on the expansion to the East. He notes that Russian expansion continued unabated, with the Tsarist Empire firmly established already in Central Asia. The chapter concludes with the author's suggestion that Russia is increasingly becoming a world power. Russia's struggle with Britain and China in Asia and the Far East will influence the fate of the entire West in the future.

24 Ibid., 178. It is true that at the time of Thallóczy's visit to Russia, the situation in the region was consolidated, but this was not always the case. The Caucasus was only pacified by the end of the 1850s, after some half a century of warfare against the mountain peoples. MIHAIL HELLER, *Az Orosz Birodalom története*, 480–482.

The last quarter of the volume, some sixty pages long, is a summary of Thallóczy's memories of the voyage and a marked departure from the previous sections in style and genre. (It cannot be ruled out that the reason behind this editorial solution, which is difficult to understand, may have been that the illustrated travel section would make the drier analyses full of statistical data more attractive to the public. This is at least suggested by the fact that in 1884 the reviews published in Hungarian newspapers highlighted primarily Thallóczy's travelogue.) It is surprising, however, that relatively little is known about truly personal aspects. For example, it remains largely obscure when exactly the author set out on his journey, how he organised it, where he stayed, and we can only deduce from a few passing remarks whom he met and with whom he exchanged views, for example among Russian intellectuals and influential people.²⁵ This is all the more unfortunate as Thallóczy not only spent a relatively long time in Russia, but his excellent command of Russian would have helped him establish extensive contacts. However, he had been consciously preparing for the trip and had certainly read the major German and English studies on Russia mentioned in the volume's preface. Also, one of his notes shows that he was familiar with the classic travelogue of "Sigismund Herberstein" (*Rerum Moscoviticarum Commentarii* [Notes on Russia], 1549). and the work of the Russian slavophile writer Nikolai Yakovlevich Danilevsky. That he may also have read Russian fiction is also clear from a reference to it, for example in the section on the Caucasus.

In addition to Moscow and St. Petersburg, Thallóczy made a major tour of the provinces, visiting Odessa, the Crimean Peninsula, Nizhny Novgorod, Kazan, Astrakhan, Orenburg, and the Kyrgyz desert on camelback, gaining an insight into the life of the Kyrgyz *kibitkas*. These were more or less the same cities and regions visited by the engineer Joseph Popper²⁶ some 50

25 In the foreword to the book, Thallóczy thanks those who helped him on his journey. Among them are merchants and diplomats, such as István Burián, Consul General in Moscow, and the commissioner of the Moscow World Expo. LAJOS THALLÓCZY, *Oroszország és hazánk*. V.

26 The engineer József Popper visited the Soviet Union in 1924 to study local transport conditions. This gave him the opportunity to make a smaller tour of Moscow and Leningrad, Nizhny Novgorod and Tula, but also to travel through the Volga region, via Kazan and Simbirsk, as far as Samara, and to get a glimpse of life in Bashkir and Kyrgyz villages. He published an account of his travels. See JÓZSEF POPPER, *A mai Szovjetország. Egy tanulmányút élményei* (Budapest: Világirodalom Publication, 1926). For more on the travelogue, see JUDIT HAMMERSTEIN, „Előre a múltba. Egy mérnök útibeszámolója a bolsevikok földjéről”, *Kommentár közéleti és kulturális folyóirat*, no. 2 (2021): 27–37.

years later – visiting the country of the Bolsheviks – the difference being that Popper did not visit the Crimean Peninsula or the Caucasus, but did go to Voronezh or Samara.

When it comes to gaining a visual impression, we cannot really read particularly exciting landscape descriptions in Thallóczy's work: either because the landscapes he sees do not really capture his imagination, or, if they do, as in the case of the Caucasian mountains, because the multitude of romantic descriptions from Russian poets prevents him from trying to express in enthusiastic lines the beauty of what he sees. However, when he sees the *shadoofs* and peasant houses, he notices striking similarities between the Russian countryside (for example, around Kishinev and Kiev) and the Great Hungarian Plain. It is this experience of kinship, by the way, which was also noticed by contemporary Hungarian analysts of Russian literary works, and which Hungarian soldiers who were taken prisoners of war by Russia during the First World War were able to witness much later, looking out of the window of the train to Siberia. Contrary to some contemporary and later travelogues, Thallóczy's descriptions of towns and cities are sometimes colourless. While little is said about the two capitals, the author writes about Kiev with great detail and even rapture: "An unforgettable sight opens up before our eyes. In the midst of the groves, the blinding whiteness, green-roofed houses, golden-domed churches, the shimmering waves of the Dnieper, and in between, huge, cold buildings melt into one another; the playful sunlight reflecting off the golden domes is almost blinding. While Odessa, this Russian Trieste, with its jumbled people, is more like an international emporium, Kiev is a true Russian city."²⁷ Thallóczy tries to bring Russian cities closer to his readers, to make them imaginable, by juxtaposing them with a Hungarian city: Odessa is the aforementioned "Russian Trieste", Kiev "the Russian Esztergom", Moscow "the Russian Debrecen", St Petersburg "this similarly nationalised big city", the Budapest of the Russians, while Bakhchisaray in Crimea is the "Tatar Miskolc", where one in ten people work as a bootmaker.

Thallóczy is constantly seeking similarities and trying to point out possible analogies, so in addition to the similarities between the Russian and Hungarian landscapes, he also draws the attention of his readers to the fact that Russia's border regions, like those of Hungary, are inhabited by other nationalities: "In some respects, the Russian and the Hungarian element are in an analogous situation. The empire is surrounded on the

27 LAJOS THALLÓCZY, *Oroszország és hazánk*, 187.

edges by foreign nations. In the west, Finns and Poles; in the south, Tartars; in the north, Finno-Uralic peoples; in the east and south-east, Tartars and Muslim tribes.”²⁸ Russian-Hungarian parallels, like references made with regard to Hungary, are numerous. When describing his experiences in Odessa, for example, he does not fail to note that there are landowners of Hungarian origin living in that area, and he also points out – to prove that in Russia there is an interest in Hungarians – that one of Mór Jókai’s most popular but controversial novels, *The New Landlord*, written in 1862, will soon be published in the Odessa newspaper *Vjestnik*.

While he sees St Petersburg as just an official “institution” which is not worth wasting much time on, Moscow, the real Russian city at the heart, is, in its bizarreness, a kind of essence of Russian civilisation and full of contradictions. “(...) Venice on the mainland; rich, miserable, religious, indifferent, national, mixed seventy-seven times, selfish and expansive, and yet in the end, Muscovite: that is its character.”²⁹ “If I may use an analogy, Muscovite civilization is very like the enamel of Russian jewellery, colourful, flowery, shiny, but very peculiar.”³⁰

The romantic point of view, which will characterize the descriptions of many a Hungarian reminiscence of captivity in Russia during the First World War, appears here and there in Thallóczy’s work: he portrays the Circassian men, who are drawn into the mountains and resemble the “eagles roaming above them”, as real giants. “Their problem is that their virtues are too virtuous for the modern world, and their faults and prejudices are incompatible with what Russians, often falsely, call civilisation.”³¹ It is not entirely clear whether Thallóczy is referring to the downside of modernisation in general, or to the falsity of the civilisational superiority claimed by the Russians.

In the first chapters of the book, the author speaks only in passing about the lack of freedom and the climate of anxiety that previous Hungarian travellers had often condemned, referring for example to the repression of Jews, the unthinking Russian press and censored foreign newspapers, or the spies who could easily appear anywhere. On the subject of student life, which he sees as a ‘special phenomenon,’ he notes that it is a hotbed of revolution and terrorism, but that the primary cause of this is the misery

28 Ibid., 241.

29 Ibid., 197.

30 Ibid., 193.

31 Ibid., 232

of students and the way they are treated. In describing the experience of the trip, he is more explicit about the authoritarianism he witnessed: 'No one dares to think, the people do not know what to do. Eight to ten people are arrested every day, no one knows why. Only days later they whisper that this person or that one is under lock and key. The police are violent but not brave.'³²

Nor does poverty escape Thallóczy's attention. He confronts the misery of ordinary Russians, for example, by observing day labourers and stevedores in the Dnieper port of Kiev. He contrasts the misery of the Russian people with the rampant debauchery of the intelligentsia: 'The Russian intelligentsia rivals the Babylonians, fun-seeking, revelling, spending, one might say, to the point of frenzy. And all this is patriotically guarded by the government. The people are allowed to live as they can, the rest enjoy the present – let them not think. And yet they think.'³³

In Moscow, he visits the National Exhibition, which he finds particularly enlightening in terms of understanding conditions in Russia: 'In it we see a true-to-life photograph of today's Russia: a vast, populous state, expanding like oil and moving in its own way.'³⁴ He concludes that the educational materials exhibited reflect the low quality of public education, and the machinery on display convinces him of the dependence of Russian industry on foreign countries, even though the Russians try to present products imported from abroad as their own. With the exception of Russian jewellery, needlework, woven and painted goods, and the practical products of the Finns, which he praises, Thallóczy is rather disparaging about what he sees. In his view, the exhibition also points to the fact that some of the peoples of the borderlands (Poles, Finns, etc.) are more advanced than the Russians. The falsity of Russia's ambition and sense of superiority, which Marquis Custine sharply criticises, and the contradiction between Russia's self-image and reality, are exposed by Thallóczy's conversation with a Russian. This demonstrates that, despite the poor quality of the products on display, the Russians seem to be very pleased with themselves: "'Look at these splendid wardrobes! Can't you see what a high level our industry is at? What is the Paris exhibition compared to this?'" said an enthusiastic Russian friend of mine, as he led me through the exhibition. He went even further in his

32 *Ibid.*, 241.

33 *Ibid.*, 188.

34 *Ibid.*, 197.

enthusiasm, berating foreigners, Germans and French alike [...].”³⁵ Another remark of Thallóczy’s about Moscow reveals the Russians’ disparaging, often hateful attitude towards foreigners: “All true sons of Moscow despise foreign forms, but blindly imitate them. Yet they still consider themselves the most excellent nation in the world.”³⁶ Russian contempt and hatred of foreigners and foreign influences is also a recurrent feature of contemporary observations of Russia. For example, Béni Kállay, in one of his studies mentioned above, in analysing the development of Russian civilisation and the characteristics of Russian public spirit, names three defining factors, among which, in addition to the Tatar rule and the static and inflexible orthodoxy associated with the state, the hatred of ideas from foreign lands is mentioned as a third factor.³⁷ However, Thallóczy believes that envy is the primary reason behind Russian xenophobia: “The Russian knows only Russians, he hears his master speak French, he knows that there are Germans (немец), because he lives among them, and where the latter have a foothold, there is greater prosperity, and so he looks at them with a more evil eye. This envy is the natural consequence of the psychological relation which exists between the clever and the stupid, the poor and the rich, the industrious and the unprofitable.”³⁸

Observations and remarks on the Russian character permeate the passages on his travel experiences. Like other travellers, Thallóczy notes the extreme manifestations of the Russian character: “Alongside the natural animalistic goodness, there is also a rough, uncontrollable instinct for destruction, which needs only a spark. They cannot be influenced by intellect; you must give them a material, a tangible goal, and they will understand it. The government understands the condition of its people. To reduce the drinking of pálinka [vodka], free pictures are distributed, where eight-tailed, red-tongued devils with forks take the drunken muzhik to hell. This is what they understand.”³⁹ The theme of drunkenness, of unbridled drinking, recurs here too: “[...] the Russian people are a cheerful people, they love fun, it is alcohol that brings out the animal in them.”⁴⁰ It is noteworthy that several decades later, Gyula Illyés, who visited the Soviet Union in 1934, also describes in detail the link between drinking,

35 Ibid., 200.

36 Ibid., 193.

37 BÉNI KÁLLAY, *Oroszország keleti törekvései*, 61.

38 LAJOS THALLÓCZY, *Oroszország és hazánk*, 3.

39 Ibid., 196.

40 Ibid., 185.

drunkenness and the Russian character. Illyés, however, does not associate drunkenness with animal behavior, brutality, but his viewpoint is much more romantic: he discovers in the consequences of Russian drunkenness the expression of Russian sentimentality and a childlike attitude.⁴¹

Thallóczy also visits the famous Rumyantsev Museum,⁴² where, among other things, all the Slavs of the world can be seen in wax figures and national costumes. The exhibition convinces Thallóczy that there are such great differences in the development of the Slavic peoples that it is practically impossible to equate them. This was the view of Béni Kállay, who argued that the Slavic peoples were so different in language, customs and morals that there was really nothing to fear from pan-Slavism: there was no reality in unified Slavic aspirations. This notion is vividly expressed in Count Gyula Andrásy's mocking remark, quoted by Thallóczy, in connection with Katkov's comment on the peaceful coexistence of the great Slavic race, " ... they (the Slavs) get along together very peacefully: stuffed like this."⁴³

Thallóczy also reveals the extraordinary ethnic and ethnographic colourfulness of Russia (which later deeply impressed Popper as well), including the anthropological characteristics, dress and character of the different ethnic groups. Thus, the Caucasian peoples, the Georgians, Circassians, Tatars, Mordvins, Cheremis, Volga Germans, Kalmyks, Armenians, Jews, Gypsies, Kirghiz, etc. are mentioned, with the author also making a few pointed remarks on their national character.

Thallóczy also travelled to the villages, gaining an insight into the life of Russian village manors, whose hospitality and economic decline he contrasts with the Hungarian noble mansions. From his experiences in the villages, Thallóczy finds the optimistic developmental perspective of some Russians, like Danilevsky, that Russia could soon become the America of Europe, unimaginable.

41 "Alcohol, it seems, brings out the original tendencies of all peoples: in the Russians, at least in those I have seen, it is a softness, a childish openness, a certain immense desire to communicate... The Russians I observed did not drink as our people do, for example; they did not get drunk from glass to glass in the midst of pleasant discussions. From one minute to the next, from perfect sobriety, they suddenly threw themselves into intoxication, as into some abyss." GYULA ILLYÉS, „Oroszország 1934”, in: Uő (idem): *Szíves Kalauz* (Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó: Budapest, 1974), 111.

42 The famous museum operated between 1831 and 1924, first in St Petersburg and then in Moscow. Its successor is now the Russian State Library.

43 LAJOS THALLÓCZY, *Oroszország és hazánk*, 199.

Thallóczy also visits Nizhny Novgorod. He is not particularly enthusiastic about the world-famous fair, but neither is he enthusiastic about the city itself. Here, too, he points out the drunkenness of the Russians and criticises the extremely dirty, miserable accommodation on the outskirts of the city, where, he says, “in Hungary even the gypsies live in greater comfort.”⁴⁴

He also visits Kazan and Astrakhan. In a few words, he describes the Tatars and the Germans living around Samara, he mentions the language relatives of the Hungarians, who he finds are dwindling, travels across the Kyrgyz desert, and visits Caucasian towns, including Tiflis (present-day Tbilisi).

He highlights religious blindness and superstition in Russia. Like many observers of his time, he finds that Russian religiosity was more manifested in outward appearance. He criticises the priests, whom he sees as having little concern for the interests of the people. “The true Russian fanatic is devoted to his Church, a true Christian Muslim, but his priest is indolent; he treats his people as he sees fit and, for money, opens wide the way for other religions. This is the reason why this state of ‘Russian faith’ par excellence can boast of the most denominations.”⁴⁵ On the subject of religion, he refers to the Russian hatred of Poles, which is rooted in religious differences. On the subject of his experiences in Kiev, he also describes his visit to the Lavra Monastery, where he notes that the Eastern Church is on display in all its splendour and richness.

Of particular note is Thallóczy’s observation on the social status of women. It is as if the progress of women to success here is further ahead than in Europe. Men are indecisive, inconsistent and childishly emotional. But women are not like that: “As if men’s determination were all theirs, many a woman is character in the literal sense, whether this be good or bad. The Russian quest for female emancipation is not only a disease of theory in action, but the fulfilment of a woman’s individuality. If it were up to women, Russia would take a different shape.”⁴⁶ Thallóczy is, of course, aware that the position of women in a country so diverse both ethnically and culturally can hardly be described in one way. After all, it also happens, for example, along the Volga, that “... the hardest manual labour is done by women. They carry the wood and stones to the boats and replace the

44 Ibid., 207.

45 Ibid., 3.

46 Ibid., 215–216.

Tatars who carry the loads. And that is quite natural here. The men play the role of overseers."⁴⁷ But he marvels even more at the peculiar yet self-evident "inversion" of gender roles and behavioural patterns common in Europe: it is taken for granted that "some governors are very good at embroidery and sewing, while women are excellent at administration." This also reinforces the author's conviction that in Russia anything is possible, and vice versa. Like Lajos Thallóczy, some thirty years later, the POW writers of the First World War also noted that Russian women were more proactive and that their social role was different from that at home. They found that the social conventions and norms of behaviour expected of women in Western culture did not seem to apply in Russia. Thallóczy is also struck by the freedom that pervades the love life of Russians, but he does not see this as a romantic, attractive aspect, but associates it with a general lack of morality in everyday life: "Love, in all its varieties, has found a happy ground here. It is fashionable to live in a lawless way: even priests dare not speak of so-called morality."⁴⁸

On his way home, Thallóczy is confronted with the Russians' ambitions for world power when he overhears a conversation: "When I boarded the ship, a Lutheran priest from St Petersburg, a Russian lieutenant-general and the ship's engineer were talking about the future and dividing up the world. Asia was given to Russia as far as China, only Paris and London were left in Europe, and the Lutheran priest stipulated that the Pope should live in St Petersburg."⁴⁹

SUMMARY

Thallóczy's work is difficult to define in terms of genre, as it includes scientific analysis, statistical reports, and a travelogue written in a much lighter style. The great virtue of *Russia and Our Country* is that, in addition to his experiences, the author also draws on primary Russian archival sources, and presents the Tsarist Russia of the 1880s from a wide variety of perspectives, while always keeping the Hungarian point of view in mind.

The focus of his attention is the comparative presentation of Russian and Hungarian economic relations, with an emphasis on Russian-

47 Ibid., 216.

48 Ibid., 197.

49 Ibid., 234.

Hungarian competition in the grain market, so that (thanks to published statistics) their two states of economic development can also be assessed in a broader international context. Thallóczy sees the Tsarist Empire as a concerning rival from Hungary's point of view, as well as a promising but untapped opportunity for bilateral trade relations. This method of analysis, which focuses on analogies and parallels, is a feature of the entire volume, including the chapters on travel experiences. A further interesting feature of the text is the separate chapter on Russian colonialism and the eastward expansion of the empire, which is also discussed in the context of the Austro-Hungarian occupation of the Balkans.

Compared to other contemporary travelogues, Thallóczy's gives a more nuanced picture of Russian society: his travel report presents a panoramic view of the typical characteristics of Russian (mostly) urban society. Like other observers of his time, he too captures the atmosphere of lack of freedom (the "gag" on the streets or in official circles, arrests, the presence of spies, censorship, etc.), but without overemphasising it. He does not, for example, report on his experiences of crossing the border, which other travellers condemned. It is telling, however, that at the end of his study trip he says goodbye to Russia with some relief: "I left this strange country of contrasts, where life is so easy and so difficult, with a certain sense of relief."⁵⁰

There is a strong emphasis on comments on the Russian character, which abound in virtually every chapter. Mostly, it is about the formulation of stereotypes that have become fixed in the meantime, stereotypes which are also known from other travelogues of the time and echoed in the memoirs of Hungarian prisoners of war of the First World War, and even in travelogues published between the two world wars. In Thallóczy's case, however, the focus is not on the romantic Russian so familiar from classical Russian literature, but on the passive, sluggish Asian character, one of whose most defining characteristics is a tendency to drunkenness, which brings out the roughness and savagery inherent in Russians in a spectacular way. He, like Hungarian travellers in general, sees himself as an observer from the West, coming from a more developed, civilised world. He perceives the backwardness of the Russian world (education, technology, infrastructure, housing conditions, the lack of civilisation of peasants, etc.) with a sense of Western cultural superiority, but he also notices Russian ambition, a disdainful attitude with a tendency towards

50 Ibid., 242.

hatred and disparagement of foreigners, and the extreme contradictions of the Russian character.

In many respects, Thallóczy's work stands out from among the Russia-related studies and writings of his time. Drawing on Russian archival sources, and as a result of tenacious research, the author has published comparative economic and social analyses – for example, a detailed account of serf emancipation and its consequences, or the institution of *obshchina* – that opened up new lines of research and are still relevant today. And what distinguishes his travelogues from contemporary travelogues is that, despite the light narrative style, the author's scholarly attitude and political interest shine through in his colourful portrayals of life, for example in his more in-depth depictions of Russian society, his reflections on the Nizhny Novgorod Fair and the museums he visited.

Taking into account the author's intention to “present a fair and – I emphasize – impartial picture of what an unbiased Hungarian man has seen, heard and experienced in Russia,”⁵¹ it can be concluded that Thallóczy was not completely unbiased, but his effort to publish a largely objective work can hardly be disputed.

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