



Military Veterans' Associations in the Kingdom of Hungary (1868–1914)*

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One of the typical social consequences of the introduction of compulsory conscription and mass politics in nineteenth century Europe was the emergence of veterans organizations. This study examines the veterans' movement in the territory of the Kingdom of Hungary between 1867 and 1914. While in Europe and Imperial Austria the widespread military veterans' organizations were important actors in the relationship between the military and the civilian sphere and also in state policy, in Hungary their spread remained limited. However, their operation, specific ideology and also their reception in local society can provide important lessons about the impact of the military on society, and the forms and workings of loyalty and nationalism in Hungary.

The study consists of two main parts. First, it examines the prevalence and main characteristics of the associations: where and when were they founded, for what purpose were they established, how the state treated them, what social groups did they consist of, and finally how did all this relate to the other half of the empire? The second part of the study presents the activities of veterans' associations in Hungarian society by drawing on the example of town of Szombathely and Vas County in western Transdanubia. It analyses what activities did they perform in everyday life, what ideologies did they follow, how did they get involved in the life of the local society, and what was their reception in local civil society and administration?

Keywords: Austria-Hungary, Hungary, military veterans' association, militarism, civil-military relation, veterans

The national perspective has long dominated research on the history of the Habsburg Monarchy. Over the course of the past two decades, however, the “the new imperial history”¹ of the Habsburg Monarchy and the concept of “national indifference”² have shifted attention to transnational approaches, imperial policy, and multi-ethnic frameworks, pointing to the phenomena of national indifference, multilingualism, multiple identities, imperial patriotism,

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1 On the “new imperial history,” see Hirschhausen, “A New Imperial History?”

2 Tara, “Imagined Noncommunities.”

and dynastic loyalties.³ These theories have significantly altered the image of the Habsburg Monarchy, making it clear that the concepts of multinational empire and nation were compatible rather than competing categories and also highlighting the limits of national mobilization and the importance of dynastic loyalty (though without forgetting or ignoring the limits of this loyalty). Research, however, has focused primarily on the western half of the Monarchy, and with the exception of a few scattered research endeavors, Hungary's place in this narrative remains largely unclear.⁴

The Imperial and Royal Army was one of the most important institutional pillars of dynastic loyalty and patriotism. In recent decades, historical research in a number of European countries has shown that armies based on the general conscription and military symbols and traditions played a decisive role in building national identity, mobilizing the population for national purposes, and thus militarizing society at the turn of the century.⁵ One of the most important areas in which civil society and military society intersected were the military veterans' organizations, which in parallel with the emergence of mass politics became a hotbed of militarism. The *Kyffhäuserband* (an umbrella organization of veterans), for example, with its 2.8 million members, had become one of the largest societies in Germany by 1913. These associations had a strong nationalistic, authoritarian and militaristic character, which was also propagated in the wider society.⁶

Similar trends were underway in the Habsburg Monarchy, but of course in a different social, historical, and political context. Although general conscription was introduced in 1868, the Habsburg Army was organized around a supranational ideology which was unique in Europe. The cornerstones of this ideology were loyalty to the emperor and the common fatherland and the equality of nationalities and religions. Since there was no dominant nation in the Monarchy, the army did not symbolize the “nation in arms,” but rather was an embodiment of the community of the peoples of the empire as a whole. The army, too, was not a “school of the nation,” but a “school of the peoples.”⁷

3 Cole, *Visions and Revisions of Empire*; Berger and Miller, “Building Nations In and With Empires”; Judson, *The Habsburg Empire*; Unowsky, *Patriotism*; Cole and Unowsky, *Limits of Loyalty*.

4 Gerő, *Emperor Francis Joseph*; Gyáni, *The Creation of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy*.

5 See Vogel, *Nationen im Gleichschritt*; Frevert, *A Nation in Barracks*; Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen*.

6 Rohkrämer, *Militarismus der kleinen Leute*.

7 Allmayer-Beck, “Die bewaffnete Macht,” 88–99; Hämmerle, “Die k.(u).k. Armee,” 175–85; Tangl, “Ezredideológiák.” For an international perspective, see Leonhard and Hirschhausen, “Does the Empire strike back?”

The military culture developed by the army had an impact on wider society. In his work on military culture and the veterans' movement which emerged in the 1870s, Laurence Cole draws (at least) two important conclusions. He argues that "a process of societal militarization took place in imperial Austria during the second half of the nineteenth century, much as occurred in other European countries," and "a considerable reservoir of dynastic loyalty and 'pro-Austrian' sentiment existed across the multinational state."⁸ Of course, veterans were influenced by nationalism (in Bohemia more than anywhere else), but this did not affect their patriotism. Rather, it merely changed the language they used to express it. In Austria, however, military culture also contributed to the polarization of society as opposition emerged to the militarism and "certain circles of society rejected involvement in activities associated with or symbolized by military veterans." Thus, Cole agrees with István Deák's assessment, according to which the society of Habsburg Monarchy was divided not only nationally but also ideologically and socially.⁹

Cole's work does not deal with the case of Hungary, and his hesitancy to do so suggests that the distinctive position of the country should be the subject of separate study.¹⁰ With the Austro-Hungarian Compromise in 1867, Hungary, which had always occupied a special place in the Habsburg Monarchy, gained full internal autonomy with the exception of foreign affairs, military matters, and certain economic questions. Multilingual and multi-religious but governed by the Hungarian liberal elite, Hungary (in contrast with Imperial Austria) defined and organized itself as a nation state in which the dominance of Hungarian nationalism prevailed, while the nationality movements were ever more restricted.¹¹ For this reason, the lack of a national army was the Achilles-heel of Hungarian politics, and the ideology on which the Imperial and Royal Army's claim to legitimacy was founded was a constant target of Hungarian nationalists, even if the relationship between the army and Hungarian society had become harmonic and close in everyday life by the turn of the century.¹² Another significant and, from the perspective of the development of military veterans' associations (MVAs), important difference was the absence in Hungary

8 Cole, *Military Culture*, 308 and 322.

9 Ibid., 311. Also see Stergar, "Ljubljana Military Veterans."

10 Among Hungarian historians, András Cieger was the only one to deal shortly with Hungarian veterans' associations in one of his works. Cieger, *1867 szimbolikus világa*, 93–95.

11 Varga, *The Monumental Nation*.

12 For the relationship between the Habsburg Army and Hungarian society, see Hajdu, *Tiszttakar és középosztály*; Péter, "The Army Question."

of any modern mass politic. While the gradual extension of the right to vote in Austria eventually led to the introduction of universal and equal suffrage for all men in 1907, in Hungary, only a narrow section of society was able to take an active part in politics throughout the whole period.¹³

In this essay, I investigate the MVAs¹⁴ in the Kingdom of Hungary, not including Croatia-Slavonia. While in Europe and Imperial Austria the widespread MVAs were important actors in the relationship between the military and the civilian sphere and also in state policy, in Hungary, their memberships remained low, and they were established mainly in German-speaking territories and larger towns. For this reason, they attracted less interest from the state. However, their spread, operation, and specific ideology and also their reception in local society can provide important lessons not only about the impact of the military on society, but also about the forms and workings of loyalty and nationalism in Hungary.

The paper divided into two main parts. In the first, I discuss the prevalence and general characteristics of MVAs in the country and the relationship of the state to these associations. I also consider how the circumstances of these associations compare to the circumstances of similar associations in the other half of the Monarchy. In the second section, I shift perspective and, drawing on the example of Vas County in western Hungary, I examine the MVAs activities, the ideology represented by their members, and the reception of these associations in local civil society. As the MVAs in Hungary were mainly concentrated in the larger towns and in areas inhabited with German-speaking¹⁵ populations (first and foremost in the western Transdanubian region), Vas County offers an ideal case on the basis of which some general conclusions can be drawn.

Finally, it must be emphasized that the present study is about the veterans' associations founded by the members of the Imperial and Royal Army and the Royal Hungarian Honvéd Army (*königlich-ungarische Landwehr*), which was established with the army reform of 1868. I do not intend to deal with the Hungarian Honvéd Associations founded by the veterans of the Hungarian War

13 Gerő, *Az elsőprő kisebbség*.

14 The modern Hungarian language uses the word *veterán*, but in the late nineteenth century, the archaic words *hadastyán* and *aggharcos* were still used. In the study, for the sake of simplicity, I will use the abbreviation MVA (Military Veterans' Association) to name each association.

15 In Hungary, the contemporary censuses asked about mother tongue, not nationality. Thus, no ethnic statistics are available regarding the age. For the problems of the linguistic data of the Hungarian censuses, see: Kővér, "Statisztikai asszimiláció."

of Independence of 1848–49 and made the subject of a fairly sizeable amount of the secondary literature.

Military Veterans' Associations in the Kingdom of Hungary

The first MVA to function as an association in the modern sense of the word in the Habsburg Monarchy was founded in Reichenberg in Bohemia (today Liberec, Czech Republic) in 1821. Similar associations began to appear more and more frequently in the second half of the century, in parallel with the introduction of general conscription in 1868 and the granting of the right to freedom of association under the Fundamental Laws of 1867. By the turn of the century, the MVAs had become one of the most numerous types of civil association in Imperial Austria.¹⁶ In his work, Cole makes note of at least 2,800 MVAs before World War I, but he estimates their real number to be at least 10 to 20 percent higher. We know even less about the actual number of members of these associations, but it probably ran into the hundreds of thousands. 98 percent of the associations were founded in Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia, and the Hereditary Lands, while only a few dozen were established in Galicia, Bukovina, and Dalmatia, which had a lower standard of living and had been integrated into the Monarchy and its military system only towards the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth.¹⁷

Compared to its western neighbor, in Hungary, the MVAs spread at a much slower pace and only to a limited, geographically relatively well-delimited extent. The MVAs began to appear in the 1870s, after the Austro-Hungarian Compromise, when the right of association and assembly became free.¹⁸ Unfortunately, it is extremely difficult to estimate the number of MVAs in Hungary. During the Dualist era only a single census of associations was held (in 1878), according to which there were only 13 MVAs with a total of about 3,000 members.¹⁹ In

16 Cole, *Military Culture*, 126–29.

17 In 1913, the *k.k. Österreichischen Militär-Veteranen Reichsbund* had a total of 1,656 MVAs with a total of 209,761 members. However, more than a third of the Austrian MVAs (mainly Czech, Slovenian, and Italian) did not join the federation. Cole, *Military Culture*, 130.

18 In Hungary the establishment of associations was not regulated by law, only by a ministerial decree. According to this, the state limited its right of supervision to a minimum. The formation of associations was free, but the statutes required the approval of the Ministry of the Interior, while the operation of the associations was supervised by the local legislature. A m. kir. belügyministernek 1873. ápr. 29-én 1394. sz. a. kelt rendelete az egyesületek ellenőrzése tárgyában, *Magyarországi Rendeletek Tára, 1873*, 131–34.

19 Varga, *Magyarország egyesületei és társulatai*, 522.

addition, a survey prepared by the Ministry of Interior for the Ministry of Defense during the preparatory work for the Law of *Népfelkelés* (*Landsturm*) in 1883²⁰ listed some 21 associations.²¹ Although it is certainly possible that the figures given in the two sources are unreliable or imprecise, these numbers are still strikingly low, as at least 883 such associations had already been established in Imperial Austria.²²

Since there are no available census data for the later period, I tried to find another way to determine how many MVAs had been formed in Hungary by the outbreak of World War I. In addition to the two sources mentioned above, I used the statutes approval published in the official gazettes (*Budapesti Közlöny* and *Beliügyi Közlöny*)²³ and the association database of the National Archives.²⁴ According to the sources, the first MVA in Hungary was founded in Királyfalva (today Königsdorf, Austria) in Vas County in 1874, followed by about 100 more over the course of the next 40 years. Of course, this does not mean that there were exactly that many MVAs in the country at the outbreak of war. In Budapest, for example, ten MVAs were founded in the 1870s and 1880s, but by the turn of the century, their number had fallen to five, primarily because some of them had merged together.²⁵ There were similar mergers elsewhere. The Pécs MVA, founded in 1875, was merged into the Baranya County MVA in 1906.²⁶ Of course, there may also have been several associations which were disbanded without legal succession. Nevertheless, the operation of associations was generally quite stable. In Vas County, for example, a total of 17 associations were formed during the period, they were all still in operation at the outbreak of World War I.²⁷ Similarly, of the five associations established in Baranya County, all but the abovementioned Pécs MVA survived until the war.²⁸

The MVAs in Hungary were established in two distinct periods. The first period was in the second half of the 1870s and the first half of the 1880s, when

20 The Hungarian *m. kir. Népfelkelés* (in Austria, *k.k. Landsturm*) was a reserve force intended to provide replacements for the first line units. It was established in 1886 by Law XX.

21 MNL OL K150 1883. VII. 8. 5323.

22 Cole, *Military Culture*, 130.

23 The two journals are available in digitized and searchable form at <https://adt.arcanum.com/hu/>.

24 The database contains a list and markings of association documents remaining in the archives of the Ministry of the Interior: <https://adatbazisokonline.hu/adatbazis/polgari-kori-egyesuletek>.

25 *Budapesti czím és lakjegyzék, 1891–1892*, 220–29, *Budapesti czím és lakjegyzék, 1913*, 512 and 552.

26 Rayman, “Pécsi és baranyai hadastyán egyesületek,” 192.

27 MNL VaML IV. 405. b. Census of associations.

28 Rayman, “Pécsi és baranyai hadastyán egyesületek,” 195.

the MVAs were formed primarily in towns and to lesser extent in some villages in western Transdanubia. The second period was from the turn of the century until World War I, when MVAs were formed mainly in larger villages in western Transdanubia and only to a lesser extent in the towns. An important difference between the two periods is that in the 1870s and 1880s, the associations were formed primarily by war veterans, while after the turn of the century, they were formed by veterans of the peacetime army.

Compared to Austria or Germany, politics played no or only a negligible role in the spread of MVAs. Not surprisingly given their small number, their social impact remained largely local, and one cannot speak about a general veterans' movement throughout the country. The Hungarian state thus understandably paid little attention to the MVAs. The Austrian state, in contrast, began encouraging the spread of MVAs in the 1890s as an important institution of patriotism, and it also played an active role in creating a common federation (thereby also trying to increase the state control over the associations). The success of MVAs meant pressure from below, and this played an important part in obliging the state to react.²⁹ Things unfolded very differently in Hungary, however. The MVAs, of which there were comparatively few, did not really arouse the interest of the state, neither in a positive nor in a negative sense. The state did nothing to hinder the spread of MVAs, nor did it do anything to help them. It essentially remained indifferent to them throughout the whole period. The biggest problem the associations faced was caused by their uniforms. The MVAs tried to make themselves as similar as possible to the army through their flags, uniforms, and side weapons (in contrast to Austria, where side weapons were forbidden). However, the use of uniforms which closely resembled the uniforms actually in use by the army was expressly forbidden by the military. In 1884, the Minister of Defense drew the attention of the Minister of Interior to this in a special transcript, and in 1896, a general review of the uniforms was ordered.³⁰

The geographical location of the MVAs can also be well defined. They were established mainly in western and southern Transdanubia, in the western part of present-day Slovakia, in Budapest, in two Transylvanian Saxon counties in Brassó, (Brasov today Romania and Nagyszeben (Sibiu today Romania) and, finally, in southern Hungary: in the Bánát and Bácska. There were also a few associations

²⁹ Cole, *Military Culture*, 268–307.

³⁰ MNL. OL K150 1888.VII.8.31554.

scattered across other parts of the country. Like their Austrian counterparts, the associations were formed on a territorial basis, recruiting members from a particular town, neighborhood, or county.³¹

The regions mentioned above had one thing in common: they all had a significant German-speaking population (although they were extremely heterogeneous in terms of language, religion, culture, history, and living conditions). The western villages of Vas and Sopron Counties were inhabited by the predominantly Catholic and to a lesser extent Lutheran “Hientzen,” while in Moson County one found the Catholic “Heidebauers.” Transylvania was home to the largely Lutheran Saxons, who had enjoyed considerable privileges and autonomy before the Austro-Hungarian Compromise. These German settlements can be traced back to the Middle Ages. The Bácska and Bánát were home to the Catholic “Swabians,” who had come from southern Germany in the eighteenth century after the expulsion of the Ottomans. The southern Transdanubian Baranya County was home to the so-called “Stiffollers.”³²

The German minorities undoubtedly played a decisive role in the formation of the MVAs, as most of the MVAs were established in German-speaking settlements. However, this did not mean that MVAs spread exclusively among German speakers. They could also be found in some Croatian and Slovak villages in Sopron and Pozsony County on the Austrian border. In addition, the Hungarian-speaking population in the larger towns of Transdanubia established their own MVAs, for example in Szombathely, Győr, Zalaegerszeg, Nagykanizsa, Pécs, and Mohács, as well as in the other towns of the country, such as Miskolc, Marosvásárhely (today Târgu Mureș, Romania), one of the main Székely centers), and even in towns on the Great Plain, such as Szeged and Hódmezővásárhely. Finally, in towns with mixed populations such as Budapest, Sopron, Pozsony (today, Bratislava, Slovakia), Óvár, Arad (today Arad, Romania), Nyitra (today Nitra, Slovakia), Újvidék (today Novi Sad, Serbia, and Temesvár (today Timișoara, Romania), the German and Hungarian-speaking populations set up associations together. No MVAs, however, were found among the majority of Hungarians and other nationalities of the country, or in other words in the Slovene, Slovak (except along the Moravian border), Ruthenian, Romanian, or Serbian settlements.

31 Cole, *Military Culture*, 129.

32 On the history of the Germans in Hungary, see Seewann, *A magyarországi németiség története*.

The prevalence of MVAs (like associations in general), were also closely related to the spread of the literacy. With the exception of Hientzen villages in Vas and Sopron Counties, the vast majority of MVAs were formed in towns and in some large villages. The literacy rate of the total population of these settlements was well above the local and national average, which was only 58 percent in 1910. In Vas and Sopron Counties the literacy rate was 70 percent and 74 percent. In Bács-Bodrog County, it was 58 percent, in the settlement of Szeghegy (today SekiĆ, Serbia), it was 79 percent, and in Apatin (today Apatin, Serbia) it was 84 percent. MVAs were established in both settlements. Similarly, 68 percent of the total population of Stájlerlakanina (today Anina, Romania) could write and read, while the average rate in Krassó-Szörény County was only 45 percent. Finally, the literacy rate in Niczkyfalva (today Nićhidorf, Romania) in Temes was 71 percent, while the county average was 54 percent.³³

The most important factor in the development of the MVAs, however, was the proximity of Austria. It is no coincidence that half of the associations identified were formed in Moson, Pozsony, Sopron, and Vas Counties on the border of Austria and Moravia, and most of them were found in the western part of the area. In the case of the Nagyfalva (today Mogensdorf, Austria) MVA founded in Vas County in 1874, for example, the alispán (the deputy *főispán*, or lord lieutenant of the county) explicitly claimed in his report that the local people had taken their model from neighboring Styria.³⁴ In the case of the MVA in Dobrafalva (today Dobersdorf, Austria), also established in Vas County, the local authorities welcomed the formation of the association, because earlier the veterans had joined the Styrian associations.³⁵ The cross-border relations are also illustrated by the fact that, in 1877, 30 MVAs in Hungary, Lower Austria, Bohemia, and Moravia wanted to form a federation called the *Allgemeine Österreichisch-Ungarischer Militär Veteranen Unterstützungs-Bund*. The federation would have included two associations from Hungary: the Sopron MVA and the Nagyszombat (today Trnava, Slovakia) MVA. However, the statutes of the federation did not win the approval of the Hungarian Ministry of the Interior, as the federation's headquarters were abroad and thus the Hungarian authorities would have had no influence on its composition and operation. The Ministry therefore did not allow the two Hungarian associations to join.³⁶

33 *A Magyar Szent Korona országainak 1910. évi népszámlálása. Első rész*, 47, 176–77, 180–81, 350–51, 356–57.

34 MNL OL K150 1875.III.4.776.

35 MNL VaML IV.401.b. 222/1886

36 MNL OL K150 1876.III.4.4682.

Probably because there were comparatively few of them, the MVAs in Hungary did not form a common organization, and no attempt was made to form a federation apart from the attempt mentioned above. The MVAs were also unable to establish a viable permanent veteran press, although several attempts were made to do so, mainly in the capital. The Hungarian-German bilingual *Első Magyarországi Hadastyán Újság* (First Hungarian Veteran Journal) was launched in 1878, followed by the *Hadastyánok Lapja* (The Journal of Military Veterans) in 1882 and its German counterpart *Veteranen Zeitung*, and finally, in 1893, the bilingual *Magyar Hadastyán Újság* (Hungarian Veteran Newspaper). As individual initiatives, these newspapers were of low quality, and they published articles almost exclusively on the affairs in the capital. None of them lasted for more than a year, and unfortunately very few copies have survived.

It is even more difficult to determine the number of people who belonged to the various MVAs or and the social composition of these associations, as detailed censuses and membership lists are not available. However, there is some partial information on the basis of which a few general conclusions can be drawn. For example, a survey of associations in Vas County in 1892 and 1914 reveals that the MVAs in the villages had an average of 30–60 members, while in Szombathely, the county seat (with a population of 30,000), the MVA had 120 members.³⁷ Similar proportions can be noticed in Baranya County. The Baranya County MVA in Pécs, the county seat (with a population of 47,000), had 111 members in 1901, while its two rural branches had 58 members in Pécsvárad and 25 in Hosszúhetény.³⁸ In Stájerlakanina, a small German-speaking town in Krassó-Szörény County in Bánát, had 61 members at the time of its formation.³⁹ The Fiume (today Rijeka, Croatia) MVA had 99 members,⁴⁰ the Nezsider (today Neusiedl am See, Austria) MVA in the western part of the present-day Austria had 150,⁴¹ the Arad MVA had 120,⁴² and the Achduke Joseph I Pozsony MVA had over 100 members at the time of its formation.⁴³ In general, the associations established in villages and small towns had a membership of around 50 people, while in the larger towns they had over 100 members. The only exception was

37 MNL VaML IV. 405. b. Census of associations.

38 Anonymous, “Huszonöt éve,” *Pécsi Figyelő*, June 22, 1901, 3.

39 MNL OL K150 1885.VII.8.11379.

40 MNL OL K150 1892.VII.8.32180.

41 MNL OL K150 1876.III.4.23307.

42 MNL OL K150 1888.VII.8.31554.

43 MNL OL K150 1875.III.4.54388.

Budapest, where the MVAs had 200–300 members or more.⁴⁴ Based on these facts, the total number people who belonged to one of the MVAs before World War I might have been between 10,000 and 15,000. For the sake of comparison, it is worth keeping in mind that the total population of Hungary in 1910 (excluding Croatia) was 18.2 million.

Unfortunately, even less is known about the social backgrounds of the people who belonged to the MVAs, as the few membership lists which survived do not include details concerning the members' occupations. One can only draw conclusions on the basis of the statutes and the reports received by the administrative authorities and the Ministry of Interior. The statutes generally distinguished three types of members: the ordinary members were veterans (or in some cases reservists) of the Imperial and Royal Army and the Royal Hungarian Honvéd Army. Although the associations did not differentiate between the soldiers who belonged to the imperial army and those who belonged to the Hungarian Honvéd Army, it is also true that the statutes were only approved in this form by the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Defense. The patrons and honorary members could also be civilians with no military background. They helped the associations on a voluntary basis, but they could not claim financial aid, nor could they wear uniforms or bear side weapons. Finally, every association had a protector. The associations would ask a local prominent citizen, landowner, nobleman, or even a member of the royal house to fill this role.

As was the case in Austria and Germany, the ordinary members of the associations were chosen from among the rank and file soldiers, and there were even some associations that stipulated in their statutes that members had to be rank and file soldiers. For example, the First Budapest MVA and the Edelsheim-Gyulai Budapest MVA only enrolled members from the rank of sergeant downwards. However, this was something of an exception. In many cases, one or more officers served as the organizer and the president of an association. For example, the first president of the Pécs MVA was Colonel Baron Gottfried Ottinger,⁴⁵ and the first president of the MVA in Szombathely was Captain József Gottmann.⁴⁶ In Fiume, retired ship-of-the-line Captain Gustav von Zaccaria played a key role in the establishment of the association.⁴⁷

44 MNL OL K148 1885.IV.D.436; K148 1900.IV.D.192; K150 1887.VII.8.31055; BFL IV.1428. IX.2717/1903. I. and II.

45 Rayman, "Pécsi és baranyai hadastyán egyletek," 184.

46 Pintér, *A Vasmegyei Aggbarcos Egylet*, 5.

47 MNL OL K150 1892.VII.8.32180.

The military ranks of the members offer some indication of their social status. In principle, the veterans came from the lower social classes, whom Thomas Rohkrämer referred to as “little people” (*kleine Leute*). In Germany, for example, most of the veterans were workers, peasants, artisans, small shopkeepers, and low-ranking civil servants, even if the leadership of the MVAs came from the higher echelons of society.⁴⁸ In Austria, the majority of the MVA membership was comprised of artisans, civil servants, shopkeepers, merchants, and, as of the turn of the century, peasants. There were, however some regional and national differences. In German-speaking areas, the MVAs also had people who belonged to the liberal bourgeoisie and landowners among their members, while where national politics played an important role (in Czech and Italian territories), the middle class and liberal bourgeoisie were mainly absent. In addition, the majority of the working class was largely left untouched by the veterans’ movement in Austria. Members of the nobility or the clergy and officers participated mainly as initiators, supporters, or presidents. In addition, there was another important peculiarity to the MVAs in Austria. In ethnically mixed areas, the veterans increasingly formed the associations on the basis of nationality.⁴⁹

In Hungary, the reports preserved in the archives of the Ministry of Interior refer to the “lower social status” of the members, who were generally tradesmen, artisans, lower civil servants, and peasants. Members of the local nobility, the urban middle class, and the clergy were present as supporters at most. In addition, it must be highlighted that not only men but in many cases women also took part in the operation of the MVAs. One way of doing so was to form a sister association. The wives of veterans formed associations in Pozsony in 1882, in Budapest in 1885, and in Pécs in 1884.⁵⁰ Similarly, several associations in the capital had their own women’s section, such as the First Budapest MVA, the Archduke Joseph MVA, and the Prince Coburg MVA.⁵¹

Finally, it is worth offering a few words on the goals of the associations. The MVAs established in the territory of the Kingdom of Hungary were first and foremost relief organizations, like their Austrian counterparts. Their members received financial and medical aid in case of illness, and their widows and orphans received funeral and financial assistance in case of death. Most of the associations, however, had two main additional goals: to cultivate the esprit de

48 Rohkrämer, *Militarismus der kleinen Leute*, 34–36.

49 Cole, *Military Culture*, 131–36.

50 MNL OL K148 1897.IV.D.174.

51 MNL OL K150 1888.VII.8.74534, K148 1900.IV.D.192.

corps and loyalty to the king and fatherland. In many cases, these goals were met by self-education and efforts to foster civic virtues and respect for the law and legal authorities. The associations, however, were not allowed to engage in political and national activities. Otherwise, they could be banned, at least for the nationalities. In 1885, for example, in Szakolca (today Skalica, Slovakia), in a predominantly Slovak-speaking town on the Moravian border, the local authorities prevented the formation of a MVA because of its national character (the mayor, János Sebesi, was a Hungarian lawyer). After the attempts to reestablish the MVA in the neighboring settlement Holics (today Holič, Slovakia), the association was banned by the Ministry of Interior. According to the Deputy Lord Lieutenant's report, the main organizers were known nationalist agitators, and therefore the association would have served primarily nationalist and unpatriotic purposes.⁵² This austerity, however, affected only the nationalities, while, as we shall see, the authorities welcomed indications of attachment to the Hungarian national idea in the associations.

Military Veterans' Associations in Vas County

In the second part of this study, I examine the functioning of MVAs, drawing on the example of Vas County in western Hungary. I primarily seek answers to the following questions: how was loyalty to the king and the fatherland expressed? What did the concept of fatherland mean according to veterans? How did the MVAs relate to the national idea, and how were they received by the local society? I first examine the Vas County MVA, founded in Szombathely, the county seat, and then the associations formed in the villages of the German-speaking western part of the county. In doing so, I primarily use the local newspapers and the official reports, because the associations themselves did not have any archives or at least no such archives have survived.

The Vas County MVA

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Szombathely was a dynamically developing medium-sized town, an episcopal seat, and an important commercial, financial, and transport hub in the western Transdanubian region with significant industry and a military garrison. It was one of the fastest growing settlements in

52 MNL. OL K150 1885.VII.8.27780.

the country. Its population was only 7,500 in 1869, but by 1910, it has risen to 31,000. 83 percent of the inhabitants were Catholic, 10 percent were Jewish, and the rest were Protestant. Although at the beginning of the nineteenth century Szombathely was a town with a mixed German-speaking and Hungarian-speaking population, by the 1880s, 90 percent of the population identified as native Hungarian speakers.⁵³

In November 1883, at the initiative of Károly Luxander, the police commissioner of Szombathely began organizing the Vas County MVA. Although his original intention was to start an association as a branch of the Sopron MVA, the MVA was eventually established as an independent organization on June 22, 1884.⁵⁴ At the moment of its formation, it had 87 ordinary members, a number which rose to 120 by 1892.⁵⁵ At that time, it had 22 additional founding members and 170 patrons. By 1899, the number of ordinary members fell to 95, but by 1909, it had risen again to 124.⁵⁶

In principle, the association covered the whole county, but its members came mainly from Szombathely. Unfortunately, the sources reveal little about the social background of its members, because no lists of the members have survived (assuming there were such lists). Based on the linguistic composition of the town, it can be assumed that the majority of the members were Hungarian-speaking. The statutes and invitations of the association were only published in Hungarian. It was mixed in terms of religion, with both Christians (probably predominantly Catholic) and Jews. This is indicated by the fact that the most significant internal crisis of the association was not national but religious. In 1899, several Catholic members tried to deprive the Jews of their voting rights in the general assembly. They failed in this attempt, however, and the religious peace was restored.⁵⁷

At the time of the formation of the association, the majority of its members were probably war veterans, most of them rank and file soldiers. According to a document written in 1894, the association had among its members veterans of the war of 1848–1849, the Italian war of 1859, the Schleswig-Holstein war of 1864, the Prussian and Italian wars of 1866, the Dalmatian campaign of 1869,

53 Melega, *A modern város születése*, 33–65.

54 Anonymous, “Aggharczosok,” *Vas megyei Közlöny*, November 18, 1883, 3.

55 MNL VaML IV. 405. b. Census of Associations, 1892, Szombathely r. t. város, 47.

56 Anonymous, “Izgágalom az aggharczos egyletben,” *Vasvármegye*, February 9, 1889, 6–8; Anonymous, “Az aggharcos-egylet jubileuma,” *Vasvármegye*, August 17, 1909, 2.

57 Anonymous, “Izgágalom az aggharczos egyletben,” *Vasvármegye*, February 9, 1899, 6–8.

and the occupation of Bosnia in 1878.⁵⁸ This is well illustrated by the leadership of the association too. The first president was József Gottmann, while the vice-presidents were Károly Luxander and József Heimler. Gottmann was educated in a military institute, had fought under Radetzky in Italy in 1848–49, and had taken part in the battle of Solferino in 1859.⁵⁹ Subsequently, he was dismissed as a hussar captain. József Heimler, who later became president of the association, enlisted in the army in 1854, fought at Magenta and Solferino and, in 1866, at Königgrätz.⁶⁰ Finally, Károly Luxander enrolled in 1864 and fought in the Danish campaign and against the Prussians in 1866.⁶¹

The statutes of the association set out its goals as follows:

- a) To cultivate and propagate the military spirit, to maintain patriotic sentiment and loyalty to the king, and to maintain respect for the law and the lawful supreme authority, the esprit de corps outside the military service.
- b) To provide financial support for the members of the association, to contribute to the medical expenses of sick members and the funeral expenses of deceased members, and possibly to provide financial assistance to the widows and orphans of the members left behind.⁶²

The means of achieving these goals were also laid down in the statutes. Regarding the first point, which is now relevant to my discussion, they were as follows: the association had its own holiday calendar, which included dynastic and patriotic holidays as well as religious holidays including the king's birthday and name day (August 18 and October 4), the queen's name day (November 19), Saint Stephen's Day (August 20), the procession on Holy Saturday, and the procession on Corpus Christi. On these days, the association marched as a body in uniform with side weapons and under the flag. In addition, on Good Friday at least two members were sent with swords and in uniform to guard the Tomb of Christ.⁶³

Nurturing a sense of loyalty to the king was a priority for the association. This is shown by the fact that the first public march-out after its formation was timed for August 18, the birthday of Franz Joseph. The event was celebrated

58 MNL OL K148 1894. IV.D.2776.

59 Anonymous, "Gottmann József," *Torma*, June 25, 1885, 2.

60 Anonymous, "Heimler József," *Vasvármegye*, April 29, 1914, 3–4.

61 MNL VaML V. 173. b. 9/1909.

62 MNL VaML IV. 440. 29. box. 229, 1884. 2. §.

63 MNL VaML IV. 440. 29. box. 229, 1884. 43 and 45 §§, 1888. 35 §.

with particular pomp. The town was roused in the morning with the firing of howitzers and an alarm. People then marched to music to the festive mass in the cathedral, and after the official program, they held a popular festival.⁶⁴ Franz Joseph's birthday and name day were official holidays in Hungary. In Szombathely, all churches celebrated festive masses, but the central celebration always took place in the cathedral, where the town and county authorities, the military garrison, schools, and many associations appeared. Beginning in 1884, the Vas County MVA also joined, and it became an essential part of all dynastic celebrations. The association commemorated both the royal and the imperial anniversaries, which were not official holidays in Hungary. From the point of view of Hungarian law, Franz Joseph ruled in Hungary as king and not as emperor (as Austria and Hungary were, according to Hungarian law, two independent states). On the occasion of Franz Joseph's 70th birthday in 1900, President József Heimler had a portrait of the royal family painted. This offers a clear indication of the central role of the emperor for the association. Indeed, this portrait was treasured by the association even in the interwar period.⁶⁵

The other most important holiday for the association was August 20, the day of Saint Stephen, the first Hungarian king. This was one of the most important public holidays in Hungary, although it was not official due its Catholic character. With some exceptions, the Vas County MVA held its summer feast, the income from which increased the association's fund, on this day every year. These were usually folk festivals following the mass, with a band, tombola, various outdoor games, and often fireworks in the evening.⁶⁶ Thus, the association's main patriotic holiday was linked to the Hungarian state, and the concept of fatherland meant the Kingdom of Hungary, not the unified Austrian Empire. In addition, the association had a strong local identity which was linked to the county. This is also shown by the flag itself. It had a picture of the Virgin Mary with the inscription "Virgin Mary, Patroness of Hungary" on one side and angels holding the holy crown and the coat of arms of Hungary and Vas County with battle badges at their feet and the inscription "Vas County Veterans' Association" on the other. In addition to the county coat of arms, the colors of the flag (blue and white, the colors of the county) also expressed the attachment to the local community.⁶⁷

64 Anonymus, "A vasmegyei hadastyán," *Vas megyei Lapok*, August 21, 1884, 3; Anonymus, "Aggharczos-egyletünk," *Vas megyei Lapok*, August 24, 1884, 2.

65 Pintér, *Vas megyei Aggharcos Egyesület*, 12 and 18; MNL VaML IV. 401. b. 772/1900.

66 See the reports of the local press (primarily *Vas megyei Lapok* and *Vasvármegye* on August 20).

67 Pintér, *Vas megyei Aggharcos Egyesület*, 7.

A much more complex picture emerges, however, regarding the military culture nurtured by the association. On one hand, it fostered an attachment to the heroic past of the Imperial and Royal Army, in which its members had served and in which many of them had fought. This is perhaps best illustrated by the Millennium celebrations of 1896, to which the veterans contributed with a special commemorative day. On June 24, the veterans in Vas County of the battles of Solferino and Custoza held a meeting in Szombathely organized by the MVA. On the anniversary day, nearly 200 veterans of the battles gathered with a cockade with the inscription “1859–1866” on their chest. The deputy lord lieutenant and the town mayor and also the delegation of the military garrison appeared in the meeting, while the band of the Imperial and Royal 48th Infantry Regiment was provided by Corps Commander Archduke Friedrich at his own expense. The meeting focused on loyalty to the king and fatherland, a sense of duty, and the memory of fallen comrades. In his speech, József Heimler said,

As the Hungarian nation as a whole celebrates the millennium of its state-existence with a light that shines throughout the world, this time we, warriors fighting in wars, those who with the full devotion of our military oath and duty once risked our lives and blood in bloody battles for the fatherland and the throne, today, on the anniversary of the ever-memorable decisive and bloody battles of Solferino and Custoza, we have every right to enjoy a double celebration.⁶⁸

It was also decided at the feast that the meeting would be repeated every five years, although we only know of one occasion (in 1901) when it took place again.⁶⁹

In addition to the Habsburg Army's heroic past, however, the veterans also nurtured the legacy of the Hungarian War of Independence of 1848–49. In 1886, for example, several Hungarian army veterans from Szombathely were invited to the flag consecration ceremony. Furthermore, Mária Lebstück, who was famous for fighting as a woman in the War of Independence and even received the rank of lieutenant, was also present. Lebstück arrived with the veterans from Pest, and she was personally welcomed at the banquet after the flag consecration, setting as an example for all those present. From the second half of the 1890s onwards, the veterans also took part in many events and ceremonies connected to 1848, such as the celebrations of the fiftieth anniversary of the death of

68 Anonymous, “Hadviselt harcosok emlékünnepele,” *Vasvármegye*, June 25, 1896, 3.

69 Anonymous, “Harczosok mulatsága,” *Vasvármegye*, June 26, 1901, 5.

Sándor Petőfi, the hundredth anniversary of the birth of Lajos Kossuth, and the unveiling of the only statue of Kossuth in Körmend in 1907, the only statue of Kossuth in the county. They also frequently took part in the requiem masses on October 6, the day on which 13 Hungarian Honvéd generals were executed in 1849. Finally, in 1895 they joined the Vas County Honvéd Army Association as supporters, and between 1894 and 1899, the two associations had a common president, István Farkas.⁷⁰

This duality is far from unique. For example, in several associations in Budapest, former veterans of the Hungarian Honvéd army were also enrolled, and in other places the president of the association was a former Honvéd army soldier. For example, Jenő Heinrich, the president of the Baldácsy Third Budapest MVA, fought throughout the War of Independence, after which he was imprisoned and then conscripted into the Habsburg Army.⁷¹ But the association protector himself, Antal Baldácsy, was also an officer of the Honvéd army. Heinrich's case, moreover, highlights the fact that many members of MVAs in Hungary had served both in the Honvéd army in 1848–49 and in the Imperial and Royal Army. After the War of Independence, 25–30 percent of the former Honvéd army soldiers were conscripted, so it was not uncommon for MVAs formed in the 1870s and 1880s to have members with a dual military past.

Based on the above, the MVAs which formed in the towns of Hungary were not left untouched by Hungarian nationalism, especially from the 1890s onwards. In the 1870s and 1880s, for example, the use of traditional imperial symbols was still quite common. On the holidays of the associations, “Gott erhalte” (the imperial anthem) was played, and even in 1888, the associations in Budapest voted down the proposal to replace this anthem with the Hungarian anthem.⁷² In Sopron and in Fiume, the veterans originally wanted to display the two-headed eagle on the association flags, a plan which was only abandoned because the Ministry of Interior banned it.⁷³

It is hardly a coincidence that in the 1880s Hungarian nationalists often blamed MVAs for “Germanisation.” *Pesti Napló*, for example (a periodical on Pest), reported on the founding and first march held by the veterans in Szombathely,

70 Pinter, *Vas megyei Aggbarcos Egyesület*, 15–19.

71 MNL OL K148 1879.IV.D.5026; K150 1885.VII.8.15001, Anonymous, “Egy érdemdús hadastyán,” *Hadastyánok Lapja*, 1882, 1.

72 Anonymous, “Germanizáló veteránok,” *Pesti Hírlap*, August 18, 1888, 7.

73 Hungary, which defined itself as an independent state, treated the double headed eagle as the coat-of-arms of a foreign state. In addition, in the eyes of Hungarian nationalists, it was a hated symbol as the sign of the unified Habsburg Empire MNL OL K150 1883.VII.8.47835.; K150 1882.VII.8.32180.

characterizing it as a “pointless waste of time and money” as well as a “hotbed of Germanisation,” and as such, a “particularly unhealthy movement.”⁷⁴ But the same accusation was also brought against the associations in Budapest for using the imperial anthem and German-language invitations to their events.⁷⁵ These criticisms, however, interestingly did not find support locally. On the contrary, in Szombathely, for example, the newspaper of the Independence Party rejected the accusations made by *Pesti Napló*, highlighting the humanitarian purpose and Hungarian character of the association.⁷⁶

Although imperial symbols were a constant target of criticism by Hungarian nationalists, they did not really cause much of a clash in everyday life until the turn of the century. In Szombathely, for example, the imperial anthem was used at all official dynastic celebrations until the 1890s, and it generated no particular scandal when it was played before thousands of people at the veterans' flag consecration ceremony in 1886, just a few months after the so-called Janski scandal, which had provoked great uproar among nationalists.⁷⁷

In the 1890s, however, the use of symbols began to change in parallel with the strengthening of Hungarian nationalism in general. The imperial anthem was replaced with the Hungarian anthem, in Sopron the German language of command was replaced with Hungarian, and the memory of 1848–49 became more and more important.⁷⁸ In 1905, for example, the Mohács MVA held its own ceremony to commemorate the revolution which began on March 15, 1848.⁷⁹ In the same year, the placing of a wreath on the local Kossuth statue was a key part of the flag consecration ceremony for the veterans of the Bosnian occupation campaign in 1878 in Hódmezővásárhely.⁸⁰ The imperial anthem was now a source of conflict in Szombathely too, and at the commemoration meeting of the veterans of Solferino and Custoza in 1901, deputy lord lieutenant Ede Reiszig did not to deliver his speech, because the conductor of the military

74 Anonymous, “Szombathelyről,” *Pesti Napló*, August 21, 1884, 2.

75 Anonymous, “Germanizáló veteránok,” *Pesti Hírlap*, August 18, 1888, 7.

76 Anonymous, “Az agharczos egyletről,” *Dunántúl*, August 21, 1884, 2.

77 On May 21, 1886, under the leadership of General Ludwig Janski, officers of the Common Army put a wreath on the tomb of General Heinrich Hentzi in Budapest. Hentzi, who was the Austrian commander of Buda in 1849, during the Hungarian War of Independence died a heroic death during the siege of the castle. In his speech, Janski presented Hentzi as an example for his officers. The ceremony and Janski's speech led to a domestic political scandal and huge demonstrations in Hungary. Hajdu, *Tisztikar és középosztály*, 90–94.

78 Anonymous, “Honvédek és hadastyánok,” *Soproni Napló*, February 16, 1909, 2.

79 Anonymous, “A mohács-kerületi I. katonai hadastyán egyesület,” *Mohács*, March 19, 1905, 4.

80 Anonymous, “A boszniai harcosok zászlóavatása,” *Hódmezővásárhely*, September 12, 1905, 3.

band insisted on playing “Gott erhalte” when the name of Franz Joseph was mentioned.⁸¹

The relationship with the former soldiers in the Honvéd army and the change in the use of symbols suggest that Hungarian nationalism had an impact on the urban MVAs, at least where Hungarian veterans played a decisive role in their operations. However, it had a specific content corresponding with local peculiarities and the veterans’ military past. Based on the example of Szombathely, the apparent contradiction between the Habsburg army and the 1848–49 tradition did not pose an insoluble dilemma for the veterans. For them, both were examples of military duty and a patriotic act through which they expressed their loyalty to the king. Fatherland in this sense meant the independent Kingdom of Hungary, but as the part of the Dual Monarchy under the rule of the Habsburgs. This is why Custozza and Solferino were presented as a symbol of loyalty to the Hungarian fatherland. For these veterans, the two were not easily separable. For example, József Heimler himself, who led the association from 1899 until his death in 1914, was a committed 1867 liberal. As a wealthy merchant (as the representative of Grazer Puntigam in Szombathely he managed the company’s interests in Hungary, Croatia, and Bosnia), he was a staunch supporter of the Liberal Party and, later, of the Fejérváry government and then István Tisza.⁸² It should also be pointed out, however, that the supranational patriotic ethos of the army and the idea of the unified empire was also far from the veterans’ philosophy, as it had no tradition in Hungary.

The appearance of national symbols met with a completely different reception in Hungary than in Austria. In Ljubljana, for example, the replacement of the German language of command with Slovenian led to the dissolution of the Carniolan Military Veterans Corps, while in Hungary the local authorities welcomed these processes.⁸³ The examples above, however, are largely from Hungarian-speaking or mixed-population towns, where the assimilation of the Germans was the most significant during the Dualist era. It is worth noting that this issue requires further research. In Szombathely, for example, there was no German-speaking local elite, while the local peculiarities significantly influenced these processes. In towns with strong German elites and a strong sense of local identity (e.g., Temesvár, Pozsony, and the towns in the Saxon territories

81 Anonymus, “Harczosok mulatsága,” *Vasvármegye*, June 26, 1901, 5.

82 Anonymus, “Heimler József,” *Vasvármegye*, April 29, 1914, 3–4.

83 Stergar, “Ljubljana Military Veterans,” 49.

of Transylvania), the members of the MVAs probably behaved completely differently.⁸⁴

Returning to the example of Szombathely, the question of how the veterans and their activities were received by local society also arises. In this respect, there is also a kind of dichotomy. On the one hand, the formation of MVAs was supported by the leadership of the town and the county, as well as by a number of local landowners. Prince Ödön Batthyány-Strattmann was the association's main protector, and the vice-protector was Bishop Kornél Hidassy. The formation also had the support of Crown Prince Ludwig of Bavaria,⁸⁵ Lord Lieutenant Kálmán Radó, Deputy Lord Lieutenant Ede Reiszig, Mayor Károly Varasdy, several financial institutions of Szombathely, and the landowners of the county.⁸⁶

The great interest shown by the town is well illustrated by the flag consecration ceremony held on August 22, 1886. The flag itself was donated by two surviving members of the former Tailors' Guild, which was then modified. The highlight of the two-day celebration was the consecration ceremony in the town's main square in the presence of nearly 8,000 people. According to press reports, there were even people on the rooftops. The flag-mother was Mrs. Ödön Batthyány-Strattmann, but the town and county leadership also attended, as did many members of the county elite and several local associations. In addition, many MVAs arrived from different towns of the country. Finally, Colonel Rohonczy, the commander of the 5th Hussar Regiment stationed in the county, and a delegation of the 76th Infantry Regiment of Sopron (Szombathely was part of the supplementary area of this regiment) paid their respects on the day of the celebration. The latter regiment also provided the music. The festive mass was celebrated by István Horváth, the parish priest of Szombathely. After the ceremony, the association gave a banquet for 180 people, and the evening entertainment was held in three places in the town.⁸⁷

84 At the beginning of 1903, for example, the ball invitation of Brassó MVA, which portrayed the coat of arms of the old Principality of Transylvania and the black and yellow imperial flag, caused a minor scandal in the press. The case went to court, and the association was fined. Anonymous, "A tüntető meghívók büntetése," *Magyar polgár*, March 14, 1909, 6; On the identity of the Saxons and their relationship to Hungarian nationalism, see Varga, *The Monumental Nation*, 103–25, and on the case of Pozony: 47–73.

85 The heir to the Bavarian throne, as the owner of huge estates in Sárvár, was a frequent guest of the county and an active participant in its social life.

86 Pintér, *A Vas megyei Aggbarcos Egylet*, 6.

87 *Ibid.*, 8–10; Anonymous, "Zászló szentelés," *Vas megyei Lapok*, August 26, 1886, 1–2.

In other words, the association received considerable support from the county, the town, and the diocese, not only from official circles, but also from many individuals, as indicated by the high number of patron members described earlier. The local press also welcomed the formation of the association and appreciated its aims, irrespective of political affiliation. “The parade, which was watched with warm interest by the people of our town, was in every respect a success [...] the most successful of all this year’s summer festivities.”⁸⁸ The latter comment was echoed several times in the local press in the following years. The August 20 festivities of the veterans were basically folk festivals, and they drew crowds in the hundreds and sometimes thousands. These festivities were special highlights of the town’s social life. As one local newspaper noted in 1889, “I don’t know how, but this association was born under a lucky star in Szombathely. It succeeds in everything though everyone smiles at it.”⁸⁹

The second sentence of the report, however, also points out that the association’s reputation was far from self-evident. According to a local satirical magazine the “old children” were regularly smiled at with a touch of scorn in the town as they marched with their “toys” at every celebration and holiday.⁹⁰ This seems to have continued in later years, and even on the occasion of the 25th anniversary celebrations of the association in 1909, a local paper noted that the association was “often quite undeservedly the center of jokes and mocking banter.”⁹¹ Interestingly, however, these jokes never appeared in the local press.

The habit or practice of mocking veterans was not peculiar to Szombathely. There are several examples of this in many other places, especially in the 1870s and 1880s, and where there was a Hungarian or a significant Hungarian-speaking population. For example, in a report to the Ministry of Interior, the lord lieutenant of Sopron County wrote about the Sopron MVA founded in 1877. He contended that, “this association receives no support or sympathy from the locals,” and “the citizens also show some aversion to this association, which is rather military in character.”⁹² Similar voices were heard from Mohács in southern Hungary⁹³ and Arad at the other end of the country, where the mayor wrote that “the members waste their time on parades which have become

88 Anonymus, “Aggharczos-egyletünk,” *Vas megyei Lapok*, August 24, 1884 2.

89 Anonymus, “Aggharczos egyesület nyári mulatsága,” *Dunántúl*, August 25, 1889, 5.

90 Anonymus, “A veteránok,” *Torma*, October 17, 1886, 5.

91 Anonymus, “Az aggharcosegyesület jubileuma,” *Vasvármegye*, July 13, 1909, 2.

92 MNL OL K148 1880.IV.D.4642.

93 Rayman, “A mohácsi hadastyán egyesület,” 136.

comical in the eyes of the public.”⁹⁴ The associations in Budapest also carried the stigma of the “serious old comedians.”⁹⁵

The events of the association, however, remained popular until the turn of the century, when a rather spectacular break can be observed in the activity of the Vas County MVA. Its public appearances were pushed back. The most obvious sign of this was the end of the summer festivities on August 20 at the turn of the century. In 1913, a local newspaper described the association as follows:

The Szombathely Veterans' Association does not boast a loud publicity of charity; the whole humble and valuable individuality of the brewery commissioner József Heimler, the president of the veterans, is expressed in the work of the association: to talk little and do as much as possible. To hold as few parades as possible and to wipe away as many tears as possible, to alleviate misery, to make easier the helpless old days of old soldiers.⁹⁶

The stagnation of the Vas County MVA can probably be explained primarily by the fact that, while the number of war veterans decreased, only a few of those who had done their military service in peacetime joined the association. The association could not adapt to the changing social and political environment of the turn of the century. One of the local papers summed up the situation as follows in 1909: “A somewhat outdated but venerable institution of the old parade world is celebrating on August 15 in Szombathely. [...] The urban development of Szombathely, the progress of the electric tram has made the veterans' institution a little outdated. Today, the veterans are no more than a crowd for the town or the church celebrations.”⁹⁷

Veterans' Associations in German-speaking Areas of Vas County

In Vas County, in addition to the MVA in Szombathely, 16 other veterans' associations were formed during the Dualist era, all of them in the western areas inhabited by German-speaking “Hientzen.” Of these, 13 were purely German-speaking, two were mixed German and Hungarian, and one was German and

94 MNL OL K148 1885.IV.D.436.

95 Anonymous, “Germanizáló veteránok,” *Pesti Hírlap*, August 18, 1888, 8.

96 Anonymous, “Aggharcosok és a bajor király,” *Vasvármegye*, December 14, 1913, 5.

97 Anonymous, “Az aggharcosegylet jubileuma,” *Vasvármegye*, July 13, 1909, 2.

Croatian.⁹⁸ The associations recruited veterans not only from their own villages, which had populations of 1,000 or 2,000 people, but also from the surrounding settlements. Their main aims, as in the case of all MVAs, were to provide relief, foster an esprit de corps and a sense of loyalty to the king and the fatherland, and uphold the rule of law and good morals. There are no precise records of their memberships, but they were probably made up of peasants and artisans who had served as rank and file soldiers in the army. The leadership and organization were often taken over by the local elite. For example, the president of the Vaskomját (today Kemetten, Austria) MVA was Ármin Schocklits, a local landowner, and the vice president was Ferenc Hulfeld, the local teacher. The president and organizer of the Királyfalva MVA was General Woche, also a local landowner, while the first president of the Némethidegkut (today Deutsch Kaltenbrunn, Austria) MVA was Mihály Rathner, the local priest.⁹⁹

The local Hungarian nobility also played an important role in the organization and in providing financial and moral support for the associations. Of the three associations mentioned above, the patron of the Királyfalva MVA was Prince Alfred von Montenuovo and the patron of the Vaskomját MVA was Count Gyula Erdődy. The Némethidegkut MVA had most prestigious protector, however. It won the support of Crown Prince Rudolf, while the flag-mother position was taken by Archduchess Stefania. Of course, neither the crown prince nor the archduchess appeared in person at the flag consecration ceremony. Archduchess Stefania was replaced by a local landowner, the widow of Count Herman Zichy.¹⁰⁰

It is not surprising that, while they did not always enjoy high esteem in the towns, MVAs were highly prestigious in the rural area. In 1876, for example, the lord lieutenant wrote the following about the Királyfalva MVA in his report: “In rural areas, however, it has a good reputation and is well respected, because it can boast members who are among the most distinguished members of the countryside and belong to the intelligentsia.”¹⁰¹ The rural association had no membership problems and, although it was presumably war veterans who first organized themselves in the 1870s and 1880s, the steady increase in the number of associations suggests that, later, they were able to recruit peacetime veterans who had done general military service. Thus, three associations were

98 MNL VaML IV. 405. b. Census of Associations.

99 Anonymus, “A vas-komjátai aggharczos egyesület zászlószentelése,” *Vasvármegye*, June 22, 1902, 5; MNL OL K148 1880.IV.D.665; MNL VaML IV.401.b. 214/1876.

100 Ibid.

101 MNL VaML IV.401.b. 214/1876.

formed in the 1870s, four in 1880s and nine more after the turn of the century. The associations also played an active role in local society. They were not only regular participants in certain public and church holidays but also contributed to the village life by holding their own events. More than one association even organized readings and popular lectures for its members.¹⁰²

In the case of the German-speaking MVAs, which were formed near the Austrian border, one might well assume that they were more influenced by the Austrian state-idea. But this was far from the case. Even an examination of their statutes suggests that, instead of common imperial consciousness, loyalty to the Kingdom of Hungary came to the fore. This is well illustrated by the fact that twelve associations had Saint Stephen with the Hungarian coat of arms and the Holy Crown on their flags, one (the aforementioned Vaskomját MVA) had King Matthias, and one had only the coat of arms and the crown. In addition, the Némethidegkut MVA, also mentioned above, had a portrait of Archduke Charles on its flag. Finally, many associations emphasized their Hungarian character in their choice of name and described themselves as “Hungarian military veterans’ associations.”¹⁰³

The holiday calendar of the associations was also adapted to the above. All associations marched in uniform under the flag at the celebrations on Franz Joseph’s birthday, on Saint Stephen’s Day, and at all “church and patriotic” celebrations, to which they were invited by the organizers. Saint Stephen’s prominence was further enhanced by the fact that most of the associations also chose a patron saint, and in every such case, they chose the first Hungarian king.

Saint Stephen, as the founder of the Hungarian state, symbolized the Kingdom of Hungary, to which the loyalty of the veterans was primarily directed. This was also reinforced by the local church and noble elite, who played an important role in the organization and support of the associations and who were predominantly Hungarian. Their support was not without any ulterior motives, as they tried to direct the population towards the Hungarian national idea through associations with great prestige in the countryside. At the flag consecration ceremony of the Vaskomját MVA, for example, in his speech, deacon József Pulay noted the following Hungarian heroes as examples of valor for the veterans: János Hunyady, Tamás Erdődy, ban of Croatia (who was obviously included in the speech because of the presence of Gyula Erdődy),

102 MNL VaML IV.401.b. 802/1902, 300/1905

103 For the statutes, see MNL OL K150 1874. III. 4. 13640; 1875. III. 4. 776; 1886. VII. 8. 464; 1886. VII. 8. 465; 1889. VII. 8. 22689; MNL VaML IV. 440.

Mátyás Hunyadi, and the heroes of the War of Independence of 1848–49. After Pulay's speech, Gyula Erdődy exhorted those present to show "loyalty and love for His Majesty, the most noble and righteous monarch." The association also paid tribute to the king on the occasion of the consecration of the flag.¹⁰⁴

The activities of the German-speaking MVAs were also positively assessed by the county administration. In his report on the Némethidegkut MVA, the lord lieutenant wrote,

The behavior of its members is not only honorable, but also shows loyal devotion to the reigning king and the Hungarian fatherland, which, with its beautiful character, has a good effect everywhere, but especially on the borders of the country, towards our Styrian neighbors and raises the self-esteem and character of the nation.¹⁰⁵

The authorities also welcomed the formation of the associations, because, as the report on the Vasdobra (today Neuhaus am Klausenbach, Austria) MVA shows, the phenomenon that many veterans joined the neighboring Styrian association had gradually disappeared. This was seen as a positive development, even if close links with the Styrians were maintained and they were mutually present at each other's celebrations. For example, four Styrian associations were represented at the flag consecration ceremony of the Vaskomját MVA, and several foreign associations sent their representatives to the flag consecration ceremony of the Nagyfalva MVA in 1911.¹⁰⁶

In other words, the German-speaking associations, in addition to fostering the military spirit and esprit de corps, primarily considered it their task to pledge and nurture loyalty to the king and the Kingdom of Hungary. However strongly the Hungarian political circles may have wanted to push nationalism and Magyarization, these sentiments and ideologies were distant from the rural German-speaking population. Loyalty to king and country did not mean nationalism. Even at the turn of the century, the pre-modern so-called "Hungarus" identity, which had its roots in the Middle Ages but became dominant only in the early modern period, was still predominant among the German minority, and the degree of national mobilization (whether German or Hungarian) remained low. The essence of the Hungarus identity was loyalty to the Kingdom of Hungary without linguistic, religious, or cultural differences,

104 Anonymous, "A vas-komjádi aggharczos egyesület zászlószentelése," *Vasvármegye*, June 22, 1902, 5; MNL VaML IV.401.b. 511/1902

105 MNL OL K148. 1880. IV.D. 665.

106 Anonymous, "Aggharcos-parádé a nagyfalvai úton," *Vasvármegye*, September 5, 1911, 5.

mixed with strong local identity. The German minority groups in Hungary had no common national identity, and they identified themselves according to their place of residence, culture, and religion.¹⁰⁷

Conclusion

In Hungary in the Dualist era, there was nothing analogous to the veterans' movements found in Austria or Germany. Although the number of associations grew steadily before World War I, these associations spread only locally. The MVAs were formed above all in a German-speaking environment (mainly in western Transdunabia), even if they appeared sporadically among Slovaks and Croats in western Hungary and among Hungarians in the larger towns.

The lack of a veterans' movement is perhaps most easily explained by the lack of a national army and the supranational ideology of the Habsburg Army. This is confirmed by the fact that the 1848–49 Honvéd army veterans' associations were able to spread throughout the country in a short space of time. In 1867, the former veterans of the Hungarian War of Independence established their associations throughout the country on a territorial basis. As a result, within a year, Honvéd army veterans' associations were established in every county and several towns, with a total of 50,000 members, and a central organization was even created.¹⁰⁸

Attachment to national identity, however, would be an overly simplistic explanation. For example, the number of members in the case of the Honvéd army associations is somewhat deceptive: the associations themselves were largely formed by former officers in the seats of the counties, but membership was not entirely voluntary. It was prescribed by the administrative authorities on central orders, and even the Honvéd army veterans had to prove their identity. It is also surprising that the Royal Hungarian Honvéd Army established in 1868 was not able to influence the Hungarian-speaking population in this respect. Finally, the ideology of the army would not provide an explanation for similar attitudes among the nationalities. It is interesting, for example, that MVAs did not appear among the Serb or Croat population of the former military frontier.

The explanations (of which a sense of national identity is only one) are more complex. First, one must consider the political and economic situation

107 Baumgartner, "Der nationale Differenzierungsprozess."

108 Farkas, "Régi honvédek," 1019–23.

of Hungary. Hungary had always occupied a special status within the Habsburg Monarchy, and military organization was no exception. Until the second half of the nineteenth century, Hungary was less integrated into the Habsburg fiscal-military state, and thus there was less of a military tradition on which to build.¹⁰⁹

Financial considerations were an equally important factor. Since MVAs were primarily relief associations, their establishment and maintenance required significant financial sacrifices from the membership. Even to join a MVA required a considerable investment, as uniforms and side arms had to be purchased. Thus, the establishment of MVAs depended heavily on the financial strength and standard of living of the population, which was generally lower in Hungary than in Austria. Furthermore, there were also huge regional differences within Hungary. In rural areas in particular, the population invested primarily in fire-fighting associations and less often in economic or other cultural associations (such as reading or singing clubs), or in the creation of a broader relief association.¹¹⁰

In addition to the above, the lack of a widespread veterans' movement suggests that there was simply no need to create such organizations, and this in turn points to the limits of the impact of general conscription on the wider society. On one hand, the militarization of society is a phenomenon of modernization, but even at the outbreak of World War I, nearly two-thirds of the country's population was still traditional agrarian with a very low level of literacy in many places. The lack of MVAs indicates at least in part (and is explained by) the low degree of social militarization of the population. On the other hand, in the case of the Hungarian urban bourgeoisie and middle class, national reasons undoubtedly played a role. Though the officer corps and the army itself were highly prestigious and the spread of pre-military training among the Hungarian urban middle class suggests the importance of military values at the turn of the century, the supranational ideology of the army and the memory of the war of independence did inhibit the formation of MVAs among the national middle class.¹¹¹ The mixed, often mocking reception of the associations formed in the larger towns also indicates the lower level of prestige enjoyed by veterans.

Even if one cannot speak about a general veterans' movement in Hungary, the study of the MVAs that were formed nonetheless yields some interesting insights. One of these is that the Habsburg Army could have played a role in

109 Hochedlinger, *The Habsburg Monarchy*.

110 For the case of Baranya County, see Márfi, *Baranya vármegye egyesületei*.

111 Hajdu, *Tisztikar és középosztály*, 227–54; Tangl, "Katonás nevelés és a militiarmus."

strengthening loyalty to the Habsburg House in this part of the Monarchy, but only in the Hungarian context. For historical reasons, there was no breeding ground for the idea of unified empire in Hungary, even among the German minority.

Given the small number of MVAs in Hungary, the state did not play a role in their spread and operation, but the local Hungarian elites supported them in some cases. The example of the MVAs in the German-speaking rural areas of Vas County reveals that, where the MVAs enjoyed a high level of prestige, the Hungarian elites tried to put them at the service of Magyarization. This met with only limited success, however. The identity of Hientzen was more dominated by the pre-modern Hungarus-idea, and even the Vas County MVA in Szombathely (and other towns) had a very special interpretation of the national consciousness. Not only was the use of imperial symbols common among veterans even in the late 1880s, but the heroic past of the Habsburg Army and the idea of the Hungarian nation were compatible for them, as both symbolized loyalty and duty to the king and the Hungarian fatherland. It was at the turn of the century that the imperial symbols began to be replaced by Hungarian ones. This also shows that the Hungarian national idea could have distinct meanings even in Hungarian-speaking populations, meanings which in some cases were very different from what was nationalists expected. Finally, it is noteworthy that these contradictions did not cause any conflict on the local level either, and the Vas County MVA was not exposed to nationalist critics from the Hungarian-speaking population of Szombathely. On the contrary. Even though it did not enjoy a high level of prestige, its humanitarian patriotic goals were recognized and its events were popular among the town's population.

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