

MÁRTON FORGÁCS

## Austro-Hungarian Prisoners of War during World War I in the Territory of Present-day Uzbekistan – the Estate of Ferenc Palkovics (1892–1919)

During World War I, approximately 2.1 million Austro-Hungarian soldiers were taken prisoner by the Russian army. 1.4–1.5 million, primarily Slavs, Romanians and Italians, who were considered more reliable, were taken to camps in European Russia, most of the Austrians and Hungarians were brought to regions further away from the front line: to Siberia (about 300 000–500 000), and Central Asia (40 000–50 000).<sup>1</sup> The sources related to POWs in the latter area are – based on current knowledge – even rarer than would result from the lower number. Books published during the decades after the war, like the Hungarian *Hadifogoly magyarok története*<sup>2</sup> (“History of Hungarian POWs”) or the Austrian *In Feindeshand*<sup>3</sup> (“In Enemy Hands”) deal with the Central Asian region relatively in detail, but in modern specialist literature (Georg Wurzer,<sup>4</sup> Alon Rachamimov,<sup>5</sup> Reinhard Nachtigal), it is only marginally mentioned.

The territories of present-day Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan were conquered by the Russian Empire gradually from the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. At first the nomadic Kazakhs came under Russian rule up to the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Emirate of Bukhara and the Khanate of Khiva became protectorates in 1868 and 1873, in 1876 the Khanate of Kokand was annexed. The nomadic Turkmens were defeated in 1881 at Göktepe and

<sup>1</sup> Reinhard NACHTIGAL: *Rußland und seine österreichisch-ungarischen Kriegsgefangenen (1914–1918)*, Verlag Bernhard Albert Greiner, Remshalden, 2003, 80–83. The number of the POWs is based only on estimates, varying from 1.6 million to 2.5 million. Nachtigal suggests accepting the data of Swedish nurse Elsa Brändström (1888–1948), who mentions 2 050 000 rank-and-file and 54 146 officers: Elsa BRÄNDSTRÖM: *Unter Kriegsgefangenen in Russland und Sibirien 1914–1920*. Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft für Politik und Geschichte, Berlin, 1922, 8. The total number of POWs in Turkestan at the beginning of the war is estimated at 200 000, but gradually decreased to 50 000 in 1917. Interestingly, a large number of Slavs were also brought into the Tashkent camp, but received much better treatment than other nationals, which led to several conflicts. BRÄNDSTRÖM: 49.

<sup>2</sup> Benedek BAJA – Imre LUKINICH – Jenő PILCH – Lajos ZILAHY: *Hadifogoly magyarok története II*. Athenaeum, Budapest, 1930.

<sup>3</sup> Hans WEILAND (ed.): *In Feindeshand. Die Gefangenschaft im Weltkriege in Einzeldarstellungen*. Bundesvereinigung der Ehemaligen Österreichischen Kriegsgefangenen, Wien, 1931.

<sup>4</sup> Georg WURZER: *Die Kriegsgefangenen der Mittelmächte in Rußland im Ersten Weltkrieg*. Dissertation, Eberhard Karls Universität, Tübingen, 2000.

<sup>5</sup> Alon RACHAMIMOV: *POWs and the Great War. Captivity on the Eastern Front*. Berg, Oxford–New York, 2002.

finally in 1884 Merv was occupied. The conquered territory was reorganized into the Governorate-General of the Steppes (central and eastern parts of present-day Kazakhstan, including Omsk) and Turkestan, divided into the oblasts Transcaspia (capital: Ashgabat), Sir-Darya (Tashkent), Samarkand (Samarkand), Fergana (Skobelev<sup>6</sup>) and Semirechye (Verny<sup>7</sup>). The Governor-General also exercised power over the two vassal states of Bukhara and Khiva. The ruling military officers barely had any connection with the indigenous population, and used the land primarily for the excessive cultivation of cotton instead of grain. Also, a large number of Russian settlers arrived to the region, including Cossacks – several historians draw parallels to western colonisation. On the other hand, railway lines were built, the constant wars in the region ended, and local intellectuals came into contact with modern European culture. This played a major role in the birth of the reformist *Jadid*-movement, in which several leaders of the later struggles for independence had their roots.<sup>8</sup>

POW camps were established all over Russian Central Asia, both in the Kazakh steppes and in the ancient cities or their surroundings of the more urbanized southern area. Similarly to other parts of the Russian Empire, the circumstances of the prisoners varied from camp to camp, and much depended on the commandant's attitude. In general, the hygienic conditions were unfavourable; the Russian Empire was overwhelmed with the care of such a large number of POWs, so the mortality rate in Russian camps was the highest during World War I, estimated between 9–10%, 14–15%,<sup>9</sup> or 20%.<sup>10</sup> Also, there was a significant difference between the situation of the officers and the rank-and-file. Russian officers often behaved comradely towards captured officers. They received payment, and were in many cases allowed to leave the camps and discover the exotic surroundings. To avoid boredom, they created libraries, theatre groups, orchestras and organized sport events. Much harder was the fate of the rank-and-file, who were forced to toil in mines, construction works or in the fields under extreme weather conditions. Their accommodations were rudimentary, typhus, cholera and,

<sup>6</sup> Present-day Fergana. Until 1924, the city bore the name of Russian General Dmitriyevich Skobelev (1843–1882).

<sup>7</sup> Present-day Almaty.

<sup>8</sup> Hélène CARRÈRE D'ENCAUSSE: "Organizing and Colonizing the Conquered Territories." In: *Central Asia. 120 Years of Russian Rule*. Duke University Press, Durham and London, 1989, 160–161, Baymirza HAYIT: *Turkestan im XX. Jahrhundert*. Leske, Darmstadt, 1956 (=Forschungen zur neuen Geschichte der Völker Osteuropas und Asiens. Band I.), 22–27, Svat SOUCEK: *A History of Inner Asia*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000, 195–208, Rudolf A. MARK: *Krieg an fernen Fronten. Die Deutschen in Zentralasien und am Hindukusch 1914–1924*. Ferdinand Schöningh, Paderborn, 2013, 14–16.

<sup>9</sup> Georg WURZER: "Die Erfahrung der Extreme. Kriegsgefangene in Rußland 1914–1918." In: Jochen Oltmer (ed.): *Kriegsgefangene im Europa des Ersten Weltkrieges*. Ferdinand Schöningh, Paderborn, 2006, 108.

<sup>10</sup> MARK: 68.

especially in Central Asia, malaria epidemics swept the camps, causing several tens of thousands of deaths.<sup>11</sup>

In addition, the military administration of Turkestan, as well as the activity of the German expeditions<sup>12</sup> made it difficult for the Red Cross to help the POWs in the region. Hungarian nurse Katalin Mihalóty<sup>13</sup> and Danish Captain Frits Cramer (1869-1952) visited POW camps in Central Asia between 4 December 1915 and 26 January 1916. Based on their reports, the numbers of Hungarian POWs in the largest camps in the territory of present-day Uzbekistan were as follows:<sup>14</sup>

CAMP	OFFICERS	DOCTORS	RANK-AND-FILE
Tashkent	627	37	7019
Samarkand I.	—	—	1289
Samarkand II.	183	3	3300
Bukhara	46	1	720 <sup>15</sup>
Kokand I.	2	5	1500
Kokand II.	55	—	—
Andijan	4	1	546
Skobelev	10	15	1155
Kattakurgan	52	92	210

Camps were also established in Zolotaya Orda, Namangan, Jizzakh and Khiva. Katalin Mihalóty herself fell ill with typhus after visiting the infamous Troitsky camp at Tashkent. Although she recovered, Cramer had to continue the travel alone.<sup>16</sup> Turkestan was visited in the autumn of 1916 by German nurse Countess Mathilde von Horn (1875–1943), and later by Erika von Passow who disappeared in the summer of 1918 during the Russian Civil War.<sup>17</sup>

As the rank-and-file were forced to work hard and their financial resources were limited, most diaries, picture postcards and POW postcards were made by officers, who had the chance and time to write down their experiences, impres-

<sup>11</sup> WURZER: 105–116, MARK: 70–92.

<sup>12</sup> The German Empire attempted to trigger revolts in India, Persia and Afghanistan against Russia and Great Britain, and the POWs in Central Asia should have played an important role in the plans. But the expeditions, led by Lieutenant Oskar Ritter von Niedermayer (1885–1948), Second Lieutenant Werner Otto von Hentig (1886–1984), Indian Prince Mahendra Pratap (1886–1979) and Wilhelm Wassmuss (1880–1931) were insufficiently prepared and were unable to achieve their goals. MARK: 97–126.

<sup>13</sup> Her name also occurs as *Mihalótyiné*, in German *Käthe von Mihalóty*.

<sup>14</sup> BAJA – LUKINICH – PILCH – ZILAHY: 128–131.

<sup>15</sup> The report mentions that about 2400 POWs were working outside the camp on the construction of the Bukhara–TERMEZ RAILROAD LINE. BAJA – LUKINICH – PILCH – ZILAHY: 130.

<sup>16</sup> Käthe v. MIHALÓTY: „Einer Reise durch Kriegsgefangenenlager in Rußland und Turkestan.” In: Weiland: 255–258.

<sup>17</sup> NACHTIGAL: 141.

sions and thoughts. A notable example is the estate of Ferenc Palkovics, which is preserved in the Collection of Manuscripts in the Hungarian Military History Museum.<sup>18</sup> It consists of 75 picture postcards, 43 POW postcards, 9 field postcards, 3 letters, 2 telegrams and 1 POW money receipt.

Ferenc Palkovics was born as the son of Ferenc Palkovics the Elder and Anna Klein on 18 March 1892 in Besztercebánya.<sup>19</sup> His younger brother, Elemér, was born on 17 February 1893.<sup>20</sup> When World War I broke out, Ferenc served as second lieutenant in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Field Company of the Imperial and Royal 39<sup>th</sup> (Debrecen) Infantry Regiment. He wrote his first field postcard on 4 November 1914 on the way to the front, still in a good mood, like many other soldiers at the beginning of the war.<sup>21</sup> But after only a short time, on 28 December 1914, he was taken prisoner with a severe injury caused by the Russians at Tylawa,<sup>22</sup> after the Austro-Hungarian troops were encircled following a failed attack.<sup>23</sup> On 10 January 1915, he sent a picture postcard<sup>24</sup> from Vorozhba,<sup>25</sup> and informed his mother, that he would be brought to Tashkent. On 23 March, a telegram arrived at Besztercebánya: "I am healthy please answer. Palkovics Ferenc Prisoner of War Namangan Turkestan."<sup>26</sup> The next station of his captivity was Jizzakh, from where he wrote his next postcard on 30 June.<sup>27</sup> After more than a half year, in early January 1916, we find him in Samarkand, and in the autumn in Skobelev, where, according to our knowledge, he spent at least two more years. A preserved letter, written on 13 October 1917, gives an insight into this camp: by that time, the POWs had already established a library with around 1000 books and a music chapel. He mentions 550 officers in the camp, calls the accommodation circumstances "quite good", and complains only that there are very few trees.<sup>28</sup>

The 133 documents of the estate can be examined from several aspects. Nine were written in 1914, 12 in 1915, 72 in 1916, 38 in 1917, 1 in 1918, and 1 in 1919.

<sup>18</sup> The estate was partially published in Hungarian: Márton FORGÁCS: "Közép-Ázsia egzotikus világa egy első világháborús Magyar hadifogoly képeslapjain." In: Szilvia Závodi (ed.): *A Hadtörténeti Múzeum Értesítője 15*, Budapest, Hadtörténeti Múzeum, 2015. 257–296; FORGÁCS: "Válogatás Palkovics Ferenc közép-ázsiai vonatkozású első világháborús hadifogoly-képeslapjaiból." In: Gergely Pál Sallay – Szilvia Závodi (ed.): *A Hadtörténeti Múzeum Értesítője 19*, Budapest, Hadtörténeti Múzeum, 2019. 283–306.

<sup>19</sup> Now Banská Bystrica, Slovakia. <https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:KZYR-TX6> (accessed on 4 December 2020.)

<sup>20</sup> <https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:KZYR-RKR> (accessed on 4 December 2020.)

<sup>21</sup> Catalogue number of the postcard: HTM KE 71.365.1/KE

<sup>22</sup> Now in Southeast Poland, near the border to Slovakia.

<sup>23</sup> Győző LÉPES – Artur MÁTÉFY: *A cs. és kir. Bárány Hötendorfi Konrád Ferenc tábornagy debreceni 39. gyalogezred világháborús története*. Debrecen, 1939, 98. Ferenc Palkovics informed his family about his capture in a letter written the following day (HTM KE 72.313.1/KE).

<sup>24</sup> HTM KE 71.284.1/Em

<sup>25</sup> Now in Northeast Ukraine.

<sup>26</sup> HTM KE 71.916.1/KE

<sup>27</sup> HTM KE 71.368.1/Em

<sup>28</sup> HTM KE 71.918.1/KE

Seventy-three of the picture postcards show Central Asian themes, 59 of them have inscriptions including city names: Samarkand (30 cards), Tashkent and surroundings (11), Kokand (5), Andijan (4), Old Bukhara (3), Turkistan<sup>29</sup> (3), Skobelev (1), Namangan (1), Old Margilan (1). We have to assume that many of the postcards have been lost, otherwise it would be hard to explain, why Ferenc sent only one card showing Skobelev, where he was in captivity for several years.

The picture postcards were all printed with the photolithographic technique, 9 are coloured, the remaining black and white. The inscriptions are in Russian, occasionally with translations in German or French. The publishers are: A. Kirsner (А. Кирснер), Znanie (Знание), Eckel & Kallach, Moscow (Эккель и Калах), B. A. Schneider, Odessa (Б. А. Шнайдер), S. A. Gordon (С. А. Гордон), I. A. Bek-Nazarov, Tashkent (И. А. Бекъ-Назаров), A. N. Mishina (А. Н. Мишина).

The most common theme of the postcards is the famous Registan square in Samarkand, which is still one of the city's most popular sights. Several postcards show the Ulugh Beg, Sher-Dor and Tilya-Kori Madrasahs, the Chorsu Bazaar, alleys in the old town with the stores of artisans, or watermelon sellers in the square. The fame of the local melon is recorded in an article in the newspaper *Az Ujság* in 1925: a group of former POWs arrived by train in Hungary, and one of them told his father at the station that he brought two pounds of melon seeds from Turkestan – the only gain of ten years of hardship, hidden through thousands of kilometres from customs and inspections.<sup>30</sup> The remains of Timur Lenk's monumental Bibi-Khanym Mosque, build between 1399–1404 and severely damaged in an earthquake in 1897, also appear several times, as well as his tomb Gur-e Amir and the impressive necropolis Shah-i-Zinda, which includes mausoleums constructed from the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

It is unknown how much time Palkovics spent in Samarkand. The fact he was there at all is reflected by a POW postcard he sent on 12 January 1916 from Jiz-zakh.<sup>31</sup> Between the lines written in black pen, he hid additional information with invisible ink, which still can partially be read: "Currently ... I am in Samarkand, perhaps I will ... if I will have enough money. The natives here are 'Sarts',<sup>32</sup> Mohammedans, a folk of animal breeders and merchants..." The POWs developed

<sup>29</sup> Founded originally under the name Yasi, the city is famous for the Mausoleum of the Sufi Khoja Ahmad Yasawi (1093-1166) with the "holy cauldron" inside, which is pictured in the postcards. Today, Turkistan is located in the territory of Kazakhstan. [http://www.natcom.unesco.kz/turkestan/e10\\_mausoleum.htm](http://www.natcom.unesco.kz/turkestan/e10_mausoleum.htm) (accessed on 4 December 2020).

<sup>30</sup> Sándor LESTYÁN: "Oroszországból hazaérkezett hadifoglyok között, akik tíz év óta először látják hozzátartozóikat." *Az Ujság*, XXII, 90, 1925. 22 April, 3.

<sup>31</sup> HTM KE 71.373.1/Em

<sup>32</sup> The meaning of the term *Sart* went through several changes during the centuries, and cannot be equated with one single ethnic or linguistic group. At the beginning of the 20th century, it was used primarily for settled, Turkic-speaking inhabitants, but sometimes also included the Persian Tajiks. SOUCEK: 32–33, Richard H. ROWLAND: "Central Asia II. Demography." In: *Encyclopædia Iranica*, V/2, 161–164, available online at: <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/central-asia-ii> (accessed on 6 December 2020).

several methods to outwit the censorship. Negative information about their circumstances was often hidden into the names of fictional persons: “My friend Emerich Melegítsed has written to me.”<sup>33</sup> (“Melegítsed” is the imperative for “warm up” in Hungarian – a message to the family, that he needed warm clothing.)

The next group of picture postcards are from Tashkent. In these, only one famous building of the city is featured, the Kukeldash Madrasah, or as the inscription says: “main mosque in the old town”.<sup>34</sup> Ferenc visited the town at least once in the spring or summer of 1916 together with 14 POW officers, and noted: “Very interesting city.”<sup>35</sup> He received there a so-called “Pasteur-treatment”, which successfully healed a suppuration on his hand.<sup>36</sup> The city hospital in Tashkent, considering the circumstances, was well equipped and had during pandemics a mortality rate of 20% – instead of 55% in the Troitsky “death camp” near the town, which was described by survivors as one of the most terrible camps in Russia.<sup>37</sup> The other picture postcards show scenes of everyday life: craftsmen making spades and sieves, women leaning on carpets, or a boy playing with a dog. The inscriptions sometimes use the term “Туземный” (*Tusemnyi*), meaning “native” in Russian. Generally, the use of the names of the various ethnic groups by the Russians was nowhere near consistent. To avoid confusion with the Cossacks,<sup>38</sup> the Kazakhs were often termed “Kyrgyz”, and the Kyrgyz were marked with more than a dozen terms, like “кара киргизы” (Kara Kyrgyz), “Алат киргизы” (Alat Kyrgyz), “киргиз-калмыки” (Kyrgyz-Kalmyk), “буруты” (Burut).<sup>39</sup> But it also occurred that the term “Kyrgyz” marked the real Kyrgyz: a picture postcard<sup>40</sup> shows a group of men and women, sitting in front of a yurt in the mountains near Kokand, which is far away from Kazakh territories. The inscription calls them Kyrgyz (“Иривѣтъ изъ Коканда. Типы и жилище Киргизъ”), and it seems plausible that in this case the term was used correctly.

<sup>33</sup> HTM KE 71.373.1/Em

<sup>34</sup> HTM KE 71.315.1/Em. German inscription: “Hauptmoschee in der Altstadt”, Russian: „Главная мечеть съ полета въ старомъ городѣ“. The madrasah bears the name of the vizier of Abdullah Khan II (reign: 1583–1598).

<sup>35</sup> “Sehr interessante Stadt.” HTM KE 71.325.1/Em

<sup>36</sup> HTM KE 71.326.1/Em. The term “Pasteur-treatment” covers an injection against rabies developed by Louis Pasteur (1822–1895).

<sup>37</sup> Franz FORMANEK: “Die Gesundheitsverhältnisse der Gefangenen in Turkestan.” In: Weiland: 144.

<sup>38</sup> The similarity of the two names is no coincidence: they have the same Turkic root, meaning “free man”.

<sup>39</sup> Doolotbek SAPARALIEV: Этническое название Кыргызов в исторических источниках России (XVII-XIX вв.) 2003. [https://www.academia.edu/204640/ЭТНИЧЕСКОЕ\\_НАЗВАНИЕ\\_КЫРГЫЗОВ\\_В\\_ИСТОРИЧЕСКИХ\\_ИСТОЧНИКАХ\\_РОССИИ\\_XVII-XIX\\_ВВ.](https://www.academia.edu/204640/ЭТНИЧЕСКОЕ_НАЗВАНИЕ_КЫРГЫЗОВ_В_ИСТОРИЧЕСКИХ_ИСТОЧНИКАХ_РОССИИ_XVII-XIX_ВВ.) (accessed on 31 May 2019).

<sup>40</sup> HTM KE 71.329.1/Em





Some of the picture postcards from the estate: Samarkand, Kokand and Skobelev

The back of one of the postcards sent by Ferenc Palkovics



Another interesting postcard<sup>41</sup> shows native gold miners at the Chirchik River near Tashkent, who are watched by a man sitting on a stone, wearing European-style clothing. Although it seems at first, that he is wearing a “pith helmet”, which was used by western explorers and colonialists in the Tropics and was rather uncommon in Russia,<sup>42</sup> it is more likely a simple sun hat; we can assume that he is an employee of a foreign gold mining company. Further motifs in the postcards are amongst other: a *hauz*, which is a stone pool providing water supply in Old-Bukhara, horseshoeing and clay oven production in Kokand, a flour bazaar in Namangan, the traditional big-wheeled carts of the region (*araba*), camels in the steppes near Samarkand, caravans on the bank of the Chirchik River.

Ferenc Palkovics wrote in several postcards Hungarian or German translations of the inscriptions or even short explanations, which indicates that he was interested in his exotic surroundings. For example, in the postcard with the inscription “Ученики Сарты”, showing traditionally dressed native men sitting in a room, he wrote: “Samarkand. Savant Sarts. (Scholars).”<sup>43</sup> (In this case, he was not right – the Russian term “Ученик” means “pupil”.) The relationship between Hungarian POWs and the mostly Turkish natives (the exception were the Persian Tajiks) might be an interesting aspect for future research. The movement of Turanism, which was born in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, also had supporters in Hungary, and experienced an upswing due to the work of famous traveller and scholar Ármin Vámbéry (1832–1913). The idea of a close relationship of Hungarians with ethnic groups of Central Asia was discussed mainly among scholars, but was not unknown to the wider population either, and possibly influenced the behaviour of POWs in Central Asia. It is worth noting, that in January 1917 Palkovics asks his family to inquire after “English colonial conditions” – although it is not entirely clear what he meant by this.<sup>44</sup>

“Except English no activity,”<sup>45</sup> Palkovics complains in Skobelev in September 1916. The cards he sent from this camp well illustrate, how several POW officers spent their time. He was playing soccer, learning French and English, and asked his family to send him books: “‘Cyrano de Bergerac’ and ‘L’Aiglon’ by Rostand some stage plays by Franz Molnár<sup>46</sup> and 4 Shakespeare.”<sup>47</sup> He described the weather conditions as very capricious: for example, on 16 January 1916 it was 32 °C and three days later it was snowing again; in May he noted temperatures over 45–50°C „and sometimes it is suddenly cool.”<sup>48</sup> Another serious problem in the

<sup>41</sup> HTM KE 71.312.1/Em

<sup>42</sup> For more details see Peter SUCIU: *The Russian Colonial Pattern Sun Helmet*. <http://www.military-sunhelmets.com/2014/the-russian-colonial-pattern-sun-helmet> (accessed on 5 January 2021).

<sup>43</sup> In Hungarian: “Számámarkand. Tanult szartok. (Tudós.)” HTM KE 71.336.1/Em

<sup>44</sup> In German: “Eta könnte sich beim Mann von Martha über Englische Kolonialverhältnisse erkundigen.” HTM KE 71.382.1/Em

<sup>45</sup> “Ausser Englisch keine Beschäftigung.”

<sup>46</sup> Hungarian writer Ferenc Molnár (1878–1952)

<sup>47</sup> HTM KE 71.377.1/Em

<sup>48</sup> HTM KE 71.295.1/Em, HTM KE 71.316.1/Em.





Ferenc Palkovics (on the right) with his roommates

region was the lack of water; after arriving in Skobelew, he noted as a pleasant surprise: "Here healthy climate and good water."<sup>49</sup>

In mid-May 1917, he fell ill with Malaria and spent two months in hospital, but got well again. However, he asked Elemér not to tell their mother about his illness.<sup>50</sup> In September, he sent home some photographs that show him sitting at a table and reading a book, together with two of his roommates drinking tea, or playing at the courtyard with a dog. The last preserved POW postcard of the estate is dated 3 November 1917.

Until recently, we have had no information about the fate of Ferenc Palkovics. The only trace was a letter he wrote on 13 February 1919, from a place that could not be identified until now,<sup>51</sup> and the addressee, "Demeter" was also unknown.<sup>52</sup> Palkovics wrote that it had taken him a long time to send signs of life from this hidden settlement and that he planned to come over to Kokand in 3 or 4 weeks; he had a lot of work, and was sometimes working until midnight. Based on this last document, it seemed possible that Ferenc Palkovics either stayed voluntarily in Turkestan or that he disappeared in the turmoil of the Russian Civil War (1917-1922). After the Bolsheviks came to power in October 1917, the POWs regained their freedom, but this also often meant that they did not receive provisions any

<sup>49</sup> „Hier gesundes Klima und gutes Wasser." HTM KE 71.341.1/Em

<sup>50</sup> HTM KE 71.396.1/Em

<sup>51</sup> The handwritten name reads "Kobezo", "Kolezo" or "Kolczo". A possible solution could be the village Bokonbayevo (in present-day Kyrgyzstan), which was formerly called "Koltsovka"; but it is quite far from Kokand.

<sup>52</sup> HTM KE 71.919.1/KE

more. Several former POWs were fighting in the Red Army as well as on the side of the independence movements of the natives – some of them out of internationalist conviction, others saw no other way to survive or were forced. On the other hand, some started a new life in Turkestan and founded families. In 1924, the “Hungarian Worker’s Circle” was formed in Tashkent, and in the letter of an unknown sender, there is the following to read: “... In Kokand, there still are Hungarians. Do not think that they have forgotten Hungarian. Moreover, we taught the Uzbeks there Hungarian. Recently, an Uzbek butcher was here, who already speaks perfect Hungarian. Moreover, one can say he speaks better than we do. But in fact in all parts of Turkestan, we can find Hungarians everywhere.”<sup>53</sup>

Not long ago, a relative of Ferenc Palkovics contacted me after he had discovered my earlier studies while doing genealogy research. He kindly shared with me amongst other things the information that his grandmother had told him, that Ferenc Palkovics died from typhus in Turkestan. A handwritten list of deceased persons of the family, made by Elemér Palkovics, mentions in connection with Ferenc the date 19 March 1919 – however, it is not clear if that is the day of his death or only the date the last postcard was received. Some personal documents had also remained in the family’s possession and one of the postcards contains the previously unknown names of the two roommates shown in the photograph, Captain Petermann<sup>54</sup> and Second Lieutenant Landa.<sup>55</sup>

The estate of Ferenc Palkovics provides an insight into the life of POW officers in Turkestan. Further research and collection of the available sources will allow us to get a more complex picture of the situation of the POWs in this area. But perhaps it can already be stated, that the diverse and rich culture of Turkestan made captivity a little more bearable at least for those who had the opportunity to get in touch with it. Volunteer Lajos Kádár noted some of his experiences as follows: “The group, scattered over several kilometres, just walked on, eating bulkies,<sup>56</sup> white bread, pretzels, Kyrgyz flatbread, pies, bodag,<sup>57</sup> batter, dried fruits, bacon, sausages, roasted meat and even God knows what else, then drinking chay,<sup>58</sup> kvass, lemonade, krachedli,<sup>59</sup> milk, water etc. in huge amounts, and in addition figs, lemons, oranges, raisins, carob bread, sugar and various desserts of unknown names and tastes, of course everybody according to his taste and pouch. Meanwhile we crossed some rivers, bridges, canals and villages, met carts with big wheels, sat on camels, peeked under the feredjes of the Mohammedan women coming along, gaping at the several cars with rubber tyres, omnibuses with crosswise seats, the

<sup>53</sup> BAJA – LUKINICH – PILCH – ZILAHY: 479.

<sup>54</sup> Karl Petermann, captain in the Imperial and Royal 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment.

<sup>55</sup> Possibly Bruno Landa, second lieutenant in the Imperial and Royal 4<sup>th</sup> Sapper Battalion, or Gottlieb Landa, second lieutenant in reserve in the Imperial and Royal 10<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment.

<sup>56</sup> Bread roll.

<sup>57</sup> Unleavened flatbread, in Hungary also known as “gypsy bread”.

<sup>58</sup> Tea.

<sup>59</sup> Carbonated soft drink flavoured with fruits.

beautiful caparisoned horses of the Persians, the round Kyrgyz caps with various embroidering, the beautiful patents without heels and soles, the fezzes, turbans, belts, the men with silk slacks, so everything varied and outlandish we have seen. And we have seen a lot, more than one can note in one day.”<sup>60</sup>

### Abstract

*Specialist literature about prisoners of war during World War I in Russia only marginally deals with the Central Asian region. This paper undertakes to give an insight into the life of Austro-Hungarian POWs in the camps of present-day Uzbekistan, primarily based on the estate of Hungarian Second Lieutenant Ferenc Palkovics (1892–1919), which is preserved in the Collection of Manuscripts in the Hungarian MoD Military History Institute and Museum. Palkovics was taken prisoner by the Russians in December 1914, and spent five years in the camps of Namangan, Jizzakh, Samarkand and Skobelev. The letters and picture postcards he sent to his family are interesting in several aspects, because they not only depict the region in this period but also contain information about the everyday life of POW officers and portray a personal fate that ended tragically.*

### Keywords

Uzbekistan, Turkestan, Russia, Skobelev, Fergana, Tashkent, Samarkand, World War I, military history, POWs, postcards, Ferenc Palkovics

### Rezümé

Az első világháborús orosz hadifogságot ismertető szakirodalom csak érintőlegesen foglalkozik a közép-ázsiai térséggel. Jelen írás arra tesz kísérletet, hogy betekintést nyújtson a mai Özbegisztán területén létesített táborokban élő osztrák-magyar hadifoglyok életébe, elsősorban Palkovics Ferenc hadnagy (1892–1919) hagyatéka alapján, melyet a HM Hadtörténeti Intézet és Múzeum Kéziratos Emlékanyag-gyűjteményében őriznek. Palkovics Ferenc 1914 decemberében esett orosz fogságba, és öt évet töltött Namangán, Dzsizak, Szamarkand és Szkobelev táborában. Családjának küldött képeslapjai és levelei több szempontból is figyelemre méltóak, ugyanis nem csak a térséget ábrázolják ezen időszakban, hanem értékes adatokat is tartalmaznak a hadifogoly tisztek mindennapi életével kapcsolatban, valamint bemutatnak egy tragikus véget érő személyes sorsot.

### Kulcsszavak

Özbegisztán, Özbegisztán, Turkesztán, Oroszország, Szkobelev, Fergána, Taskent, Szamarkand, első világháború, hadtörténet, hadifoglyok, képeslapok, Palkovics Ferenc

<sup>60</sup> BAJA – LUKINICH – PILCH – ZILAHY: 239.

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