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### Food and Menu in The Frontline and in Restaurants in Homeland – What did Civilians and Soldiers Consume During the Great War?

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#### ABSTRACT

It is widely accepted that experiences become memorable when offer interactivity and involve all the senses. Still, it is challenging to provide such memorable experiences at war heritage sites or commemorative events. The aim of this short paper is to investigate how historical archive resources collecting restaurants' menus and other historical accounts could be useful to develop authentic products and services related to the Great War (1914-1918). The research shows that restaurants in Budapest (Hungary) provided rich and creative menus during wartime and tried to overcome food shortages through innovation in ingredients selection. Since „war gastronomy” is an underresearched topic, this article aims to offer an original contribution to our knowledge on the First World War.

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**Keywords:** Gastronomy; Wartime; Authenticity; Budapest; Hungary

#### Introduction

Historical reenactments and commemorations are among the tourism attractions and services that war heritage site managers and local destination management organisations (DMOs) provide to tourists and visitors interested in gaining knowledge on past events and war heritage sites (Chronis, 2005; Winter, 2015). Issues of authenticity, presented by marketers and experienced by tourists, are central in

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reenactments and commemorations (Irimiás, 2014). The authenticity of objects, landscape and narratives on-site ease visitors to better connect with the past as evidenced in the case of Gettysburg, the iconic site of the American Civil War (Chronis, 2008). During the five years of commemorations of the First World War (1914-1918) several events, conferences, workshops, exhibitions have been organised all around Europe with the aim to reinforce place identity and to diversify the destinations' tourism product (Irimiás, 2013; Franch *et al.* 2016). Some of these events were organised around the topic of food and on what soldiers consumed in the frontline and in the trenches (see the exhibition of the Imperial War Museum in London: *The Food that Fuelled the Front* or the thematic tour organised in Italy such as *Soldiers' dinner in the Sunset* promoted by the local tourguides in Veneto). However, tourists' imaginary on what soldiers ate is nurtured by limited historical knowledge and influenced by literary works and film productions that have the Great War as a central topic (Photo 1). Widened historical knowledge on soldiers' food and on menus served in restaurants in the homeland would significantly contribute to the organisation of authentic and commemorative events of the Great War. At such interactive events where tourists' all five senses are stimulated, people could experience to taste „war gastronomy” and to learn more about the everyday life in the army and in the homelands' restaurants.

**Photo 1.** Alberto Sordi, one of the protagonists in the film *Grande Guerra* [Great War], released in 1959.



Source: <http://nuovocinemalebowski.it/2015/08/06/la-grande-guerra-1959/>

This research note aims to investigate the historical sources on food in the frontline and on menus served in restaurants in the homeland. The research was carried out in the Hungarian Museum of Trade and Tourism where the menus of the top restaurants working between 1914 and 1918 in Budapest were conserved. Data gathering was concentrated in the period between April-June 2016 when during several visits to the museum archive the menus were searched for, selected and organised for scrutiny. Due to the fact that during the 100 years that passed since the outbreak of the Great War the vast majority of the restaurant menus are impossible to find because went

missing or destroyed. Only the menus of the top quality restaurants were saved during the turmoil of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This is the reason why only 30 restaurant menus (from about 1000 menu cards gathered in the archive) were selected for analysis. Food in the frontline was investigated through the analysis of secondary data published in history books, notes and research articles dealing with the topic. In the following paragraphs preliminary findings are presented.

### *Food in the frontline*

Nutrition in the army bases in the Austro-Hungarian military corps was developed in the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century adopting the Austrian traditions. Until 1881 soldiers were given only lunch, later espresso coffee and light soup for breakfast were offered to them. After 1899 soldiers were assigned vegetables with meat, noodles and coffee for dinner. The daily portion of bread was around 840 gr with other 500 gr zwieback (Süli, 2004). Officers, in addition, were offered 5 cigars and 25 cigarettes (S. Nagy and Spekál 2016). One of the typical dishes was chicken soup, potato soup, goulash soup, stew and boiled vegetables. Beef and pork was served with some rice, semolina, barely, mashed potatoes and vegetables. Beans, lentils and peas were fried on onions and bacon. Noodles, gnocchi and hominy were also included in soldiers' menus. When there was no time for cooking they had to invent something to eat, often boiled potatoes with salt and millet with milk was cooked, when meat was missing tin meat was a substitute. A central coordination of the soldiers' nutrition was completely missing, soldiers had to provide food for themselves as they could. On 26 July 1916 the newspaper *Pesti Napló* described the Austro-Hungarian soldiers' conditions in the Italian frontline. In this article it is stated that Hungarian soldiers were assigned: beef and boiled peas, tin meat and mashed potatoes, beef and cabbage, beans or peas for a week. For breakfast infantry was given boiled eggs, bacon, sausages or salami. Soldiers were allowed to consume half litre of beer twice a week and ¼ litre of wine five times a week. Espresso coffee and cold tea was also available upon request.

### *Food in the restaurants in the homeland*

In the period before the Great War the main Hungarian cities and restaurants were supplied perfectly. The situation of a rich and luxurious supply was recorded by traders and by their advertisements on newspapers and magazines as well as in the cooking books of aristocratic and bourgeois families and in restaurants menus (Saly, 2011). The first months of the war were characterised by wasteful abundance in restaurants but this brief period was shortly followed by hard times when restaurants had to face the emptiness of the stock and shortages of different types. Restaurant owners were not prepared to the new rules that assigned the portions of meat and flour and to the introduction of ticket-system to have access to basic ingredients (Fehér and Szécsi, 2015). In this view, it is particularly interesting to see what one of the best restaurants of the Hungarian capital city, the Grand Hotel Hungaria, offered to its clients. The menu of 4 July 1914, written in Hungarian and French, offered for lunch luxurious dishes for soups Potage St.Germain, Consommé pâté de Génes and tomato soup; as starters clients could choose from pork chops with Robert-tartar, goose liver with onion, veal

chops à la Parma or dished based on egg like poached eggs à la Saint Hubert, fried eggs with tomatoes or scrambled eggs. This exceptionally rich menu clearly evidences that the Grand Hotel Hungaria was one of the top restaurants in that period. Among the main dishes the menu list British beef spine à la Nizza, Irish stew or goose leg. If clients preferred fishery, besides the typical carp with paprika they could find valleye from lake Balaton à la Orleans or could choose even lobster for dinner. For gourmand clients the chef offered deer ribs with truffle.

In 1915 the Ministry of Home Affairs introduced two days a week when meat could not be sold by butchers and restaurant had to respect such a policy that modified their offerings radically. Since meat was not available in a great quantity, because of the rations, restaurants started to propose offal, such as internal organs of butchered animals, this was the reason why veal kidneys, liver, tripe, marrow, brain or heart were included in the menus. A few years later, in 1917, the Grand Hotel Hungaria managed to keep its high level as a restaurant although the ingredients were clearly more humble. The menu form 21 January 1917, written in German and in Hungarian, lists a wide range of dishes based on vegetables, beans, peas and mushrooms (just like in the soldiers' menu). Soup, a traditional Hungarian dish served at the beginning of lunch or dinner, was still in menu but only chicken soup with noodles was offered, as a main dish clients could choose for different egg-dishes, vegetables or offal. As desserts the menu listed different cakes (Hungaria, Linz or chocolate cake) and ice-creams (coffee, lemon, chocolate).

## **Conclusions**

The commemorations and events organised around the theme of the Great War are popular among tourists with different interests as much as among local residents who aim to deepen their knowledge on the past. This research note tried to contribute on the debate on how events related to war heritage could be more authentic. The research method applied by historians (archive data analysis focusing on restaurants menus from the war period) was deemed appropriate to introduce a new path on war heritage studies.

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