

Chapters from the History of the Serb Raids

by Atilla S. Delvideki

*„'Neath the twin towers, where Bechtold drank champagne last week,
Naked crowds of 'Madzaries' fruitlessly pleaded ...
All strung on a spit through their chest, as if beads,
Made to dance under the whip – a bullet at the end ...!
Unspeakable torture awaits the two thousand stuck inside,
The arms and legs of dr. Toth will soon be sawed off.
Bloodied wraiths are at work in the Kuszly house:
Women's breasts diced, a child's body carved.
They nail one to the church door – still alive;
Here they crucify, and hack, the Son of God – yet again...!’*
(Excerpt from *The Twin Towers of Bacsszenttamás* by A.S.D.)

The reader can reap rewards from a wealth of factual and documented research done for this thorough and, to-date, absent volume dealing with the shared past of Hungary and Serbia, including some events persistently ignored. The author has published several articles and other writings on this topic. He has no job appropriate to his qualifications, which has not held him back from – or perhaps freed him to – carry on relentless research for the past two decades. The result will be a vast, multi-volume compendium. The title of the planned series, spanning six centuries, is: *'Cemeteries in Flames – The Concealed Secrets and Horrors of the Carving Out of the Voivodina (1268-1868)'*, the period he deals with in his recently published first volume, *'Chapters from the History of Serb Raids,'* in which we are treated to the unvarnished reasons for, and the beginnings of, the wars, territorial claims and counter-claims between the two nations.

Alas, it was not in 1944-45 that the first attempt was made to annihilate the non-Serb population from the southern reaches of the Great Hungarian Plain, it also happened in 1848-49, as well as during the Freedom Fight of Rakoczi (1703-11), all during the two hundred year Hungarian wars (1521-1718) and even before (1514). This is even to skip over the centuries of Turkish rule. This much-suffering – and originally entirely Magyar populated – region had to undergo an aggressive population exchange and influx to reach today's 70% Serb majority of Vojvodina (pre-Trianon, in 1919, it was 33.8% Serb). The Serbs, taught and urged by their own national church to territorial conquest, began the ethnic cleansing of county-sized territories of Magyars, beginning in 1391. It was then that Nagyenyeg (Smitrovica) was levelled, at the time the most populous town of of Magyar-populated Sirmium county, along with neighbouring towns, not much smaller, which were plundered and torched: Szeremvar (Sremska Mitrovica), Szenternye (Mačvanska Mitrovica) and Nagyolaszi (Mandelos).

In Hungary, during the Turkish occupation, the ‘Turk’ spoke Serb, and it was this ‘Turk’ who exterminated over three-quarters of the Hungarian populace during the Two Hundred Years War. In the Turkish period, Serbs represented the Sultan in the heart of Europe: the ‘Turkish’ garrison was Serb, the mass of brigands specializing in killing the population were Serbs, and even the vast majority of the ‘Turkish’ functionaries and officials were Serbs. In fact, often the Pasha of Budapest, viceroy over the entire Turk-Serb conquest in Hungary, was Serb. The Turkish Empire reorganized the patriarchate of Peć (then Ipek), which was also a civil state along the lines of the Papal States. Beginning with their national assembly of 1694 in Baja, Serbs began to lay claim to the Great Hungarian Plain from its new ruling power, the German Emperor, whose armies exercised control over the entire Hungarian region, having taken over from the Sultan’s forces.

We get an entirely new interpretation in the book of the actions of Arsenije III Carnojevic, patriarch of the Serbs, and his massive Serb resettlement of 1689-90 into Hungary. Estimates vary from 30,000 to 200,000 Serbs accepted into the country, most in the 30-60,000 range.

The author marshals facts to prove that the tale of the use of ‘Serb’ or ‘Rac’ – still taught today in some universities – was the creation of the ‘Serb’ faction, who blamed everything and anything on the Magyars. [Rac was the usual Magyar name to refer to the Serbs (23.6% of the population of southern Hungary in 1848) – with no negative connotations – whereas ‘Serb’ carried negative connotation-*ed.*] The Rac who had emigrated to Hungary generally referred to themselves by that name, as if to distance themselves from the Serbian Serbs. The conjectural author of is the Magyar hater, and anti-Semite, Stratimirovic. In his manifestos of May 1848, he stated that, in his opinion, the tough problem of the ‘foreigners who took shelter’ in the once-existent Serb principality(?) ‘can only be solved by sword in brave Serbian hands that eradicates it completely.’

This ‘foreign’ and ‘eradicable’ non-Serb population then numbered 1,628,000 people (76.4%), which the supporters of Belgrade wrested, by acclamation, from Hungary at a secessionist National Assembly held on May 13, 1848 in Sr. Karlovci to be annexed to the so-called ‘Serbian Vojvodina’ (Voivodstvo Srbija).

One of the most horrific and, at the same time, humanly distressing episodes in the book deals with the population extermination carried out in Bacszenttamás (Srbobran) on July 14, 1848 with the assistance of traitorous Austrian officers working on the Magyar side. It was carried out by rebels calling themselves *srbobranac* (protectors of the Rac). 1,300 innocent Magyar women, children and unarmed farmers were tortured in the most brutal fashion

and slaughtered. However, according to the information of Istvan Zako, the heads of 1,500 Magyar and Jewish citizens were displayed on pikes around the earthen walls of the fortress of Srbobran. This does not take into account bodies flung into the surrounding rivers, swamps and wells, nor the number of Magyar girls kept alive for their bodies, only to die after long months of brutal sexual assault. The author, after careful assessment, estimates that approximately 2,000 unarmed people of the village were tortured to death, including women and children. After all, the latter's heads would not grace a pike on the fort's wall but most likely end up as food for the fishes or stray dogs.

As the opening excerpt from the poem says, limbs were sawn off, men were skinned alive, girls and young women – no longer wanted sexually – were speared through their breasts onto spits, linked together and made to dance, children were hauled up between the 100 ft. tall church towers and used for target practice. An eyewitness recounted the fate of the two elements doomed for extermination: *“Armed mobs went from street to street, as if crazed animals, hunting Magyars. Any they found on the street were killed or stabbed without pity. It is worth mentioning one instance, a certain Illés /Elias/ Szimicslás, a tanner by trade, was caught by the crazed, bloodthirsty mob, his hands tied behind him as well as blindfolded, then was led about amidst shouts of glee, - until seen by some ultra-Rac youths who stoned him half to death with bricks until finally one of the rebels, out of some pity, placed his gun in the middle of his back and shot him through, -the body was buried in the yard of the current synagogue, whose bones were found in 1888.”* The population of the surrounding area who did not support the rebels hardly fared any better: *“Entire farm families of Magyars were all killed, children included, their heads lopped off and displayed as garlands on the sides of their wagons, going into town to the festive strains of bagpipes”* – wrote the '48 Freedom Fighter soldier, and later historian, Peter Császár, born in the Vojvodina.

The Magyars of Tiszaföldvár (Bačko Gradište) were similarly slaughtered three months later by the relocated 'protectors of the Rac' and other irregular forces of Stratimirovic, after similar traitorous actions by Austria. Austrian government forces were simply ordered to withdraw from the settlement earlier by Field Marshal Bechtold, who was in collusion with the rebels. The Servians (Garasanin's mercenaries), the majority of the local Rac and the irregulars (protectors of the Rac) went around the village and amid 'brutal cruelty' – Bechtold's own words – to chase, rob, kill, burn, dismember and torture the local Magyar, Jewish and Schwabian population they surprised in their sleep, without regard for women or children – mutilating even the helpless wounded. *“The Servians ... begin to rampage in the village, sparing no one,”* wrote later Surdutski (1792–1884), the leader of the attackers, *“shouting 'Rac Glory.' Death was meted out by anyone, with whatever weapon was at hand...”* The mass violence took most of its victims from among the 'simple Magyar folks' because *‘many peasants who did not leave’* – reported to Stratimirovic an

exultant Surdutski – ‘*and were killed, their number unknown.*’ The outcome here also, according to an eyewitness Austrian soldier – who felt a ‘too great sympathy’ towards the dissidents – as printed in a letter in the ‘*Abend-Beilage zur Wiener Zeitung,*’ was that “*the Serbs, when they took this village, cut off the heads of many Magyar peasants...*”

The number of the murdered in Tiszafoldvar (Bačko Gradište) is estimated between one and two thousand; on the Serb side: nine dead. The remains of the victims were piled up in what can still be seen today: the huge Bone Mound beside the road to Obecse (Bečej) – a fact admitted by Serb historian Lazar Rakic. “*On that street of Obecse that leads towards Foldvar: according to statements by several honest persons there is an oppressive cloud of stench, especially at dawn, or on occasion when the wind blows from there, ...*” wrote of the following days the chief district magistrate, Sandor Sorok. The 30 ft. high and about 130-170 ft. wide austere Bone Mound (Kostanica) is depicted on the cover of the book. Apart from Count Kolovrat’s statement, a high ranking officer in the Austrian army, of the most crime: the pyramid of childrens’ skulls in the church of Tiszafoldvar (Bačko Gradište, often confused with the skull heaps of the butchered Magyars of Zenta (Senta), six months later), essentially both acts of brutal ethnic cleansing are treated in this work for the first time.

Half a year later, around February of 1849, the horrific events of Bacsszenttamas (Srbobran) and Tiszafoldvar (Bačko Gradište) were repeated all over southern Hungary: the irregulars of Stratimirovic received a green light to begin a thorough ethnic cleansing from the Iron Gorge on the Danube to Szabadka (Subotica) and Zenta (Senta). Depositions were taken from the survivors; a selected few extracts from that horrific record:

“The wife of Pal Tot swears that her husband’s head was beaten apart and her two daughters were raped, so much that one died, the other writhed in the blood, ...she saw Misa Koles bury 28 skulls in a ditch in the cemetery that were collected by the women.”

“Peter Fris had to chop off heads, ...he heard 3,882 persons executed and one person forced to behead his father-in-law ,...he was badly tortured, not right even today.”

“Lorincz Deutsch saw more than 300 dog-chewed heads. Josef Gulicska, with his wife and son, saw the corpses hung in the mulberry tree and the bell tower and the torture of Mihaly Nemet.”

“Janos Takacs saw the human heads at Holy Trinity, was beaten 25 times with a stick, witnessed Mrs. Takacs raped.”

“Mrs. Albert Varga attests that her daughter was raped. Janos Pap testifies that his daughter was raped before her husband. Istvan Kovacs Keczeli attests that his wife was raped in front of him. Anna Mukus testifies that she was raped, that her mother was beaten to death with an axe, that his ill, bed-bound brother was shot and killed.”

“Trezsia Lovei, wife of Janos Szel, attests that she was raped innumerable times, by Arso Celeketic and a Serb miller she knows but not his name. The wife of Matyas Pal Dani attests that she was raped.”

“Kata Teleki and her daughter attest that they saw many dead bodies by the upper cemetery which were shot, covered with straw and singed, ... also attests that a 12 year old girl was raped, who she washed from the blood, the girl knows who did it.”

“Gyorgy Szecsenyi attests that there were so many bodies on the streets to make it difficult to walk, and further avers that the local Serbs continuously murdered and robbed...”

“Simon Rosenfeld saw Jovo Pivar and another man kill Ferenc Hajduska with a pitchfork, two wagons were used to haul 500 bodies out of the town.”

These were the abysmal depths reached in the Zenta (Senta) version of the Serb raids. The extermination of the Magyars of Bacsszenttamás (Srbobran) on July 14, 1848, permitted by Philip Bechtold, soon proved to be the spark for further atrocities and disturbances over a wide area.

Our current era is, unfortunately, a shining example of the saying: “The victors write the history books!” Revision of history went to the extent that the highly acclaimed Dušan Popović (1894–1965) felt unconstrained by facts to attribute non-existent Serb exterminations to the Magyars, while Dragutin Gavrilovic (1882-1945) redrew the medieval Kingdom of Hungary along the Trianon borders of 1920. Not only the history text but the authoritative literature also does not disclose the facts to the continually misinformed and simply misled public: that in 1848, thousands of Magyars and Jews were tortured and killed; that the murdered population of Tiszaföldvár (Bačko Gradište) still lie uninterred in a huge mound; that it was not the impoverished Magyars forced into serfdom who oppressed the Serb landowners settled among them but, rather, the opposite; that Stratimirovic and followers resorted to the most base instigation and cruelty on the claimed territory against the more than 75% non-Serb population; that during the early 18th century, the Serb raids decimated the returning native population from Szeged to Veszprem and from Kecskemet to Kenderes; that millions of Magyars were exterminated or carried off into slavery by the Turkish era Serb irregulars and Serb Janissaries; that even as far back as the 14th century, entire counties were cleansed of Magyar populations by the advancing Serb onslaught, among them Nagyenyege; that even in ancient time, the Eastern Serb Church advocated, and on occasion lead, its supporters towards the idea of a ‘Greater’ nation; and so forth.

In more unsettled times – as evidenced more recently in 1944, too – there is not enough pleading or servile accommodation that will save a minority population from extermination. A few thousand (tens of thousands?) mass murderers can always be found among the ranks of every nation – without the need for revisionist history or an educational curriculum extolling a ‘glorious

Great Serbia.’ According to supporters of permanent solutions, ‘the only good Magyar is a dead Magyar,’ in much the same context as it was heard elsewhere that ‘the only good Indian...!’

Translated and edited by Peter Csermely