

“Our Beloved Martyrs. . .” Preliminaries to a History of Political Detention in Dualist Hungary*

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Overture

THE HISTORY of Austria-Hungary was inexorably entangled with that of Central and South-Eastern European nationalisms. During the long 19th century, in the decades foregoing the Great War, the leaders of the people from the Habsburg lands emerged politically and expressed themselves literarily, disseminating the new nationalist ideas by using the main media of the time: the written press. Through the compromise of 1867, the Habsburg Empire became a dual monarchy, consisting of Austria (Cisleithania) and Hungary (Transleithania), each of them a multiethnic and poly-linguistic state.¹ But the Constitution of Hungary, although recognising the existence of multiple nationalities, kept denying the multiethnic character of the country, stating that only one “political nation” inhabited the lands of the Crown of St. Stephen: the Hungarian one, consisting of the sum of all citizens, regardless their nationality.

This political sophism represented the corner stone of Hungarian policy towards nationalities, thus becoming the target of countless criticisms and press campaigns urged by the political leaders of the non-Hungarian nationalities. One of the methods through which the governments in Budapest counteracted was by bringing the authors of the most radical writings to trial, sentencing them to prison and fines paid by both the author and the newspaper or typography. The method was not new, its roots went back to the Austrian absolutism of the first half of the 19th century, but the sudden increase of the written press saw it imposed on a particularly large scale.

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A press law stated the conditions under which the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Justice could, should, and would bring to trial the authors of any written paper, article or book, whose contents were considered incompatible with or offensive towards the Hungarian political system and Hungary itself.² Under such premises, the so called “press offences” should be regarded as political matters, and those trialled and imprisoned under the stipulations of the press law can certainly be considered political convicts, since they also considered themselves as such.

Some of these convicted persons were political leaders, well-known public figures and renowned journalists, men of high education and prestige—thus members of the elite. Others were middle class intellectuals who worked as “editors in charge”—a press job which consisted in taking judicial responsibility for all the articles printed in a newspaper. In order to avoid losing their best men in political trials, the socialists, for example, named as “editors in charge” young apprentices, journeymen and workers, some of them barely literate.³ The majority of the political convicts were non-Hungarian politicians and journalists, but the Hungarian opposition also tasted this bitter medicine whenever its critics towards the government were excessive in some given matters.⁴ In the particular case of Romanian politicians and journalists, the larger part of the press trials and the majority of the convictions started in the 1880s, reaching a peak during the Memorandum years. They continued at a lower scale, though remaining a constant threat, until World War I, when the exceptional character of the times brought forth another wave of political trials, relished now with accusations of espionage.

Studying the relation between political convicts and the spaces they were contained in, we choose to use the concept of “zone,” due to its coherence and to the interdisciplinary perspectives it opens.⁵ Also, since the Romanian historiography of the subject mainly privileged a conservative approach, based on political history and on emphasizing concepts such as “national struggle” and “Hungarian oppression,” we believe that offering an alternative and a more acute interpretation would be more than welcome. Studying the political prison as a zone, imposes us to discern between various kinds of conviction facilities and imprisonment experiences, which can be classified in two main categories: those belonging to a pre-zone, and those that give shape to the main detention zone.

The pre-zone

MANY OF the political leaders and journalists brought to prison under press charges did not find themselves in this position for the first time. Usually, before entering what we might call the zone, they suffered at least another sentencing, doing time in a pre-zone. This preliminary detention experience was characterized by: an easier sentence (from a few days up to a few months), the usage of local prisons and police precincts as detention spaces, different inside rules

and, last but not least, a lesser statute than the one gained by the convicts sent to the main imprisonment facilities of Hungary.

It was, nevertheless, normal for the first sentences to be lighter. Many of those who found themselves at their first press trial were new to journalism and it was not the authorities' main goal to lock them away for good on the expense of the state, but to frighten and persuade them to pay more attention to what and how they were writing. For example, Septimiu Albini, a journalist from Sibiu, was sentenced between 1886-1894 to: 8 days,⁶ 1 month,⁷ 6 months⁸ and 3 months,⁹ before being finally convicted to 2 and a half years.¹⁰ Writer and journalist Ioan Slavici was found "not guilty" after his first trial, then sentenced to 3 days and only after that convicted to 1 year of "state prison."¹¹

Short term sentences were being carried out in city prisons or police precincts (Sibiu, Cluj-Napoca, Năsăud), allowing the prisoner closer contact with his family and friends. Sometimes the detention space offered more than reasonable conditions, as S. Albini wrote to one of his friends: "It is true, the time does pass slowly because I do live in the absolute lack of society, but besides that life here [the city prison of Cluj] is quite tolerable. I'm being quartered in a separate room, I'm being served well enough, it is very clean, I pay the outside prices, I'm only locked during the night, I can read and write as much and whatever I want, I can receive visits anytime, in the attorney's room there are many newspapers at my disposal, in a word, it is only smoking, my friends, and the walks through the city and the cafes that lack from my everyday life."¹²

Other times however, the unwholesome state of some city jailhouses was enough to induce a cultural shock. A few years later, Albini wrote to the same friend about the jailhouse in Sibiu: "It is not an easy thing to be able to concentrate on something inside here. I pity the song of the caged bird! Especially, it is not an easy thing to give thought to something in this brutal nest of robbers, rangers, all sorts of smells, backsaw creaks—under my window the art of wood sawing is being cultivated in a most dreadful manner"¹³ In the same letter, Albini rejoices on account of his strong physical constitution: his "thick paunch and back head so little loved by the damsels" proved priceless health keepers inside the insanitary jailhouse.¹⁴

The pre-zone was not always a prerequisite for entering the main zone. There were cases in which heavy sentences were being pronounced after the first trial. This was the case of Corneliu Pop Păcurariu, "editor in charge" of the daily newspaper "Tribuna" from Sibiu. Convicted to one year, he served his time in the prison of Năsăud,¹⁵ but the mixture of heavy sentence and his labile psyche ended up in affecting his sanity: after serving his time he went to Romania, then back to Hungary, never finding a place to settle down, getting sicker by the year, until finally he committed suicide.¹⁶

But usually the pre-zone did not bring on such sorrowful results. Until the 1890s, sentences were not very harsh except for a handful of cases, probably chosen as examples. The radicalization of the Romanian political movement during the

years of the Memorandum (1892-1894) caused a strong riposte from the part of Hungarian authorities. The number of press trials practically exploded and involved, like never before, elite politicians, journalists, middleclass people and peasants alike. The tide of small and medium time sentences, although strongly condemned by the nationalities, and sometimes even by the international community, carried out its point and many journalists were forced to soften their speech or face heavier convictions. When such sentences were pronounced, some of the convicts fled to Romania, where they found shelter with the help of some local politicians who were planning to use them in order to control the radicals of the national movement in Hungary and avoid, when possible, diplomatic conflicts.¹⁷ Others returned to their newspapers, paying more attention to the words they used further on.

For the majority of those who passed through it, the pre-zone proved to be a space where their nationalist radicalism extinguished quickly, tiding away their political illusions and driving them to a state of passivity, due to the feeling of helplessness against the judiciary machinery of the Hungarian state. Those who carried on with radical speeches and actions, despite the warnings, were being sentenced to heavier convictions and came in touch with the main level of the political detention zone.

The zone

UNLIKE THE pre-zone, the zone involved longer convictions, the prisoners were being held in special facilities (in the main prisons of Hungary—Szeged, Vác) and, most importantly, they gained a special status both in the eyes of their fellow Romanians and those of the Hungarian authorities. Since this special status played a key role in their relations with the detention zone, we should focus on it.

When referring to political convicts, the Romanian newspapers never forgot to use the term “martyrs.” For example, in a randomly chosen small article of 1/3 of a column (156 words) the author used the word “martyr” three times and the word “convicts” one time.¹⁸ The political detention cases usually held the first page: special correspondents were sent to witness trials, speeches delivered in court were published *in extenso* and collections were opened on behalf of the convicts and their families. The accused and their lawyers became, for various periods of time, national heroes. They were praised by the press, who followed them even behind the prison walls, publishing correspondences of visitors, interviews, and other small news regarding their life behind bars.

From this point of view, regardless of their previous status, the political convicts who entered the zone became top figures for their co-nationals. Among other gestures of good will, they received letters and telegrams of encouragement from

their compatriots and consistent gifts (food and drinks), meant to ease their long abidance in the prison, from the ones close to them. After the most notorious trial, the one of the Memorandum authors, there was even a committee formed by their wives and friends, which managed to collect an enormous quantity of such goods sent from all Eastern Hungary and Transylvania to the freshly convicted national heroes.

In their turn, the Hungarian authorities kept for a long time an honourable demeanour towards political prisoners. Writer Ioan Slavici does mention in his memoirs that, after being convicted for one year (1887), during the time before entering the prison "...since I appealed the sentence, not only have I returned home unbothered, but I was also allowed to make a trip to Bucharest with my wife, who wanted to see her family before accompanying me to Vác, where she was going to spend an entire year in a world completely alien to her."¹⁹ This attitude based on *bona fide* and on the personal honour of the convict ceased to exist a few years later, after two main characters from the Romanian national movement (E. Brote and A.C. Popovici) fled to Romania in order to escape heavy sentences.²⁰ They were followed a few years later by S. Albin, who wanted to avoid a 2 and a half years sentence.²¹ Worried by the possible increase in number of such cases—which placed the relation between convict and authorities outside the boundaries of honourableness—the Hungarians became more preoccupied to guard and keep track of the accused and the convicts.²² Since they were transported to prison only a few days or even weeks after the end of the trial and there was also a certain amount of time spent with the appealing procedures,²³ they were forbidden to travel outside their home city during this period, except in uncommon situations (i.e. burial of close relatives).

Despite these limitations, political convicts were often treated in accordance with their social position, which sometimes followed them inside the conviction zone, helped mediate all relations with the guards and the warden, and allowed them to maintain a lifestyle close to the one they had outside the prison walls. National heroes or enemies of the state, whatever the perspective, the prison episode in their lives only helped their status and their public image, consolidating their place inside the national movement, thus making them representatives of the nation and *nolens volens* official negotiation partners of the same government which held them imprisoned.

With few exceptions, the relations between political convicts and prison employees seem to have been at least amicable. It is true, the ideological distance between them was sizeable, since the employees were Hungarians and they surely disapproved of the political ideals of the ones they were guarding. But there was also a social distance which gave odds to the political convicts. Most of them were educated people, with university studies and a social position higher than the one of their guards. They were members of the elite and they did act accordingly, enforcing their status and commanding respect.

The relations established between these two categories of people can be easily identified in a letter lawyer Adolf Scsitinszky wrote his fellow convict, lawyer Ioan Rațiu, president of the Romanian National Party: “I ask you deeply, dear colleague, to kindly ask sergeant Kovács and the other prison guards to aerate my room and dust the furniture, therefore to keep everything clean, because on the 23rd I will surely come back to finish what is left of my sentence. Therewith I attach here 5 florins, asking you to give 3 florins to the barber, because it’s his rightful amount for one month, and for them he should shave me another 19 days (meaning another three weeks). I ask you to give one florin to Becsei and one to Buza, since in my bewilderment and agitation I forgot about them.”²⁴

In other words, the guards became servants of two masters. One master was the Hungarian state which was paying them to guard the enemies of the public order. The other masters were the political prisoners themselves, who tipped them with beforehand negotiated gratifications for everyday services (cleaning the room, moving furniture and belongings, bringing in dinner) or mediations (outside shopping, packages etc.). The hilarity of the situation should be emphasized: the money gathered by means of national collections in order to help the national heroes were dripping fast in the pockets of the Hungarian guards, only to ensure the convicts a lifestyle as similar as possible to the one they have enjoyed in liberty.

Along with the guards there was a second category of personnel: common law convicts with good behaviour which were assigned as servants to the political convicts. They were also tipped for their services.

The one person who could really give headaches to the political prisoners was the warden. Not only was this official an impersonator of the Hungarian nationalism, but he was also an educated man, equal at least, if not superior to the convicts through his education and social status. He was also directly responsible in front of the Ministry of the Interior for any lack of abidance to rules inside the prison. All these put his relation with the political convicts on different fundaments than the one of his subordinates and made him less indulgent, a few “crashes” between wardens and prisoners being reported in memoirs and correspondence.²⁵

These are three categories of personnel which the political convicts encountered inside the detention zone. As we have described, due to the status of the prisoners, the relations between them and the prison personnel were in the worse case polite and usually the barometer kept still on friendly. Not out of any compassion for them or for their political ideals, but because the rules and laws of the political detention zone were a reflection of the social relations from the outside world, making social status, education and of course, money, come prior to any forms of nationalistic hate or disdain. One should not imagine for example that the private talks of the guards were kind towards the political convicts’ ideas, but that did not affect the way in which they treated prisoners, in respect of their social status.

While political prisoners were doing their time, the city in which they were being held, and of course the prison, became the centre of interest for their family, friends

and even random people passing by, who felt half obliged—half proud to visit these national heroes.

The prisoners were, according to the 19th century pattern, the breadwinners of their families. Thus, when they went to prison, their families often moved in the new city of residence, bringing in children, servants and acquiring lodging apartments in the prison's proximity.²⁶ In the 1880s families were allowed to visit them daily. For example, writer I. Slavici was allowed to spend the entire day with his wife and children. At the end of the day he returned to the house that served as prison and was closed in his chamber until 6 a.m. next morning. The families of those convicted in the Memorandum trial were also allowed to visit them almost daily, and even spend time with them in their cells. Such visits also involved household activities, like having the children's haircut done by their own parents.²⁷ Wives were usually cooking and baking for the prisoners, bringing them food, cookies and other delicacies to "sweeten" their stay. Of course, the families also mediated the convicts' contacts with the outside world and with people who were not allowed to visit them.

There were nevertheless exceptions. The families did not always have the financial resources to relocate in another city (the case of V. Braniște), or remained at home to take care of the family business (G. Pop de Băsești)²⁸ In such cases, letters remained the only way to keep in touch, but correspondence was being censored and had to comply with some strict rules. One of those rules, introduced in 1895, stated that the letters should be written in a language that the prison's censor could understand (usually Hungarian or German).

Sometimes, members of the prisoners' families passed away, in which case the law stated that the convict could be set on leave for a few days, in order to attend the funeral. It was the case of N. Cristea (archpriest of Sibiu) who lost his son,²⁹ and of G. Pop de Băsești who lost his wife.³⁰

But sorrow and death were not the only outriders of the political detention zone. There were situations when love was making its way through and at least one such case is documented. It involved the daughter of I. Rațiu (president of the Romanian National Party) and Iuliu Coroianu (the latter's lieutenant). After having a beautiful love story while Coroianu was imprisoned at Szeged, they ended up getting married, with Rațiu's blessing, although Coroianu was older and recently divorced.³¹ Not everybody approved of such proceedings, one of their most virulent critics being a fellow prisoner and political leader, V. Lucaciu, a Greek-catholic priest who expressed his doubts regarding the morality of those involved in this story and who became one of their strong adversaries during the following years.³²

Despite the lack of data, we believe that this case was not singular. The status of those involved, the scandal, and the concluding marriage made it worthy of being mentioned in the memoirs, but that doesn't exclude the possibility that other similar cases existed, yet undocumented. Being a national hero and martyr surely helped one's image among the ladies, and love, whether platonic or concupiscent, must have been an undeniable presence around political detention spaces.

The same status triggered the admiration and compassion of fellow Romanians and determined them to help the prisoners by whatever means. Some of them were sending money, collected by the families and used for the everyday needs of the convicts. Others were sending products, so that food and good beverages (beer, wine) seldom lacked from the prisoners' tables.³³ It is worthy to recall the stupefaction of one of Braniște's uncles, a village priest, who visited his nephew during his imprisonment together with the Memorandum convicts. After being fed a copious meal and exquisite wines, while leaving, he publicly expressed his amazement towards the excellent conditions in which the heroes' martyrdom was taking place. This drew the other convicts' rage upon Braniște, because of the public image issues that such declarations could have inflicted.³⁴

The above presented aspects reveal the tendency of political prisoners to "domesticate" their prison space, to make it look and feel as homelike as it could. Some of them came into prison carrying furniture (chairs, worktables, mattresses, and library shelves), lots of personal effects (books, study instruments, collections of newspapers³⁵) and consistent provisions of food, drinks, and delicacies.

What did differ from the outside daily routine was their timetable. They were woken up at 6 a.m., after which they were free to do as it pleased them. Cell doors closed at 10 p.m. During the day, they used to read, write, make conversation, and enjoy open air walks.³⁶ Some of them found time for scientific research. D.P. Barcianu, for example, who was a professor of natural sciences, was performing his microscope researches on a daily basis,³⁷ while others wrote their memoirs or debated on subjects of history, linguistics, and philosophy. The only subject officially forbidden was politics, but we should not imagine that it really lacked from their conversations.

This rigorous schedule proved to be quite welcomed for some prisoners. After the nationalistic agitation and exuberance of the newspapers' editorial boards, a long stay in political detention could be perceived as a holiday. The memoirs of I. Slavici or V. Braniște clearly indicate the feeling of relief experienced inside the prison zone. Plus, the rigorous schedule had beneficial effects on their health—but this assertion cannot be made for all political prisoners, since conditions differed from prison to prison and from man to man.

Games were also present on the list of everyday "to do" things: cards, chess, and rummy. Sometimes they gambled, but only using symbolic bets (I Kreutzer).³⁸ The daily open air walk was also a highly anticipated moment, especially during summer.

A large amount of time must have been dedicated to correspondence, because along encouragement and personal letters we should assume the existence of a consistent economic correspondence, regarding various aspects of their businesses back home.

Conclusions

THE WORLD of Romanian political prisoners from Hungary is at this point a very little charted territory. Trying to ordinate it, one can observe that depending on the length of the conviction and on the place of detention, the prisoner entered a pre-zone, or a zone, both spaces completely new and unfamiliar and to which he had to adapt.

The social status of the convicts played a key role in the development of their relations within the concentration space, with its inhabitants and visitors. Just like in the case of common law convictions, the heavier the sentence was, the higher the prisoner's status grew, both among his colleagues inside and his Romanian fellow citizens outside. Epithets such as "hero" and "national martyr" were often used by the press, helping their status increase further. On the other hand, media had a tendency to quickly forget those sent in the pre-zone, with short sentences in local prisons, after a few weeks.

Inside prison, convicts usually developed good relations with the facility's employees, despite the fact that they did not share the same political ideas. Their education and money helped them accommodate quicker to the detention zone. In fact, they seemed to have tried a real domestication, by bringing inside as many outside items as they could, from furniture to food.

Except movement limitations and political rights, their life inside the detention zone was rather a prolongation of the external one, than a syncope. The fact that their families had everyday access helped keeping a sense of continuity, rather than rupture. Overall, it seems that life inside the zone was closer to the one outside than life inside the pre-zone. In the large prisons of Hungary political prisoners had more freedom and were presented with more opportunities than in city prisons, underlining the fact that the wider environment played a crucial role in the bettering of their abidance in the zone.

Of course, things were not always bright, and convicts often mentioned situations in which detention rules were very harsh. The very lack of liberty and the fact that it was political injustice that brought them behind bars were enough premises not to enjoy any positive side of their special situation, but to constantly condemn the oppressive regime they held responsible for the imprisonment. However, to perceive their detention only as a period of martyrdom would be, from a historical point of view, as faulty as presenting it in an exclusively positive light. Thus, it was far from our intentions to minimize the negative social and psychological impact that the detention zone had on these people, but as historians we felt obliged to present the other side of the story as well. We conclude by expressing our hope that in the future, the image of the "national martyrs" from Hungarian prisons will not be drawn by using a thick brush and dark colours, but by paying careful attention to both positive and negative elements that altogether gave shape to their life as political convicts.



Notes

1. For a synthetic overview of the demographic situation of Eastern Hungary in the second half of the 19th century see: Ioan Bolovan, Sorina Paula Bolovan, "From Tradition to Modernisation. The Romanian Family in Transylvania in the Modern Era (1850–1918)," *Transylvanian Review: Demographic Changes in the Time of Industrialization (1750–1918)*, XVIII, Supplement 1 (2009): 148.
2. Gelu Neamțu, *Procese politice de presă antiromânești din epoca dualismului austro-ungar 1868-1890. Alte studii de istoria presei românești* (Cluj-Napoca, 2004), 32; Dimitrie Vatamaniuc, *Ioan Slavici și lumea prin care a trecut*, vol. 1 (Bucharest, 1968), 311.
3. Valeriu Braniște, *Amintiri din închisoare. Însemnări contemporane și autobiografice*, ed. attended by Alexandru Porțeanu (Bucharest, 1972), 286.
4. *Ibid.*, 287; Alexandru Onojescu, Vlad Popovici, eds., *Correspondențe politice peste Carpați. Visarion Roman colaborator la ziarul "Românul" (1868-1870)* (Cluj-Napoca, 2011), 109.
5. The very fact that we have borrowed the terms "zone," and "pre-zone" from Arkady and Boris Strugatsky's fantasy novel *Roadside picnic* proves how the alternative interpretations of this subject stand open in so many ways in front of the researchers. What was considered yesterday pure political history it is, in fact, just a story that can be read and re-told from so many different perspectives, without altering the truth in it. A primary version of this approach was presented, without being published, at The Second International Conference "Re-Thinking the Humanities and Social Sciences," University of Zadar, Croatia, September 1–4, 2011.
6. Vatamaniuc, 319.
7. *Ibid.*, 362. See also, *Procesul de presă al lui Parteniu Cosma contra Septimiu Albini pertractat naintea Curții cu jurați din Cluș la 27 Martiu n. 1889* (Sibiu, 1889).
8. *Tribuna*, VII, 199 (1890): 795.
9. Gheorghe Iancu, "Valeriu Braniște la 'Tribuna' din Sibiu (1893)," *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie 'George Barițiu' din Cluj-Napoca*, XLIV (2005): 271-272.
10. Ilie Moise, "Un scriitor uitat, Septimiu Albini," introductory study to vol. Septimiu Albini, *Scrieri* (Sibiu, 1998), 27.
11. Vatamaniuc, 319.
12. E. Hodoș, *Scrisori cu mai multe figuri și un adios* (Sibiu, 1941), 66–67.
13. *Ibid.*, 70.
14. *Ibid.*, 72.
15. The Romanian Academy Library in Bucharest, Correspondence, S 40 (1–3, 5–6, 12)/XXXII.
16. Vlad Popovici, *Tribunismul (1884–1905)* (Cluj-Napoca, 2008), 388.
17. Lucian Boia, "Contribuții privind criza Partidului Național Român și trecerea de la passivism la activism (1893–1905)," *Studii. Revistă de istorie*, 24, 5, (1971): 964 sqq.; Șerban Polverejan, Nicolae Cordoș, eds., *Mișcarea memorandistă în documente (1885–1897)* (Cluj-Napoca, 1973), 61–72.
18. *Tribuna*, XII, 60, (1895): 1.
19. Ioan Slavici, *Închisorile mele. Scrisori adresate unui prieten din altă lume* (Bucharest, 1921), 44.
20. Braniște, 209–212.

21. The Romanian Academy Library in Bucharest, Septimiu Albini Archive, I, Mss. 6, 2.
22. Nicolae Josan, "Rubin Patiția, memorialist al mișcării memorandiste," *Apulum*, XXXVI (1999): 391.
23. I.P. P[app], *Procesul memorandumului românilor din Transilvania. Acte și date*, vol. I (Cluj, 1933), 372–386.
24. The National History Museum of Transylvania in Cluj-Napoca, Mss. M 2442, 1.
25. Gheorghe Iancu, "V. Braniște în închisoare" – work in progress. We wish to thank Senior Researcher Dr. Gh. Iancu for the amiability with which he allowed us to make reference to this work; Josan, 393.
26. Slavici, 45; Braniște, 270.
27. Braniște, 277–278.
28. *Ibid.*, 281–282.
29. Nicolae Cristea, *File de memorialistică. Jurnal* (Sibiu, 1998), 26–27.
30. Ioan Georgescu, *George Pop de Băsești. 60 de ani de lupte naționale ale românilor transilvăneni* (Oradea, 1936), 95–96.
31. Nicolae Cordoș, Gelu Neamțu, *Iuliu Coroianu în vâltoarea vremurilor 1847–1927* (Cluj-Napoca, 2006), 163.
32. L. Boia, *Eugen Brote (1850–1912)* (Bucharest, 1974), 123.
33. Braniște, 269–297 passim.
34. *Ibid.*, 278–279.
35. *Ibid.*, 269, 293–294.
36. Josan, 395.
37. Braniște, 273.
38. *Ibid.*, 287–288.

Abstract

"Our Beloved Martyrs. . ."

Preliminaries to a History of Political Detention in Dualist Hungary*

In the 19th century, major political and journalistic Romanian leaders spent many months inside Hungary's prisons, leaving consistent memoirs and correspondence on this topic. Their writings present the political detention space (the prison and its surroundings) as a particular zone, with special rules, special inhabitants and special types of interactions. Our paper intends to focus mainly on the mutual relations inside this zone, comparing the individual perception of prison space, the ways in which people organized the zone trying to "domesticate" it, relate it to their background, previous lifestyle and expectations. The impact of the prison is also worthy of attention: although each individual responded to detention in a particular way, some major categories of reactions can be identified, from negation and pathological behaviour to full acceptance and integration.

Keywords

political detention, political convicts, Hungary, 19th century, memoirs, press law, prisons

