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“THE HELL OF GALICIAN UKRAINE”: THALERHOF’S IMAGES ON THE PAGES OF THE “NASH LEMKO” NEWSPAPER

Abstract. *The purpose* of the study is to clarify the peculiarities of a diverse understanding related to the Thalerhof concentration camp issue by the representatives of the authors’ circle of the “Nash Lemko” newspaper. **The methodological basis** of the research is an interdisciplinary approach. In the article such methods and approaches as systematic, comparative and critical analysis of the source base, represented by large text arrays, have been used. The correct interpretation of various genres of the newspaper information has been made possible by the use of the content analysis method. **The scientific novelty** of the article consists in the attempt to comprehensively analyse the reception of a number of Thalerhof stories by the authors of the “Nash Lemko” newspaper. In **conclusion**, it has been noted that it was the Thalerhof events that significantly influenced the self-awareness of the Ruthenians as an ethnic group during the interwar period. Realizing this issue somewhat later than the representatives of the Muscovite camp, the Ruthenian intellectuals united around the “Nash Lemko” newspaper and began a difficult activity of deconstructing the stereotypes spread by their opponents, and thus a difficult activity of Ukrainizing the Thalerhof narrative. The activity carried out by Yulian Tarnovych, Petro Antonyshyn, Ostap Kostarevych and other employees of the newspaper was multifaceted, as it included the development of a new conceptual model, interviewing eyewitnesses of the tragedy, processing and publishing their memories, preparing polemical speeches, writing analytical studies, etc. As a result, a completely competitive historiographical image of the Thalerhof tragedy was created, which encouraged the Lemkos to remain with the Ukrainian national choice after their expulsion from their native lands and a subsequent resettlement by many diaspora centres during the post-war years. This conceptually balanced and factually based interpretative model proved to be in demand for the Ukrainian socio-humanitarian studies of the independence era, becoming an organic component of a modern academic restructure of the Thalerhof issue.

Keywords: *the “Nash Lemko” newspaper, Thalerhof concentration camp, Second Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Muscovite, reception.*

“ПЕКЛО ГАЛИЦЬКОЇ УКРАЇНИ”: ОБРАЗИ ТАЛЕРГОФА НА СТОРІНКАХ “НАШОГО ЛЕМКА”

Анотація. *Мета* дослідження полягає у з’ясуванні особливостей осмислення представниками авторського кола “Нашого лемка”, пов’язаних з темою табору Талергоф різнопланової проблематики. **Методологічне підґрунтя** роботи становить міждисциплінарний підхід. **У статті використано такі методику та підходи, як систематичний, порівняльний і критичний аналіз джерельної бази, представленої великими текстовими масивами.** Здійснити коректну інтерпретацію різножанрової газетної інформації уможливило застосування методики контент-аналізу. **Наукова новизна** статті полягає у спробі комплексного аналізу реценції дописувачами часопису “Наш лемко” низки талергофських сюжетів. **Висновки.** У підсумку відзначено, що саме талергофські події значною мірою вплинули на самосвідомість русинів як етнічної групи у міжвоєнний час. Зрозумівши це дещо пізніше від представників московфільського табору, об’єднані довкола “Нашого лемка” русинські інтелектуали розпочали складну працю з деконструкції поширюваних опонентами стереотипів, а отже, й українізації талергофського наративу. Проведена Юліаном Тарновичем, Петром Антонішиним, Остапом Костаревичем й іншими співробітниками часопису робота була багатоаспектною, адже передбачала розробку нової концептуальної моделі, опитування очевидців трагедії, опрацювання й публікацію їхніх спогадів, підготовку полемічних виступів, написання аналітичних студій тощо. У підсумку було створено цілком конкурентний історіографічний образ талергофської трагедії, що спонукав лемків після вигнання з рідних земель і подальшого розселення у повоєнні роки багатьма діаспорними осередками залишатися при українському національному виборі. Ця концептуально виважена й фактологічно узасаднена інтерпретативна модель виявилася затребуваною і для української соціогуманітаристики доби незалежності, ставши органічною складовою сучасних академічних реконструкцій теми Талергофа.

Ключові слова: *“Наш лемко”, табір Талергоф, Друга Річ Посполита, московфіли, реценція.*

Problem Statement. Among the Lemko scholars, the prevailing belief is that the processes of national self-awareness among the Ruthenians are lagging behind those of other sub-ethnic groups of the Ukrainians. This fact is reasonably explained by the peculiarities of the Lemkos’ mentality formation under the conditions of an isolated high-mountain living and sporadic contacts with the outside world. This isolated high-mountain living contributed to a long-term preservation of pre-modern social and cultural practices among the indigenous population of the Eastern Beskyds, with all its uncertainties. However, World War I destroyed the archaic Lemkos’ world, tragically pushing its actors to an increased self-reflection regarding their own identity.

This process of understanding the national “I” took place under the difficult conditions of the repressive policy of the Second Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth governments towards the national minorities and a fierce competition between the Ukrainian and Muscovite intelligentsia for the Lemkos’ civilizational choice. In this struggle, the instrumentalization of historical events and facts of the recent past became increasingly widespread. By using different interpretations of the tragic pages of the Great War, the opposing sides tried to win the Ruthenians over to their side, presenting the opponent in the most unattractive light possible. At the same time, the study of the causes, perpetrators, and consequences of the mass extrajudicial imprisonment of the Galician Ukrainians in the Thalerhof concentration camp in 1914 – 1917 became particularly emotional. And if the Muscovite perspective of this tragedy was widely popularized by interwar and diaspora publicists (Vavryk, 1966), the origins of the tradition of its interpretation from the point of view of the Ukrainian historical interest have not been studied sufficiently. Drawing attention to this problem, we reconstruct the Thalerhof component of the historical policy by the editors of the “Nash Lemko” newspaper, which was the most authoritative media platform for the Ruthenians of the Ukrainian choice.

Review of Recent Research and Publications. Given the aforementioned information on the “Nash Lemko” newspaper as a particularly popular press among pro-Ukrainian Ruthenians in interwar Poland, a number of studies have been devoted to it. Thus, recently the Lemko studies scholars have clarified the publishing specifics (Telvak, Nakonechnyi & Telvak, 2022) and editorial policy (Nakonechnyi, 2019; Nakonechnyi, 2023) of this periodical, as well as the discursive practices of its contributors in covering many of the problems that plagued the Ruthenians during the second half of the 1930s. Among other things, the media campaigns of the Lemko intellectuals against the dominance of harmful habits were analysed (Telvak & Nakonechnyi, 2021) and illiteracy (Telvak, Nakonechnyi & Telvak, 2022; Telvak, Nakonechnyi & Telvak, 2023), avalanche-like emigration among the Ukrainian highlanders from their native lands (Telvak & Nakonechnyi, 2020), repression by the Polish officials (Nakonechnyi, 2017; Nakonechnyi, 2018) etc. At the same time, in the studies on the historical policy of the publishers of the “Nash Lemko” newspaper (Nakonechnyi & Dushniy, 2024) the Thalerhof issue is obviously underestimated. That is why, this issue determines the relevance of our research. Some methodological principles of researching the interwar Ukrainian press are presented in the works of Kostiantyn Kurylyshyn, Mykola Haliv, Anna Puriy (Kurylyshyn & Haliv, 2024; Haliv, & Puriy, 2023).

The purpose of the study is to clarify the peculiarities of diverse issues understanding related to the topic of the Thalerhof concentration camp by the representatives of the authors’ circle of the “Nash Lemko” newspaper.

Research Results. First of all, let us outline the historical and cultural context of the actualization of the issue related to the Thalerhof tragedy during the interwar period. Above,

we've mentioned the widespread practice of instrumentalizing historical issues in the struggle of Muscovite and Ukrainian intellectuals for the national choice of the Lemkos at that time. At the same time, while the latter, during the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries, successfully found unifying historical arguments (a common ethnic origin, similarity of linguistic practices, the same civilizational challenges over the centuries, etc.), for a long time Muscovite people appealed only to the archaic and incomprehensible idea of "a united Rus from the Carpathians to Kamchatka," which was not widely understood by the Lemko community. As a result of this greater appeal of the Ukrainian figures' slogans, more and more Ruthenians realized themselves to be an organic part of our people.

Having considered this situation as threatening to their long-term dominance, the Muscovites began to look for more effective divisive arguments. Thus, they successfully took advantage of a spy mania inflated by the Austrian authorities at the beginning of the Great War, which was based on rumors of the mass betrayal of the interests of their state by the then Russophiles in favour of the enemy – the Russian Empire. As we know, this gave rise to preventive arrests – first among Russophile activists, and later all those Ukrainians who traditionally called themselves "Ruthenian people" and had at least some Russian-language publications at home. Ultimately, the very name "Ruthenian people" was natural, because in the vocabulary of Austrian officials, all Ukrainians from the moment the Danubian Monarchy was established were labelled with the unifying concept of "Ruthenen". Since it was among the Lemkos that the old-world ethnonym "Rusyn" existed the longest, and Muscovite publications were distributed free of charge in the villages for many decades, and therefore were in almost every settlement, and the Lemkos dominated among the residents of the Eastern Galician region deported to concentration camps (Klym Beskydskyi, 1937).

Traditionally, taking advantage of the similarity of the ethnonyms "Rusyn" and "Russian", Muscovophiles skillfully constructed a myth about a deliberate persecution of the Lemkos by the Austrian authorities because of their alleged civilizational choice – their adherence to "united Russia". At the same time, the Muscovite regime shifted responsibility for extrajudicial executions and expulsions from the native lands, from the Austrian state to conscious Ukrainians, who allegedly took revenge on their opponents, leading them to certain death. The logical simplicity of this explanatory combination proved convincing to the extremely illiterate Lemkos. Thus, the Thalerhof tragedy was turned into a dividing marker for the Transnistrians by the Muscovite – those who suffered in the concentration camp (the Lemkos) and those who organized the "Golgotha of Galician Rus" (conscious Ukrainians). The success of this manipulation was evidenced by a large-scale *veche* organized to honour the victims of Thalerhof in Lviv and the provinces in the 1920s and the first half of the 1930s.

Such stigmatization by Muscovites of their ideological opponents as the embodiment of absolute evil threatened to turn many local residents of the Eastern Beskyds away from the Ukrainian choice. Fortunately, the Ruthenian intellectuals united around the "Nash Lemko" newspaper timely realized the seriousness of the threat that hung over the Ukrainian nation. Thus, an alternative discourse to the Muscovite discourse on the Thalerhof tragedy gradually began to be constructed on the pages of the periodical. This was evidenced by the diverse articles on the newspaper's pages. In them, along with the deconstruction of the most anti-Ukrainian components of the interpretation imposed by Muscovites, the newspaper's authors began to construct a unifying image of Thalerhof for our people.

First of all, the Lemkos newspaper offered its readers a series of publications that criticized from various aspects the theses spread by Muscovites about the guilt of the Ukrainians for the

destruction of their fellow villagers, who had a different national choice and different ritual practices. To this end, the authors of the "Nash Lemko" newspaper quite rightly reached the historical roots of this problem, namely, they depicted the emergence and spread of Russophilia in Galicia, and then its later degeneration into Muscovophilia. In a series of historical essays by Petro Antonyshyn it was explained that the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy was an ethnically and culturally diverse state that lacked an effective bureaucratic apparatus. The evidence of the latter was the state's belated response to the Russian information sabotage. This meant the unhindered spread of the Pan-Slavic ideology by Russia in Western Europe in the mid-19th century, according to which the Romanovs declared themselves the guardians of all Slavic peoples, who would be able to realize the fullness of their national existence only under their scepter (Antonyshyn, 1934a, p. 5).

The effect of this campaign was a rapid spread of Russophilia in Galicia, which, owing to such Galician intellectuals encouraged by rubles as Ivan Naumovych and Bohdan Didytsky, acquired the dimensions of an intellectual fashion. Therefore, P. Antonyshyn notes that cultural institutions financially supported by Russia were established (primarily, the Stavropihiisky Institute, the People's House in Lviv, and the Galician-Rus Matytsia) and the periodicals ("Slovo", "Russkaya Rada", "Halychanyn" and the others), owing to which Russophiles became a noticeable political actor in the Kingdom of Galicia and Lodomeria. Moreover, they could form ostentatious factions in the Viennese parliament and effectively defend Russian interests at the national level. Having finally realized their shortsightedness, Viennese officials opposed the Russian influences with support for the Galicians, who stood on the Ukrainian national positions. However, until the beginning of the 20th century, the Russophiles were the force with a strong public support. Their greatest influence was in the Lemkos region, where the Russophile ideology was promoted by Orthodox priests who were authoritative among the community (Antonyshyn, 1934b, p. 3).

During the last pre-war years, as P. Antonyshyn informs his readers, there was a rapid ideological evolution of the Russophiles towards Muscovophilism, associated with the promotion of not only cultural, but also political Russian narratives into the public space of Galicia. Moreover, the leaders of the movement began to flatter the Russian military command openly, an eloquent proof of which was their preparation of the brochure "Modern Galicia: its Ethnographic and Cultural Political State, in Connection with National Social Sentiments" on the eve of the Russian invasion of Galicia. It detailed, often with names, how many and in which powiat (county), town and village there were "Russians" and conscientious Ukrainians, so that the Russian troops would know where they could be welcomed favourably and where they needed to be cautious. At the beginning of the war, this brochure expectedly fell into the hands of the gendarmerie, which followed its instructions, carrying out mass arrests among the Ukrainians of all ideological orientations. Thus, the newspaper contributor under the pseudonym "Former Thalerhofets" emphasizes that it was the brochure compiled by Muscovites that gave impetus to extrajudicial arrests, executions, and deportations of the Ukrainians to Thalerhof and other camps, which, under the conditions of espionage mania characteristic of the war, gained a considerable momentum (Buvshyi talierhofets, 1939, p. 3). There was also the military's desire to find those responsible for their tactical miscalculations, as well as Magyarország-German prejudices against the Slavs as supposedly eternal sympathizers of Russia. The Polish and Jewish hatred for the Ukrainians, who took advantage of the situation to slander their national competitors, also played an important role. "A bankrupt handful of Muscovite swindlers are criminally spreading among our people the

rumor that the Ukrainians were to blame for Thalerhof”, concludes P. Antonyshyn. “That is an utter lie! Only the most illiterate man who never reads anything could believe it. [...]”. “Don’t believe it, because it is a vile lie to the detriment of thousands, and for the benefit of a few ‘Russian’ liars” (Antonyshyn, 1934c, p. 5).

At the same time, while maintaining objectivity in reconstructing the Thalerhof tragedy, the “Nash Lemko” newspaper did not hide the unsightly facts of the Lemkos using the war situation to settle personal scores with hostile fellow villagers. In the newspaper it was written about the shameful acts of those Ruthenians who betrayed neighbours with different ideological beliefs to the military authorities, and usually simply slandered people who were hostile to them. But these phenomena, the newspaper’s authors rightly emphasized, are inherent in every community. And the sign of a healthy community is not the shy concealment of such facts, but on the contrary – their prominence and sharp condemnation in order to prevent them in the future (Yizdiat sobi 1934, p. 7).

Having shifted partial blame for the ethnic cleansing carried out by the Austrian punitive apparatus onto Muscovite people in the minds of the reader, the editorial staff of the “Nash Lemko” newspaper took it upon themselves to undermine another stereotype spread about the identification of the concepts of “thalerhofets” and “a Ruthenian”. To this end, the newspaper published a series of articles that explained, in a language understandable to an average reader, the differences between the real Thalerhof camp and the politicized narrative about it by Muscovites. Regarding the first aspect, the authors of the newspaper emphasized that the entire Ukrainian population of Galicia, not just the Ruthenian or Orthodox, found themselves hostages of the war between two continental powers, the war of a fundamentally new type, with unprecedented military intensity and unimaginable humanitarian catastrophes. Therefore, for people who lived in their own self-sufficient world, far from modern industrial reality, especially the Lemkos, such a sharp confrontation with the reality was not just traumatic, but shocking. Thus, as it was emphasized in the “Nash Lemko” newspaper, “thousands of innocent people from all walks of life fell victim, including a large number of prominent Ukrainian figures who were driven behind barbed wire into the dirty and cold Thalerhof barracks” (Antonyshyn, 1934, p. 5).

In detail the authors of the Lemko press focused particularly on the practices of instrumentalization of the Thalerhof tragedy by Muscovites. Their cynical attitude towards this national calamity was noted by the “Nash Lemko” newspaper even during the years of the Great War. Thus, eyewitness reports leaked into the interwar press that in 1915 Tsarist Russia had already secretly transferred funds to Galician Muscovites to support the Thalerhofists, but these funds did not reach the recipients, as they were simply stolen by party members (Navit tam kraly!, 1934, p. 5).

However, the degree of cynicism, the publicists of the Ruthenian newspaper claimed, increased during the interwar period noticeably, when the Thalerhof issue became a source of stable financial enrichment for Muscovite supporters and a tool for persecuting ideological opponents. In the first case, the “Nash Lemko” newspaper did not tire of citing numerous facts of a total desecration of the memory of the Ukrainians tortured in Austrian concentration camps (Zhebys, 1936, p. 6). It is said that instead of a concentrated prayer and quiet mourning, Muscovite people turned their commemorative practices into real spectacles with music, dancing, and a heavy alcohol abuse. As the newspaper’s contributors wrote from eyewitness accounts, the Ruthenians from the provinces were attracted to such events with discounts on railway tickets, free treats, and spectacular events. One of the authors of the

"Nash Lemko" newspaper described the absurdity of these events as follows: "A lamenting academy – (streams of crocodile tears!) and festivities, a memorial service and dances, a cross and a pole with sausage – all this is called a holiday in Russian! "It should be the Thalerhof holiday, a remembrance of a tragic moment in our history, a remembrance of the painful sacrifice that the Ukrainian people had to make with the lives of their sons" (Moskvofilski hiieny, 1936, p. 7).

Labelling such events as "Thalerhof comedies", the Ruthenian newspaper explained to its readers the real goals of holding them. Using numerous examples, the "Nash Lemko" newspaper proved the anti-Ukrainian orientation of the Muscovite organizers of such essentially memorial events. It is said that their indispensable component was the speeches of Muscovite public intellectuals, who competed to portray the role of Ukrainian figures in the government's persecution of Galician peasants as brutally as possible. Observing this constant betrayal by Muscovites of their ideological opponents, the Ruthenian publicists pointed out: "The Thalerhof holiday is one of the occasions for the katsaps to tell vile and dirty lies about the Ukrainians. Lots of malice and, above all, cheap, fairground demagogy" (Moskvofilski hiieny, 1936, p. 7).

It should be noted that the aforementioned reckless anti-Ukrainianism of Muscovites was fully consistent with the policy of officials of the Second Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, for whom the conscious work of the descendants of the Galician people in the Lemko environment was the greatest obstacle to their Polonization. Therefore, the new masters of the situation in every way facilitated the organizational activities of Muscovites and promptly popularized their anti-Ukrainian rhetoric on the pages of state-controlled publications. In the "Nash Lemko" newspaper there were published the facts of the town administrations providing premises for the Thalerhof gatherings, the friendly police support of these actions, the dissemination of information about them in the local press at the state expense, etc. (– och., 1934, p. 4). Interestingly, the authorities avoided publicizing their sympathies for Muscovites in every possible way, as evidenced by the censorship removal of such newspaper reports. We learn about them from the only copy of the "Nash Lemko" newspaper, which belonged to the censorship committee and is currently stored in the Scientific Library of Ivan Franko National University of Lviv.

However, the Muscovites did not stop at demonizing their opponents during the Thalerhof gatherings. They chose attempts to interpret the tragedy of the Galician peasantry through a pan-Ukrainian prism, different from their own, as a tool for political persecution of dissenters. The "Nash Lemko" newspaper extensively covered the essentially slanderous campaign launched by Muscovites to inform state officials about the Ukrainian priests, teachers, and government officials who were shaping the image of Thalerhof in the minds of the Lemkos as the place of pan-Slavic tragedy. Thus, such figures became unreliable in the eyes of the Polish police, with all the consequences that were harmful to their careers. In their articles the Ruthenian publicists aptly noted the similarity of such treacherous behaviour of Muscovites with the actions of their predecessors at the beginning of the Great War, when they slandered their neighbours, sending them to Austrian concentration camps for torture. An anonymous contributor to the "Nash Lemko" newspaper addressed a reader emotionally: "Let's ask: Who has any doubts about where our teachers, our pastors would be if the "Lemko Union" and all Vantsi and Trokhanovskys had conducted "Russian ideological work" during the war blizzard, and not today? Who will give the answer: What is the difference in the "activity" of those people – the leaders of the "Russian Lemko region", the "Krynytsia trinity", the

guardians of “Orthodoxy” – and the “work” of the Austrian gendarme or the Hungarian dragoon? Tell me – what is the difference?!” (Moskvofilski hiieny, 1936, p. 7).

The editorial board of the “Nash Lemko” newspaper quite rightly began to lay down an appropriate source base for the new interpretative model of the Thalerhof tragedy. The impetus for this work, which is important for an objective understanding of the problem, was “The Thalerhof Almanacs” published by Muscovite activists. They tend to select testimonies of concentration camp prisoners with a condemnatory analysis of the Ukrainian figures and the national movement in general. Thus, the staff of the Ruthenian newspaper began an important task of recording, and then publishing in the columns of the press, the memoirs of former prisoners with a pro-Ukrainian orientation, who presented firsthand an alternative picture of events as compared to the picture of events spread by Muscovites. For example, Andriy Kohut told the “Nash Lemko” newspaper that he had always felt like a Ukrainian, but because the gendarmes found a Russophile newspaper at his home, he was arrested and sent to a concentration camp, where he met people of the Ukrainian national origin mostly. Then he concluded: “Hearing that the katsaps want to turn former Thalerhof prisoners into katsaps, I strongly oppose this, because it is not true” (Shche pro Talierhof, 1935, p. 3).

Finally, let us recall that the tragedy of the concentration camp prisoners was also covered in an artistic way by the “Nash Lemko” newspaper. These literary essays, written by prominent Ruthenian masters of the word, were primarily addressed to that part of the reading audience that was not accustomed to studying large analytical texts. The artistic sketches of Ostap Kostarevych, Ivan Shevchyk-Lukavychenko, Yulian Tarnovych, and the others usually highlighted the prisoners’ longing for their homeland, the tragic conditions of camp existence, and the resilience of a human spirit in the face of difficult trials of fate (Kostarevych, 1934, p. 3). It is noteworthy that the aforementioned stories were written in both Ukrainian literary language and the Ruthenian dialect, which was intended to form in a reader’s mind the image of Thalerhof as a tragedy of a national scale.

Conclusions. As the analysis showed, it was the Thalerhof events that significantly influenced the self-awareness of the Ruthenians as an ethnic group during the interwar period. Realizing this somewhat later than the representatives of the Muscovite camp, the Ruthenian intellectuals united around the “Nash Lemko” newspaper began the difficult work of deconstructing the stereotypes spread by their opponents, and thus of Ukrainizing the Thalerhof narrative. The work carried out by Yu. Tarnovych, P. Antonyshyn, O. Kostarevych and other employees of the journal was multifaceted, as it included the development of a new conceptual model, interviewing eyewitnesses of the tragedy, processing and publishing their memories, preparing polemical speeches, writing analytical studies, etc. As a result, a completely competitive historiographical image of the Thalerhof tragedy was created, which encouraged the Lemkos to remain with the Ukrainian national choice after their expulsion from their native lands and subsequent resettlement by many diaspora centres in the post-war years. This conceptually balanced and factually based interpretative model proved to be in demand for the Ukrainian socio-humanitarian studies of the independence era, becoming an organic component of modern academic reconstructions of the Thalerhof issue.

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