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Doctoral School of History
Modern History Programme

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**The International Echoes of the Mexican
Cristero War: US-American, Spanish,
Vatican and Hungarian Diplomatic
Reflections**

Thesis to the Doctoral (Ph.D.) Dissertation

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Szeged

2018

Aims of research

The present dissertation intends to explore the Mexican Catholic guerilla movement, also known as the Cristero war, which took place in the 19th century. The dissertation itself sheds light on the history, events and resolution of the conflict through the analysis of diplomatic reports and documents. The choice of the subject was greatly motivated by the fact that the Mexican religious war of 1926-1929 – in which a Roman Catholic regular army fought against a Roman Catholic partisan army – attracted the author's attention. The Cristero rebellion broke out due to the anti-clerical measures of the Mexican government. The conflict between the Catholic Church and the state, as well as the collision of conservative and liberal interests, could also be traced back into the 19th century. This opposition only further intensified in the 20th century. The dissertation also presents the relationship between church and state until and during the Cristero uprising.

Significant international echo followed the Mexican Cristero rebellion, which broke out due to the expropriation of ecclesiastical properties by the state, the anticlerical policy of the Mexican government, and the land demand of the peasantry. The purpose of my research is to present the views of the social and political perception of Mexico on the basis of Spanish, US-American, Vatican and Hungarian diplomatic documents, reports and press articles.

The subject of the dissertation explores the position of Spain and the Vatican towards the Mexican religious persecution, paying particular attention to the diplomatic relations between Spain and Mexico and the Vatican and Mexico. With regard to the special view of the Vatican on the religious conflict in Mexico I considered it important to analyse the Hungarian reflections, which further helped me understand the very conscious policy of the Mexican government to present its country in a positive light.

The presentation of the relationship between the United States and Mexico in the 1920s is also indispensable in the interpretation of the foreign dimensions of the Cristero uprising. The role of the United States in resolving the conflict and the presence of strong US-American economic interests in the region justified the analysis of diplomatic relations between the two neighbouring countries.

Primary sources

During the research I had the opportunity to investigate the materials of Hungarian and foreign archives. Hungarian, Spanish and Vatican archival sources, reports, contemporary Hungarian, English and Spanish newspapers and periodicals were reviewed. In the *Hungarian National Archives* I investigated Vatican and Mexican reports, congressional records of the upper-house and reports from the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Parliament.¹

The US congressional records, investigated in the *Hungarian Parliamentary Library*, provided important additions to the topic.² Mexico was in the focus of parliamentary debates in the Congress of the United States several times between 1926 and 1929. The purpose of the research is to analyze the different conflicts of Mexico and the United States that determined the epoch in the outcome of the Cristero rebellion, based on the speeches of US congressional representatives and senators.

Due to the religious aspect of the subject I considered it essential to involve the relevant materials of ecclesiastical archives in the research. I had the chance to investigate in the *Library and Archives of the Archdiocese of Kalocsa*³ and the *Esztergom Primateal Archives*⁴ where I gained valuable information from the documents studied not only about the reflections of the clergy and the upper-house of the parliament with reference to the Mexican religious persecution, but also regarding the point of view represented by the Vatican diplomacy. After collecting the primary sources accessible in Hungarian archives and the secondary literature available in Hungary, I continued the academic investigation in Spain.

In the *Archives of the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Archivo del Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores)* I investigated the diplomatic documents concerning Mexico.⁵ In the process of reviewing reports of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, materials of the Spanish embassies accredited in Mexico were also studied. In the first place I looked through reports written by Spanish delegates in Mexico as they were able to provide firsthand information about Mexican current affairs. Since the ambassador of the United States played a prominent

¹ Magyar Országos Levéltár (a továbbiakban MOL): K 106, 72. csomó, 1925-1937-33/2; K 63, 162. csomó, 1929-19/3, 27/Pol. 1926.; K 6, 4. csomó 1929.; K 105, 37. csomó, 1926-32-M-a, 976/Pol.; K 63, 162. csomó, 1929-19/3, 209/1927. pol.; K 105, 37. csomó, 1926-32-M-a, 94/1929. pol.; K 105 1925-1932-M-a.

² US Congressional Records, 1926-1929.

³ Kalocsai Főegyházmegyei Levéltár: KFL.I.1.a. Egyházkormányzati iratok 409. KD. Püspökkarral kapcsolatos levelek. 1919-1929. 51-59.

⁴ Esztergomi Prímási Levéltár: 2933/1926 Mexikói püspökökhöz levél.; 1834/1927. VII.18. Mexikói Katolikusok részére gyűjtés.; 3391/1930 Mexikói állapotokról jelentés.; Serédi Magánlevéltár Beszéddek (10).

⁵ Archivo del Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores (a továbbiakban AMAE): H 2564/005 Informaciones relativas a México.; H 2565/002 Política General, México.

role in the resolution of the Mexican Cristero war, that is, in negotiations between Church and state, I also considered reviewing reports sent from Washington relevant. The fact that the Spanish diplomatic documents were not in chronological order in the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Madrid made the research difficult. I have considered the examination of a large number of diplomatic reports containing much information to be relevant by classifying the distinct content within each report by topic, then interpreting it in a chronological order. The huge amount of materials found in the Spanish Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is also particularly valuable as the research of the period in question is currently not permitted in the archives.

In the next phase of the investigation the materials of the *National Library of Spain (Biblioteca Nacional)* in Madrid, the *Municipal Library (Hemeroteca Municipal)* and the *AECI (Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional)* have also provided a decisive basis for my research, especially in the search for secondary sources for the period in question.

An important part of the subject matter was the examination of the pact between the State and the Church on the resolution of the Mexican religious conflict. The *Vatican Secret Archives (Archivio Segreto Vaticano)* have provided access to the materials concerning the Cristero uprising since 2006. In 2015 I had the opportunity to review these documents. In the light of the Vatican documents I came to the conclusion that during the conflict the Vatican tried to prevent religious persecution and ease the conflict through diplomatic representatives of other countries accredited to Mexico.⁶ There were several possibilities – in 1927 and in 1928 – to resolve the religious issue, but it seemed that the Vatican diplomacy kept the question on a "parking track." This hesitating and undecided attitude of the Holy See was due to the problem of the Vatican's unresolved political status also known as the "Roman question."

All in all, in the present dissertation I intended to analyze the evolution of the relationship between Spain and Mexico and the United States and Mexico in the historical presentation of the Mexican Cristero rebellion. In addition, the Hungarian and Vatican projections of foreign echoes will also be presented. In order to achieve this, I have used extensive archival sources, and with the help of the mosaics of diplomatic reports, press articles, and congressional records I intend to reflect upon this segment of Mexican history, reconstructing new pieces of information so that I can highlight this complex subject from an

⁶ Archivio Segreto Vaticano (a továbbiakban ASV): Arch. Deleg. Messico 53/274.; Arch. Deleg. Messico 72/372.; Arch. Deleg. Messico 73/381.; Arch. Deleg. Messico 76/394.; Segreteria di Stato 228/1, 1930.

international perspective. This way the dissertation can provide interesting information and valuable additions to the history of the countries involved.

The Cristero war did not appear for many years in Mexican historical research, and was explicitly a taboo topic. From the second half of the 20th century academic scholars began to focus on an objective historical analysis of the Cristero rebellion using a wide range of archival sources. The works of Alicia Olivera Sedano, David C. Bailey, Jean Meyer and Robert E. Quirk published in the 1960s and in the 1970s, provided the basic research of the subject. There has been a vivid interest for the topic among scholars since the 1990s. The works investigating the relationship between the Mexican state and the Church and exploring the Cristero era from various aspects are quite numerous. However, the investigation of the international echo of the topic on the basis of diplomatic documents, with particular reference to the reflections of European countries is not so common. The Hungarian academic works related to the subject were published thanks to the work of Gyula Horváth, Mónika Szenté-Varga and Emőke Horváth.⁷

Structure of the dissertation

In presenting the international echo of the Mexican Cristero rebellion, I applied the method of synthetic approach based on new information.

The first chapter presents the relationship between the Mexican Church and the state, back in the 19th century by examining the history and roots of the conflict. After the Mexican War of Independence there is a comprehensive historical presentation of the conflict between the state and the Church in the 19th century. Apart from the description of the liberal reform laws, I paid particular attention to the details of the sections referring to religion in the constitutions of 1824, 1857 and 1917 respectively. I also intend to present the relationship between the Porfirian era and the Church, and the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Mexican Revolution.

⁷ Horváth Gyula: „La revolución mexicana y la guerra cristera.” in Anderle Ádám (szerk.): *Iglesia, religión y sociedad en la historia latinoamericana (1492-1945)*. Tomo IV, Szeged, JATE Kiadó, 1989. 77-86.; Horváth Gyula: „El cristero y la consolidación del populismo en México.” in Gyula Horváth – Sára H. Szabó (szerk.): *Capítulos de la Historia de México. (De Maximiliano al populismo)*. Kaposvár, Editorial David, 2005. 113-140.; Szenté-Varga Mónika: „El reflejo de la primera guerra cristera de México en Hungría.” in Anderle Ádám (szerk.): *Acta Hispánica*, Tomus VII, Szeged, 2002. 119-135.; Horváth Emőke: „La guerra cristera mexicana y la iglesia católica húngara.” in *Orpheus Noster*, 8.évf. 2016/4. 9-19.

The aim of the second chapter is to present the most affected social layer in the conflict, that is the presentation of the Cristeros and the emergence of the events of the uprising. I considered a detailed analysis of the role of women essential, considering that women's organizations were in direct contact with members of the upper clergy and were under the influence of the Vatican.

In the third chapter, I look at the diplomatic relations between the United States and Mexico over the period in question, paying particular attention to showing the points of conflict between the two countries, such as the oil-law conflict and Nicaragua's case. Primary sources used are mainly based on United States congressional records, but documents of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, reports, and telegrams also enrich the investigated material. The official intervention of the US ambassador Dwight Whitney Morrow in the oil conflict and his role as a mediator in the Mexican state and church conflict is also an important part of this chapter.

Chapter Four discusses the Vatican's reaction to the Mexican religious conflict. Among other things, I am trying to answer the question of what may be the reason of the Holy See's 'hesitant' attitude towards the agreement. Furthermore, I look at the Vatican's role in resolving the Mexican religious issue.

Chapter Five presents the results of consulting the Spanish reports and diplomatic documents. Through the reports of Spanish diplomats in Mexico, we can get an insight into the current affairs and foreign political events of Mexico particularly focusing on the most important political events, the system of diplomatic relations with the United States and the development of the religious question. The primary sources processed in this section provide substantive information on Mexican events and help to understand the underlying content of political events.

The sixth and final chapter of the Mexican conflict presents Hungarian reflections that reveal a strong interest of the Hungarian public towards the Mexican events.

In order to determine the order of the chapters dealing with the US-American, Vatican, Spanish and Hungarian reflections, it was the first consideration to present the diplomatic materials of the countries directly involved in the conflict and then to present the Spanish and Hungarian reactions. Since the United States had a direct influence through its ambassador in the conflict, that is in reaching an agreement between the Mexican state and the Catholic Church so the first chapter regarding the international echo would focus on the United States.

Scientific novelties of the dissertation

The dissertation also offers new results in several ways. On the one hand, the topic itself can be of interest as the history and events of the Cristero war are not so well-known in Hungary.

The United States of America had a great influence in the resolving of the Cristero rebellion and has always been a determining factor in the history of Mexico. That is why it is one of the most prominent chapters of this paper. The consulted materials reveal the restrained activity of the US government and the diverse public opinion in relation to the Mexican religious issue and the business-political considerations. The problems that most affected US public opinion and politicians were apparent: petroleum issues, fears of Bolshevism, and religious persecution. The changing foreign policy of the US which primarily intended to avoid the appearance of direct intervention was also evident. This strategy has raised Dwight Whitney Morrow and Father Burke as important actors in the resolution of the Mexican church-state conflict. The State Department of the US, however, emphasized that Morrow had acted as a private person in the Mexican religious affair rather than as the official ambassador of the United States.

Similar to the United States of America, the Vatican also avoided the mere appearance of direct intervention. This caused the outside observer to detect hesitation, though it was not entirely true. As the research partially revealed, apparent inactivity was due to the problem of sovereignty of the Vatican. At the same time, this inaction was not real as the Vatican, as well as the USA, sought to exert influence by circumventing the official path. While the United States had been negotiating through unofficial representatives, the Vatican exerted influence through the official representatives of other countries.

The agreement between church and state was only viable in 1929 since the political situation of the Vatican was settled in February, 1929. The Holy See did not dare to get involved into the peace treaty earlier, because by concluding the convention it could have clashed with the government of Mussolini. The Spanish reports show that in 1928 the Italian-Mexican diplomatic relations were in a very hostile period, almost the end of diplomatic ties occurred. If the Vatican in this tense situation negotiates with the Mexican government on religious matters, it thus recognizes the Calles government. It is important to emphasize that the Vatican did not want to influence the Mexican government through its own diplomatic representatives, rather than through diplomats from other countries accredited to Mexico and by using the international press.

However, the real novelty of the dissertation is the analysis of the primary sources of the Archives of the Ministry of Foreign affairs in Madrid. Perhaps the greatest value of the Spanish diplomatic reports is the abundance of information regarding the Cristero rebellion including armed conflict, political events, and press releases illustrating the growing turmoil, the spread of the uprising, the misleading propaganda, and the government's loss of control over the insurgents. An important part of the diplomatic reports is the detailed presentation of the presidential election campaign and the Escobar uprising that fundamentally influenced the rise of the Cristero war. The legates highlighted the development of the US-Mexican diplomatic relations as well as the international echoes following the religious persecutions in Mexico. In general, it can be stated that the Spanish diplomatic documents are characterized by an appropriate combination of objectivity and critical thinking, which greatly increases the value of the consulted materials. It can be noticed that the Spanish diplomatic reports were written essentially from an outside perspective and thus were not distorted by political, economic or ideological involvement, as opposed to the US, which due to regional proximity Mexican events were crucial in their economic and geopolitical sense. The same can be stated regarding the Vatican, which was politically involved concerning its unsolved sovereignty and ideologically involved because of the religious persecution.

The examination of the Hungarian echo is interesting since the emergence of the Cristero uprising took place in a country with few connections with Hungary, but with a strong Catholic structure. The Hungarian press was not informed from direct sources but it took the news from international press releases, with US newspapers in majority. The direct source, however, was the visit of the Mexican delegate in Budapest. The importance of the visit was given by the fact that Mexico sought diplomatic contact with the Catholic countries of Europe with the intention of demonstrating that the Mexican government was not anti-Catholic, thereby reducing Mexico's international isolation. The difficulty of this consolidation effort was well reflected in the protests that this official visit provoked while also demonstrating the power of the international press against the Mexican government. On the basis of diplomatic documents, the Vatican's powerful influence and control over the reaction of the Hungarian Catholic Church and public opinion can be clearly seen. In this process the Hungarian Apostolic nuncio and the primate of Hungary played an essential role.

Opportunities for further development of the subject

It is worth considering and doing further research on the comparison between the Mexican religious affair and the so called Roman question dealing with the sovereignty of the Vatican. So far we have highlighted that the issue of the religious question in Mexico was resolved right after the Treaty of Lateran went into force. However, if we look at this specific historical event from the other side of the coin the following question may emerge: did the Mexican conflict have an impact on the Lateran Treaty? Between the Vatican and the Italian state in April 1928, when the Mexican government and the Mexican bishops were about to implement a well-prepared settlement plan in Mexico, tensions occurred. April 13, 1928, the Italian government made a decree allowing the cessation of the activity of the Catholic Action (*Actio Catholica*). The Pope protested vigorously and, at his request, interrupted the negotiations between the Italian state and the Holy See.⁸ The question arises whether the Vatican used the Mexican Cristero uprising in the negotiations with the Italian state? Was the Holy See in favor of a possibly protracted Mexican religious conflict where the state could perceive the militant power of religious belief in the uprising? Was the Mexican Catholic struggle a deterrent to other states in contemplating their relationship with the Church? These issues also raise the possibility of further research beyond the Mexican and Vatican dimensions of the Cristero war.

⁸ Ormos, Mária: *Mussolini. Politikai életrajz.* Budapest, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1987. 242.

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