

Recontextualizaciones de imágenes de prensa de la Guerra Civil Española en la Hungría de entreguerras

Recontextualizations of *press prints* from the Spanish Civil War in interwar Hungary

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RESUMEN

Mi estudio gira en torno a la difusión de imágenes de prensa sobre la Guerra Civil española, en la Hungría de entreguerras. Indago la circulación de contenido visual con respecto al conflicto, al interior de la red transfronteriza de agencias fotográficas.

Gracias a la reproducibilidad técnica, estas impresiones fueron archivadas con trayectorias distintas a través del mundo, no obstante guardar en su reverso similares leyendas en alemán, francés o inglés, emitidas por las agencias.

A menudo este material fue impreso, retocado, recortado y reformulado en sus pies de foto, con el propósito de dirigirlo a diferentes audiencias, transformándose hoy incluso en objeto de colección de museos, asociado a nuevos contextos nacionales y culturales, con diferentes sentidos.

Mi análisis busca dilucidar, a través de ciertos casos de recontextualización de imágenes de prensa, la doble naturaleza de dicho material, entre objetos únicos y al mismo tiempo reproducciones.

Palabras clave: imágenes de prensa, agencias de fotografía, foto periodismo, prensa húngara, usos de la fotografía, línea editorial, reproducibilidad.

ABSTRACT

My paper focuses on the dissemination of press prints about the Spanish Civil War in interwar Hungary. I raise questions on the spread of visual information on the conflict by the cross-border network of photographic agencies. Thanks to reproducibility, these prints might have been kept in various archives worldwide but with different trajectory even if their versos often hold the same German, French or English captions issued by an agency. As press prints, cut, sometimes retouched and recaptioned, they were once used by the press for different audience and as artefacts of museum collections today, they have been linked to various national and cultural contexts, but with possibly different meanings. Through the cases of recontextualization this paper seeks to elucidate the special in-between position of press prints that are unique objects and reproduced images at the same time.

Keywords: press print, photographic agencies, photojournalism, Hungarian press, uses of photography, editorial view, reproducibility.

Introduction

According to Geoffrey Batchen's terms, *photography's reproducibility generates all sorts of problems for the rigorous photo-historian. Among other effects, it allows photographic images to be widely circulated, but it also gives the same image the capacity to come in many different looks, sizes and formats.*

It also makes it possible for an image to appear in many places at once and to exist simultaneously at many different points of time. Equally complicated is the way its capacity for reproducibility ties photography to the processes and social implications of capitalist mass production, making any study of its effects an unavoidably political issue (Batchen, 2013: 62).

In spite of all the above mentioned difficulties, the historical study of the transnational traffic of the press prints (*la circulation transnationale des images d'actualité*) is probably worth the effort. These studies focus not merely on the distribution of visual materials (Joschke, 2017: 70) but also on the politicization of photographic agencies (Joschke 2017: 61), which formed an international trade network from the end of the 1920s, shaping the news and thus the public opinions in the societies they served with their images all over the world, although in various ways and to varying degrees.

On the one hand, press photo can be studied as a press illustration, so the relationship between image and text on published pages in various newspapers reveals a great deal about how images are used and how political accents are suggested. On the other hand, the press prints used for editing these pages can be found today in the surviving archives of the former illustrated magazines. By the aid of these prints, one can trace back the work process through which the paper positives were mostly retouched, cut and reworked before publishing.

In my paper I focus on the intermediate position of press prints (between photographic negatives and press illustrations), as well as on the decodable signs and traces they hold on their versos; their subsequent reproduction for museum use; and, ultimately, I am interested in the (editorial) gaze that selected, transformed and preserved them.

Layers of an Archive

The international collection is the youngest unit of the Historical Photo Department¹ at the Hungarian National Museum. Its size and present structure has been shaped over the decades during a somewhat complicated institution development. Today it includes fonds of «international» photographs from the Historical Portrait Gallery of the Hungarian National Museum (1874-1964), from the former Institute of Labour Movement (1948-1956), from the Museum of Modern History (1957-1966), and from the Museum of Labour Movement (1966-1989) (Jalsovszky / Tomsics 2009: 104).

The institutional changes of the 20th century have also influenced collecting policies. Today, one of the greatest values of the international collection is the richness of press prints coming from the archives of the former Hungarian dailies between the two world wars.

Many of the original press prints are from the former *Est Group* (*Est Lapok: Pesti Napló, Az Est, Magyarország*), which had a significant impact and many readers in interwar Hungary, as well as from the archives of the former *Pesti Hírlap*, and from some other newspapers.

¹ [<https://mnmu.hu/en/collections/historical-photographic-collection>] (Retrieved: 23 December, 2017).

Today the collection of photographs on international events is available in geographic, chronological and thematic order. All this represents almost 100,000 photographs from 5 continents, 60 countries and from the Great War to 1980.

Based on the remaining photographs it can be claimed that, between the two world wars, the Hungarian press acquired the majority of foreign photographs from great world companies –like AP, Keystone and Wide Word Photos– and from German photographic agencies. The latter offices also operated an international network, transferring further foreign pictures to Hungary (Jalšovszky / Tomsics 2009: 107).

After 1933 it can be observed that *in Germany the left-wing, liberal, independent photographic agencies have disappeared, they were replaced by giant companies close to Nazi power, and this process can be seen precisely on the change of the distribution of images in Hungary* (Jalšovszky / Tomsics 2009: 107).

All this is interesting because the versos of the press prints are not only date stamped or stamped by the agencies, but they also hold typed captions and the wording of these texts usually reflects the institutional-political changes.

The geographical origin and the content of photographs mirror the changing interest of Hungarian press, its hunger for images and the possibilities (and limits) of purchasing pictures. As I mentioned above, these features have always been shaped by the prevailing political context as well as by the collecting goals of the changing institutions. So when talking about the photographs of the Spanish Civil War in the Hungarian National Museum, we have to see clearly that there are different institutional backgrounds, distribution networks and practices behind them.

The Photographs of the Spanish Civil War at the Hungarian National Museum

Today we have about 1,300 photographs of the Spanish Civil War, 500 of which were taken by amateurs who were Hungarian volunteers in Spain. These images were collected rather in the 1960s and 1970s. Our 700 press prints come from the archives of former interwar newspapers and we keep 100 reproductions made in the 1970s, too, from various Eastern European collections.

As for the first layer of historical photographic material related to the Spanish Civil War, the catalogue of the negatives and paper positives was published by Katalin Jalšovszky, the former curator responsible for the international collection. She distinguished the following units in this layer according to the topic, the location and the date of the photographs taken by Hungarian volunteers: photographs of the Hungarian military unit (October 1936–March 31, 1937); of the Hungarian battalion (April 1937–September 1938); of the 12th International Brigade and the 45th division (November 1936–June 1937); of the 15th International Brigade and the 15th division (January 1937–December 1937); of the Chapayev battalion within the 13th International Brigade (November 1936–March 1937); of the Masaryk battalion, Petőfi comp. (November 1937–September 1938); of Figueras (October 1936–September 1938); of other international military units (October 1936–September 1938); of the Spanish militias and the Spanish Republican Army (August 1936–January 1939); of doctors and nurses (June 1936–January 1939); of the wounded (January 1937–January 1939); portraits and group portraits (October 1936–January 1939); photographs of the disarmed (October 1938–February 1939); of the civilians (June 1936–January 1939); of Gurs, France (April 1939–May 1940); of other camps in France (1940–1941); and of the Camp in Djelfa (1941–1943) (Jalšovszky 1984: 98).

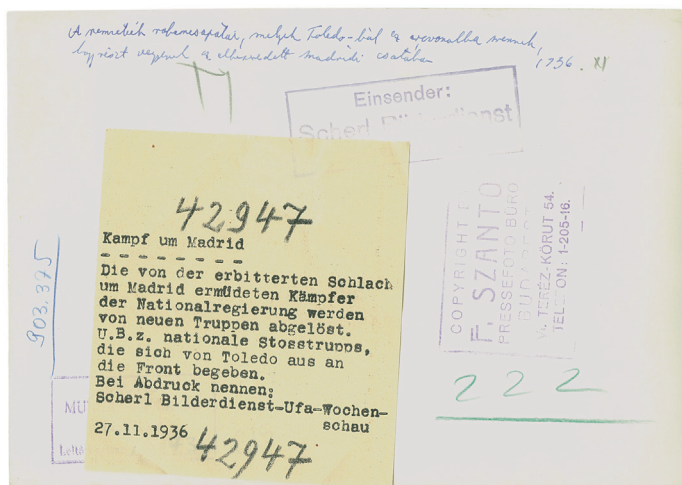


FIG. 1A8. Use and reuse of a photograph. Press print distributed by the Scherl about the troops of Franco heading from Toledo to Madrid, November 1936 (HNM: Inv. 72.173).

The press prints taken in the Spanish Civil War come from the archives of former illustrated dailies and newspapers. These paper positives are half-way between the photographic negatives and the press illustrations. The stamps on their backs provide us with information about their routes leading to the desks of the Hungarian editors.

This cross border network of press prints—including the Hungarian distributors—is the prerequisite allowing the pictures taken in Spain to get to the Hungarian newspapers. Most of the press prints came from French and German photographic agencies, and only a few from Spanish ones. The news pictures that were mass-reproduced worldwide are unique objects today, which bear the traces of human intervention mirroring overlapping purposes.

The editorial gaze can be identified above all in the various ways of cutting

and retouching. Retouching is an apt tool for emphasizing or hiding certain details. Among our Spanish press prints there are examples for *retouching to add visual information* (Verbin 2010: 68) by increasing the contrasts in order to improve printing quality, whereas there are other instances of *retouching to remove visual information* (Verbin 2010: 79), especially in case of the portraits of military leaders and politicians.

Since the press prints came from various archives, sometimes one can find several enlargements of the same shot². There is another example among our press prints, when a photo-

2 Thanks to this conference in Zaragoza and my stay in Madrid in October 2017, I could identify the author of two of our press prints, Agustí Centelles. See also at [<http://www.museoreinasofia.es/en/collection/artwork/guardias-asalto-calle-diputacio-barcelona-assault-guards-diputacio-street>] [Retrieved: 23 December 2017].

graph taken of Franco's troops heading from Toledo to Madrid was purchased by a Hungarian newspaper in 1936 and in 1939, repeatedly. The first paper positive was issued by a German agency, the Scherl, and the second by the French Fulgur (with the note, de nos archives on the back of the print). In this case a photograph taken in 1936 was reused for the illustration of another event, the occupation of Madrid in 1939.

As Simon Dell wrote about the contemporary editorial practice: *The photographer is to see all and record all. However, this is not done in order to create the fullest possible documentation; rather it is done so that the editor may have the materials to fashion the most compelling story* (Dell 2010: 39).

Press prints in our collection, too, were selected and purchased from the agencies by the editors. In other words, the pictures that have survived up till now are images that the editors thought to be good enough for compelling stories. «Hot Topics» include, first and foremost, close-ups and distances about fighters, images of ruins, political and military leaders on both sides, civilians and loyalist refugees.

The third layer of the photographic material of the Spanish Civil War in our collection consists of later (analogue) reproductions made for museum use. The former Eastern European public collections, often jointly preparing for an anniversary, or for exhibitions or books, apparently shared their photographs with one another without reservations.

Without regard to copyrights, these positives were often inventoried in several collections, while the source was noted on the versos (sometimes along with the original inventory number). Thus, we can find reproductions from the former Museum für Deutsche Geschichte (GDR) or the

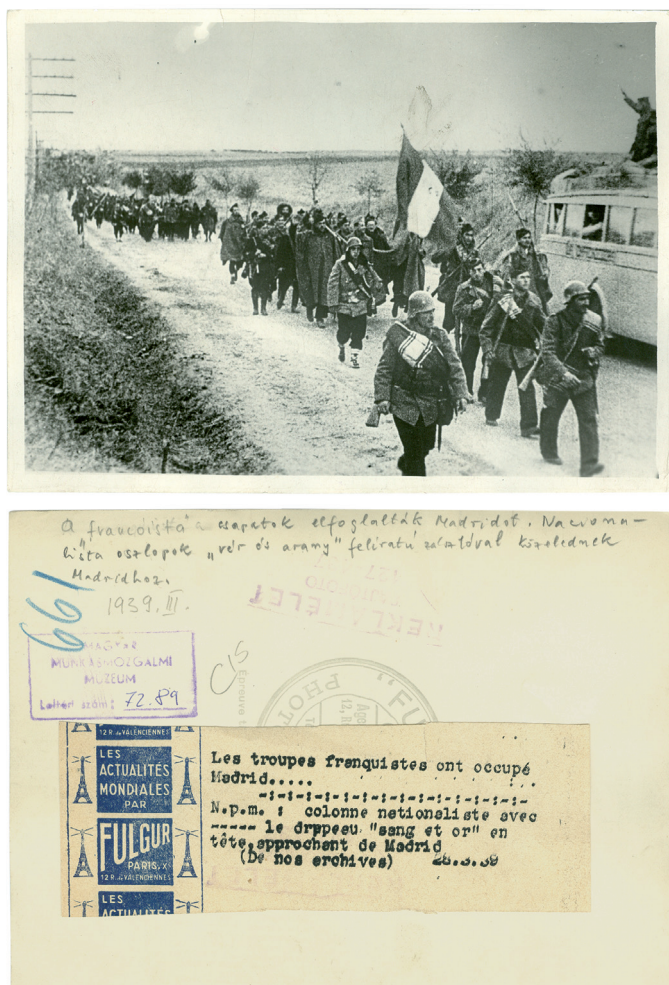


FIG. 2AB. Press print distributed by Fulgur: «Franco's troops occupied Madrid», 1939 (HNM: Inv. 72.89).

former Museum of Revolution in Warsaw in our collection. We may suppose that there can also be some reproductions of our photographs at the successors of these institutions.

Reproducing and multiplying photographs in several collections is no longer acceptable as a museological practice. However, these reproductions attest that there was a period in the second half of the 20th century when this practice was general within the scientific institutions collecting and (re)using historical photographs in the region.

It is just as important to understand this practice as to recognize that objects in a photographic collection should also be cleaned with an archaeologist's patience.

The Recontextualisation of Press Prints from the Spanish Civil War in Interwar Hungary

In the winter of 1936/37, Virginia Woolf, a famous contemporary reader of the news on the Spanish Civil War, wrote: *Photographs, of course, are not arguments addressed to the reason; they are simply statements of fact addressed to the eye. But in that very simplicity there may be some help. Let us see then whether when we look at the same photographs we feel the same things* (Woolf 1938: 10).

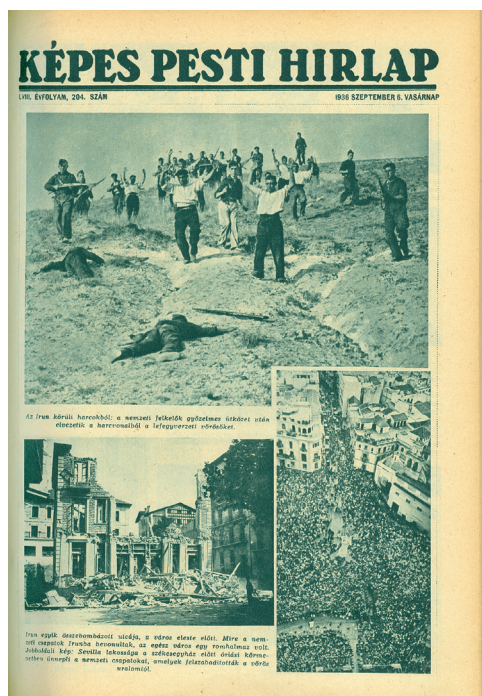


FIG. 3A-B. Pages from the issues of 6 September 1936 of *Képes Pesti Hírlap* and *Pesti Napló*. Differences in expressions can be observed. Captions of *Képes Pesti Hírlap* (left): «From the battles around Irún. Following the victory, the nationalist insurgents accompany disarmed red soldiers from the battle line.» «A bombed street of Irún before the occupation of the city. When the nationalist troops entered Irún, all the city was in ruins. On the right: The citizens of Sevilla celebrate national troops that liberated them from the red regime, with a huge procession in front of the cathedral». Main title of the *Pesti Napló* (right): «The Bayonet assault». Caption: «Two unrivalled, exciting snapshots from the Spanish Civil War, taken during the battle for the hills of Somosierra. Up: the squad of the nationalist troops storms the positions of the government's troops, and the defenders give themselves up. In the lower picture, soldiers of the national troops accompany prisoners holding their hands up behind the frontline».

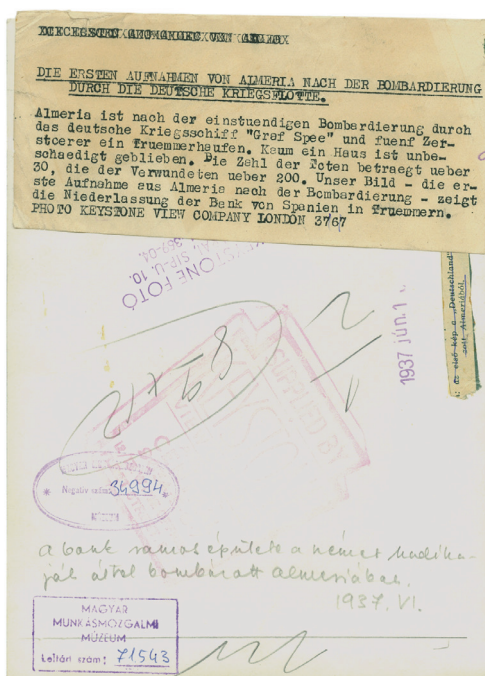


FIG. 4A-B. There are hand-drawn signs on the surface of the press print about the ruined building of the Spanish bank (HNM: Inv. 71.543). Strange, but a drawn rectangle can be seen on the final page of the newspaper, too. Verso of the press print distributed by Keystone Photo.



FIG. 4C. The ruins of a bank in Almería. The photo was published on the cover of the *Köpes Pesti Hírlap* on 10 June 1937, along with other pictures, one of which displays the Hungarian archbishop before his visit to Rome, standing next to the papal nuncio still in Budapest, while the other one shows a night view of the Soviet, the German and the Italian pavilions at the Word Expo in Paris. A page is full of symbolic representations of power.



FIG. 5A-B. A press print, Toledo, August 1936 (HNM: Inv. 71.470) and its verso. Written in red letters: «Spanish woman». She actually is the main figure on the page.



FIG. 5C. Montage from the 6 September issue of *Képes Pesti Napló*. The main title is: «Pictures from the Spanish Civil War». Among cityscapes from Malaga, there is a portrait of a woman with this caption: «An armed Spanish woman who fights in the ranks of government troops».



FIG. 6. A page from the 27 September 1936 issue of *Képes Pesti Napló*. Main title: «Soldiers' farewell». In the pictures there are soldiers from different parts of the world heading to various frontlines, leaving behind their sweethearts. Among the photographs of these highly personal and vulnerable human beings juxtaposed here, there is one taken in Barcelona. (Even if it is not recorded here explicitly, we already know that it was taken by Robert Capa [See at <https://www.icp.org/browse/archive/objects/republican-militiaman-saying-farewell-before-the-departure-of-a-troop-train-0> Retrieved 23 December, 2017]). By this juxtaposition, the Spanish Civil War became an international conflict, equal to the others.



FIG. 7A-B. Pages from the 6 December 1936 issue of *Képes Pesti Napló*. Left: «Memory from Venice». Right: «Madrid on fire! Two night photographs from Madrid burning after the bombings». The two pages are linked by analogy ('attack from above'), though one is funny and the other is frightful, the photographs mutually enhance the impact of both. By this juxtaposition, the editors suggest that the banal and the extraordinary are not so far apart.

The English author thought of different viewpoints of men and women from the same country but with different kinds of socialization, which could manifest when these men and women looked at the same photographs.

I would like add to this idea that it is not at all guaranteed that people look at *the same* pictures, even if they live in the same country and seem to look at the same ruined streets or corpses. The news we read can be really differently framed.

In order to justify my statement, I am going to give some examples of the recontextualisation of civil war press prints in interwar Hungary.

Conclusion

There is no reason to doubt that *photography's reproducibility generates all sorts of problems for the rigorous photo-historian*. But the conscious examination of the mobility and the transformations of photographs can give us a more dynamic, and therefore a more realistic vision of the past, of which we can enlarge many details.

The game is always played by multiple players.

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