

## New Perspectives on Historical Research: The Digitization of the Documents of the AUSSME on the Peace of Versailles

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**Abstract:** On November 11, 1918, the Great War that lasted for over four years came to a close. The peace treaties imposed by the Entente and Associated Powers after the War tried to establish a new international system. The research project "The Europe of Versailles (1919-1939). The new European balance between the two wars in the sources of the Archive of the Army General Staff" is funded by the Italian Ministry of University and Research (MIUR) under the program "Futuro in ricerca" Firb 2010. It aims to examine specifically the events that marked the First World War and the results of the Peace Conference of Versailles in Central and Eastern Europe through the digitization of the records of the archive of the Italian Army and the publication of several specific books.

**Key words:** Great War, Treaty of Versailles, Archives, Digitization, Italian Army

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### 1. The Project

On November 11, 1918, the Great War that lasted for over four years came to a close. The peace treaties imposed by the Entente and Associated Powers after the War, known by the improper name of Treaties of Versailles, tried to create a new international system to contain the double threat of a new German expansion and the spread of the Bolshevik revolution but resulting in a new, extremely unstable, system. The disappearance of the three major multinational Empires led to the creation of a number of new states, based on ethno-linguistic base, without solving the national conflicts that continued to tear Europe. As a matter of fact, this attempt proved to be inadequate, causing absolutely disastrous consequences on medium-term, as demonstrated by a series of conflicts that have affected Europe.

An attempt to establish a new system of international relations was proposed by Woodrow Wilson, but the League of Nations was "rejected" by the United States itself. Born as an instrument of settling international disputes, the League of Nations was unable to play fully its role and in fact remained bound to the interests of major powers. In this context it is therefore clear that the Treaty of Versailles could not form the basis for a lasting peace. The hardness of the peace treaties and the isolation of those states that lost the war, eventually created the condition for a permanent tension, dragging at last Europe and the entire World into a new conflict.

The research project "The Europe of Versailles (1919-1939). The new European balance between the two wars in the sources of the Archive of the Army General Staff" is funded by the Italian Ministry of University and Research (MIUR) under the program "Futuro in ricerca" Firb 2010. A staff made of scholars from the universities of Roma "La Sapienza", Teramo, Perugia and European University of Rome aims to examine specifically the events that marked the First World War and the results of the Peace Conference of Versailles in Central and Eastern Europe. Their goal is to focus the national dynamics that perturbed the region and created the historical context for the emergence of new states. All the treaties provided special commissions with the concrete role to draw up new boundaries, while other control committees had the responsibility of supervising the application of economic and military terms. This pattern was applied to all countries and therefore the available sources are particularly rich, allowing a deep and further rationalization and interpretation of the massive information contained in the archives in the framework of a comprehensive analysis, as well as of a further research targeted on single national realities.

The project is divided in two research Units: Central and Eastern Europe (Sapienza University of Rome), Balkan Europe (University of Teramo). The composition of the Units is based on the idea of rationalization and interpretation of sources and aims to a better division of research work, both from time and skills point of view, intending therefore, through the composition of the groups, formed by young scholars, each flanked by a Full Professor and PhD students, to exploit and develop an efficient and rational work plan. The main efforts of the research Units will focus on the study of the sources of the Archive of the Historical Office of the Italian Army General Staff (AUSSME), supplemented with the results of the research of other sources from important Italian archives (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Central State Archive) and foreign institutions (Archives of the League of Nations in Geneva and the archives of the other countries involved in the research). The project aims to work on the collection, selection and rationalization of the documentary and iconographic material and, subsequently, editing it in an electronic format of selected documents.

The two research Units investigate the dynamics of Italian politics towards Europe after the Great War, highlighting the role played by Italian military and diplomatic representatives.

In fact several treaties were signed. The Treaty of Versailles (Germany); the Treaty of Saint Germain (Austrian Republic); the Treaties of Neuilly (Bulgaria) and Trianon (Hungary), while the Treaty of Sèvres (subsequently ignored and replaced by the Treaty of Lausanne) set the terms of peace with Turkey. All of them included, among all, the supervision of the implementation of the military clauses - with particular attention to the industrial sector and the border demarcation. Moreover, all above-mentioned treaties provided special Commissions in order to determine on the field new boundaries, while other control committees had the responsibility of supervising the implementation of economic and military terms. This scheme was applied to all countries involved and therefore the available sources at the AUSSME are particularly rich. The treaties included also specific military clauses, which, for their implementation, required the supervision of special inter-Allied committees. The role of the military representatives is particularly interesting, because it is not confined to military-technical issues but fully involves the Italian officers in political-diplomatic dynamics. The Italian delegation to the Peace Conference participated in various sessions, attending subsequently the meetings of the Conference of Ambassadors discussing the execution of the military clauses of the peace treaties, as well as the committees dealing with technical issues and borders demarcation.

Many sources will have a decisive influence in the evolution of the project. The Inter-Allied Commission of Paris, containing the papers of the Supreme Council of War - Italian Section, which actually worked also as military section of the Italian delegation to the peace conference in Paris, and, subsequently, to the conference of ambassadors. The Inter-Allied Military Control Commissions collects documents relating to the activities of the supervision military commissions, responsible for overseeing the implementation of the clauses of the peace treaties and the transitional phase initiated in several countries in Central and Eastern Europe at the end of the Great War. The Commission for border demarcation, that contains the maps of the Italian delegation attached to the Commissions for the border demarcation.

## 2. Sharing the job

The First Unit aims to analyze specifically the events occurred after World War I and the consequences of the 1919 Paris Peace Conference in East Central Europe. The purpose is a broad understanding of the nationalist dynamics which affected the region and created the historical context for the building of new states and a revisionist policy in countries such as Hungary, Germany and Bulgaria.

The study is focused on the records of the Inter-Allied Commission of Paris, a collection of sources produced by a single institution containing 299 folders. They collect the records of the Italian section at the War Supreme Council of the Entente. In 1919 it was transformed in the Military section of the Italian delegation at the Peace Conference of Versailles. It is an extremely precious source that helps to understand the new international scenarios at the end of the war, as well as the setting of the "Europe of Versailles". Through an extensive research on documents (minutes and resolutions) drafted by the Paris Conference, the Conference of Ambassadors and the Allied Military Committee of Versailles, this study will offer an insight on the major political and social issue in Europe between 1919 and 1928. A further research phase will be devoted to a more specific analysis of the Inter-Allied Commissions operating in East Central Europe.

The Second Unit focuses on the Balkan and Eastern Mediterranean. More specifically, it takes in consideration the Italian influence toward these areas. The Unit is going to study a massive documentary material on the region, (Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Yugoslavia, Montenegro and Turkey).

## 3. Expected results

Beyond the impact of the war on society and individuals, from geo-political point of view, the world that emerged from the Peace Treaties was completely different from that of 1914. Two large multinational empires, the Ottoman empire and Austria-Hungary disappeared from the maps, replaced by a series of new national states; another empire, the Tsarist one, suffered the effects of the communist revolution and was replaced by the Bolshevik regime. The German Reich suffered the effects of the military defeat and its place was taken by the Republic of Weimar. The other European powers paid for the war in terms of their real political power in international field, yielding the role of ruling powers in favour of new actors such as United States and Japan.

The expected results include the collection and rationalization of archival documents (to be exploited through a series of specific publications); data analysis and its subsequent editing and placement inside of a software which can facilitate the research of future users of the Archive; the technical-electronic component will be conducted in collaboration with Rinascimento Digitale Foundation and the Institute of Computing Linguistic of CNR. The collaboration with the Historical

Office of the Italian Army General Staff will also provide a further stimulus to the enhancement of the structure in academic sphere aiming at reaching the standards of other major institutions in Europe, promoting the quality of service to the public. The interpretation of archival sources and their subsequent analysis constitutes a key aspect of the research, whose main objective is precisely the possibility of developing an analytical framework of events, designed to go beyond the well-known, yet still valid, interpretations of contemporary historiography, highlighting, through the integration capacity made available by the digital factor the new aspects of interpretation that will emerge from the study of specific sources.

The expected results include the collection and rationalization of archival documents - to be exploited through a series of specific publications; data analysis and its subsequent editing and placement inside of a software which can facilitate further researches; seminars and conferences organized by the single units and through the final conference at joint level for the dissemination of the results.