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Response Paper #1
HIST003A: Modern Europe
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Paper Title

How Austria-Hungary Waged War in Serbia by R.A. Reiss, published in Paris in 1915, describes the author's investigations into alleged war atrocities committed by Austria-Hungary during its invasion of Serbia. Though the book purports to be the "Personal Investigations of a Neutral," a closer examination calls into question both how "personal" and how "neutral" the resulting work is. Consequently, while Reiss' source yields valuable insights into conceptions of warfare leading into World War I, one must use caution and contextualize his account.

From a cursory glance of its title page, *How Austria-Hungary Waged War in Serbia* appears at first to offer a firsthand account of the conflict by a qualified and neutral source. Reiss, according to the work's title page, was a professor at the University of Lausanne, Switzerland, and a "practical criminologist." These professional credits depict Reiss as a scholar familiar with the cutting-edge criminological methodologies of his time, thereby lending credibility to his later analyses of bodies and murder scenes. Furthermore, as an inhabitant of Switzerland, a country which remained neutral in World War I, Reiss would seem to be devoid of any bias for or against a particular side in the conflict, hence the subtitle "Personal Investigations of a Neutral." The adjective "personal" refers to the fact that personal experience is supposedly the cornerstone of Reiss' account: as he writes in the introduction, "I did not limit myself to interrogating hundreds of Austrian prisoners and hundreds of eye-witnesses; I went to the spot [...]" (4). By emphasizing that the following incidents are described by Reiss, a neutral and well-qualified observer, as he saw them, the opening pages of the work establish a sense of credibility and impartiality.

Reiss further attempts to make his conclusions appear objective and persuasive through his use and presentation of evidence. Reiss employs roughly five different types of proof to make his case for Austro-Hungary's brutality: documentary (e.g. the letter reproduced on page 20), oral (interviews with soldiers and civilians), photographic (the images reproduced in the text), material (his descriptions of corpses, murder scenes, and wounds), and statistical (e.g. the graph on pages 24-25). Reiss often cross-checks facts across various types of evidence to support the trustworthiness of his assertions; for instance, he verifies testimony regarding massacres of civilians by printing a letter from General Holstein, which, he states, "proves what I have said" (20). The work's air of objectivity is reinforced by the fact that Reiss often attempts to present the evidence in a manner which seems as unmediated as possible and thus downplays his own role as its interpreter. He presents images of bodies and murder scenes when possible, rather than relying entirely on descriptions, and reproduces entire letters, rather than quoting them. Reiss further avoids any statements made in the first person, using language such as "The shape of these stains [...] showed that the blood had been thrown violently against the wall" rather than "I concluded from the shape of the stains that..." (32). These choices further contribute to the impression of objectivity and credibility established by the work's title page.

However, a more critical examination of Reiss' book casts aspersions upon its alleged neutrality and firsthand empiricism, and reveals that the finished product as was in fact heavily mediated by multiple actors with an anti-Austro-Hungarian slant. The first of these is the Serbian government, which, Reiss notes in his introduction, invited the criminologist with the express purpose of investigating their accusations (3). This immediately suggests that Reiss' experience in Serbia, firsthand though it may be, was tailored by the Serbian government, who possessed a vested interest in ensuring that Reiss substantiated their accusations against Austria-Hungary.

What involvement did the Serbian government have in arranging and facilitating Reiss' trip and his investigations? Did Reiss speak the language(s) of the soldiers and civilians he spoke to, or did he rely on a translator? Reiss remains largely silent on the context of his trip, and thus one must critically consider how the Serbian government might have shaped what Reiss saw and heard in Serbia and the way he interpreted it.

A secondary, but no less important, set of mediators are Reiss' translator and publisher, who had the power to shape the text itself. Though Reiss was Swiss, his work was translated into English and published in Paris. By 1915, both France and England were at war with Austria-Hungary and its allies; consequently, not only was the book produced and sold in a country antagonistic to Austria-Hungary, it was specifically targeted towards an English-speaking audience, many of whom would possess a similarly negative view. This raises the possibility that the editor may have excised incidents which provided a counter-perspective and could have weakened the book's accusations of brutality, or that the translator may have intensified the anti-Austro-Hungarian sentiment in the work through his or her choice of language. It is noteworthy that, whereas verbs such as "stated" or "deposed" are used when relating the testimony of Serbian soldiers and civilians, words such as "alleged" are used to cite Austro-Hungarian claims, immediately casting aspersions upon them.

In sum, Reiss' "personal investigations" and his account thereof were shaped by multiple non-"neutral" parties. Though *How Austria-Hungary Waged War in Serbia* projects an air of objectivity and veracity, this cannot be taken at face value, and the book should be verified and contextualized by using other sources before its assertions are taken as fact or used to generalize. Nonetheless, the book provides valuable insight into expectations of warfare and evolving conceptions of war crimes at the start of World War I, as well as the means by which Serbia

sought to rally the international community to its cause. Regardless of whether individual incidents are true or false, Reiss' depiction of certain acts of brutality as particularly shocking reveals much about which war tactics Europeans viewed as acceptable to employ and which groups of people were seen as acceptable to target. Furthermore, the context surrounding the text's creation and its implied audience reveals that Serbia sought to cultivate international support against Austria-Hungary by sponsoring an emotional and moral appeal to other European nations. This choice hints that swaying international opinion could be a powerful diplomatic tactic; furthermore, it evinces an idea that the international community had not only a role in policing the actions of other nations during wartime, but perhaps even a moral responsibility to do so.