

Harald Heppner - A Historian of Southeastern Europe¹

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Harald Heppner is a renowned and beloved personality in Eastern and Southeastern Europe. From Prešov to Chernivtsi and from Iași to Sofia, as well as from Bucharest to Cluj-Napoca and then again from Timișoara to Zagreb, Harald Heppner is well known and he has many friends.

Teachers and students, younger and older scholars, they all see Professor Heppner as a friend. How can this be explained? And, above all, why does he enjoy this great popularity across such a vast space? I have not yet mentioned his relations and activity in Central and Western Europe, where Harald Heppner – as Chairman of the Committee for the Study of the Culture and History of the Germans in Southeast Europe / Kommission für Geschichte und Kultur der Deutschen im Südosten Europas (2011-2012) or as a member of the Consultative Council of IKGS (Institut für Kultur und Geschichte der Deutschen im Südosten Europas in Munich) and of many other bodies – has played and continues to play a very important role.

Harald Heppner's science has also found its applicability in the various academic positions he has occupied throughout his life: President (1994-2001), then Vice-President of the Austrian Society for Eighteenth Century Studies (2008-2012) Director of the Department of History at the University of Graz (2011-2013), Chairman of the History Committee of the Austrian Defence Ministry (2005), General Coordinator of the Thirteenth International Congress of Eighteenth Century Studies. He is an honorary member of the historical department of the Romanian Academy (Iași Branch).

Harald Heppner was the initiator of the MA programme in Southeast European History, which he organized together with the University of Ljubljana and the Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca. The students of the university in Cluj have been the beneficiaries of mobilities that have allowed them to complete their training during the semesters they spent in Graz under the supervision of Harald Heppner.

¹ This material contains the modified text of the speech delivered by the author on the retirement of Prof. Harald Heppner / Graz, September 24, 2015, also published in the *Banatica* Magazine.

He has recently established the Southeast European Society for Eighteenth Century Studies, in which he is trying to bring together specialists in eighteenth-century history from Southeast Europe.

He is a highly praised scientist who belongs to a category of people that are always happy to share their knowledge and are generous by definition. It is not easy to know and to pass on what you know.

On a first glance at his scientific work, we can realize that Professor Harald Heppner has approached extremely vast research areas. At a more detailed look, we can notice that he has carried out very serious research, without losing sight of a sense of community, as he has brought together numerous authors from different countries and regions in several volumes he has edited, constantly pursuing new research ideas. Harald Heppner's work is somewhat similar to the history of the Monarchy, which, to this day, has been one of his goals: it is a fortunate blend of differences and complexities. However, this work of the mature historian, which relies on specialized knowledge, methodological approaches, historical philosophy and a keen knowledge of people, as well as on a sense of organization and order, can be successful only when it is built on a solid scientific basis. Professor Heppner acquired this strong knowledge foundation when he studied history at the University of Graz, but also when he learned the Russian language, which opened his door to the study of Slavic languages from Southeast Europe. His interest in studying Romanian appeared after a research stage he conducted in Bucharest (in 1978, before the Historians' World Congress in Bucharest), followed by other research stages in Moscow (1980), Sofia (1985) and Paris (1992).

Once the foundation – namely the study of history – was laid, his linguistic knowledge and his genuine interest in Southeast Europe, together with his willingness to understand a world that is not always positively perceived in Western Europe, have steadily enriched his experience through the people he met, or through the intelligence, insightfulness and emotion he acquired. After obtaining his PhD and Habilitation, Harald Heppner focused his research on several major themes. I will name only a few, because, judging by his list of publications, we can see that his attention is indeed concentrated on Southeast Europe. The complexity of the topics approached by Harald Heppner is impressive:

From *Das Rußlandbild in der öffentlichen Meinung Österreichs 1848–1856*. Graz 1975. (Zur Kunde Südosteuropas II/4) to *Österreich und die Donaufürstentümer 1774–1812. Ein Beitrag zur habsburgischen Südosteuropapolitik*, Graz 1984. (Zur Kunde Südosteuropas II/13/ translated into Romanian), Harald Heppner addressed two important themes, which lie on the fringes of a broader theme, the history of Austria, and which are directly related to it.

Then he examined the relations with Turkey (“Der lange Türkenkrieg (1593–1606) ein Wendepunkt im habsburgisch-osmanischen Gegensatz.” In: *Journal of Ottoman Studies* II, Istanbul 1981 S.133–146). The nobility and the defence against the Turks and postal services with Turkey, even the economic relations with the Moldovan Principality and Wallachia were tackled in this context (“Joseph Freiherr von HammerPurgstall.” In: *Steiermark-Brücke und Bollwerk. Landesausstellungskatalog* Graz 1986 S. 419–423. “Die habsburgisch-moldauischen Wirtschaftsbeziehungen um 1800.” In: *Festschrift Othmar Pickl zum 60.Geburtstag*. Graz 1987 S.229– 236. “Relațiile economice habsburgomoldave în jurul anului 1800.” In: *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie și Arheologie* XXV/2, Iași 1988 S.451–458).

Over the next decade, Harald Heppner also approached topics of Romanian, Bulgarian, Serbian and Croatian history in connection with Austria’s development policy in Southeast Europe, focusing on social categories that even today are regarded, on the one hand, as an element of the Austrian development policy and, on the other hand, as individuals who took over and assumed the function of liaising between different countries and regions: the students from Croatia, Romania and Turkey who studied at the University of Graz or at other universities in Austria, to whom Harald Heppner has dedicated numerous articles. In this context, we should mention the studies in which Harald Heppner has researched and analysed the formation of elites in Southeast Europe and in the Balkans (“Die galizischen Studenten in Graz 1848–1918.” In: *Österreichische Osthefte* 29, Wien 1987, in: *Les étudiants – liens sociaux, culture, moeurs du Moyen-Âge jusqu’au XIXe siècle*. Cracovie 1991, “‘Türkische’ Studenten an der Universität Graz 1863–1914.” In: *Blätter für Heimatkunde* 61, Graz 1987). This was the starting point for a research interest in the issue of the national identity of the peoples from Southeast Europe and in the formation of nations and national states (*Contribuții la istoria României și a Românilor* [Contributions to the history of Romania and the Romanians]. Cluj 2002), in the role that universities played in this process, in the history of cities, and in cultural history and historiography. Virtually no field of historical research has remained uninvestigated by Harald Heppner.

At around the time of commemorating one hundred years since the outbreak of World War I, Harald Heppner made a remarkable contribution to the *International Online Encyclopaedia of the First World War 1914–1918*, published by Freie Universität Berlin and other partners. Moreover, the volume edited by Harald Heppner: *Umbruch mit Schlachtenlärm: Siebenbürgen und der Erste Weltkrieg*, Böhlau Verlag, Köln Weimar Wien, 2017, is dedicated to World War I, to Transylvania and the Transylvanians.

Harald Heppner is a historian of our times who knows all the nuances and subtleties of historical research and writing, and yet the basic object of his

research is man in his environment. The role of the province as part of a whole (*Provinz als Denk- und Lebensform. Der Donau Karpatenraum im 19. Jh.*, edited together with Mira Miladinovic Zalaznik, Peter Lang, 2015) or the Habsburgs' journeys (*Habsburger unterwegs. Vom Barocken Pomp bis zur smarten Businessstour*, Leykam, Graz 2017), edited together with Renate Zedinger and Marlies Raffler, are further volumes that analyse different facets of the history of these people.

In 2015 Professor Heppner retired. He has remained active in a series of projects, in various committees, and he continues to do research and to guide students and young researchers. At the festivity organized on the occasion of his retirement, Professor Heppner mentioned that he had worked 16,219 days and 64 semesters and, most importantly, he thanked the university for allowing him to work freely and for supporting him at all times.

The countries in this part of the world have honoured him with three Honorary Doctorates, in Timișoara (2001), Cluj-Napoca (2007) and Sofia (2015). We hope that we will continue to enjoy his studies and that he will continue to share his knowledge and experience with his students and fellow professors, or get involved in projects that will explore the history of "our Europe", as the chronicler Nicolae Stoica of Hațeg once stated. This is also the principle that has guided Harald Heppner – uniting what is different and varied.