

## **BREAD IN THE GREAT WAR**

Without doubt bread is one of the most significant inventions of Man. It marks a revolutionary turn in his evolution. From being a hunter-gatherer and living as a nomad, Man started working the land, building settlements, creating culture and civilisations.

Bread is the only type of food connecting Man with basic principles of life and the transcendental.

Ritual bread follows us from birth to death, even after death. When in the ancient past our ancestors started making bread that was a result of long-lasting experience, patient work and will. As soon as they tasted it, people realized its importance to survival. Precisely because of its importance as basic food, bread has become a symbol of life, spirituality and a reflection of culture.

Bread has gained its unique position in man's life because of its peculiarity. Bread's ingredients are the basis and symbols of a lasting life (seed, salt and water); then as food – "first course"; while the very making of dough and baking are seen as the creation of the world.

In the tradition of many peoples, bread creates the balance between Man and invisible forces endangering his life, and is also used as an object with magical powers to fulfil human wishes. The former is played out through giving bread as a gift, and the latter is based on the belief that bread can transfer certain qualities onto those who come in contact with it.

The author's intent was not only to show the importance of bread as food but also to illustrate the miracle of bread as a treasury of collective memory and testament to ethical and symbolic values and downfalls of human during most difficult times such as war.

Soldiers and historians usually write war histories. However, military and history books do not tell it all. While preparing the book the author reviewed more than a thousand photographs and authentic witness accounts – from the Military Museum in Belgrade to the Imperial War Museum in London. The topic of his research was – Bread in the Great War!

The topic of bread's significance in soldiers' diet as well as its symbolic place in everyday life during the Great War has been left on the margins.

"An army marches on its stomach," claimed Napoleon. Though the importance of soldiers in trenches and on the frontlines is beyond dispute, the Great War wasn't won on the front. An important turn of events happened when the United States stopped sending wheat to the Central Powers, and opted to support the Allied Powers. Then US President W. Wilson was quoted saying after the war that "it was a victory thanks to wheat."

The Great War was the first war in which civilians were legitimate war targets. The war was not waged only with firearms on battlefields, but also by creating shortages of bread and food in cities far away from frontlines. The suffering of civilians was not any less than those of soldiers in trenches. In all cities of countries at war, from Wien, Paris, London and Berlin to Moscow and Prague, women used to queue for hours to get their rations – a modest piece of bread.

Examples of real courage were not only among soldiers. Women who stayed at home were just as brave and courageous. They are the 'forgotten' heroines who waited patiently in long lines to get a piece of bread, worked the land, and looked after the children and households. Thanks to them homes were preserved. Homes to which the lucky ones, those who were not killed in battle, returned. Without women's sacrifice it is difficult to imagine how 'normal' life would have continued after the war.

One of the more important events during the Great War happened in Russia – the 1917 October Revolution. However, it is an obscure fact that the first protests were held in Petrograd and their initiators were women who stood in breadlines for as long as 60 hours a week. They took to the streets demanding peace, bread and freedom in spite being fired at by Tsar's soldiers. Workers joined these women later. These mass February protests in Petrograd got the name Bread Uprisings. They led to the fall of the Tsar and marked the beginning of the October Revolution.

The book does not show the Great War neither in the context of military nor war fronts, battles, countries at war. It rather focuses on common topics that show equal suffering and cruelty endured by people of all countries at war. The book shows that in any war both its winners and losers are in fact all *defeated*. In that sense, the book aimed to send an important anti-war message.

The quality of book was greatly helped by and through cooperation with the Mr. Andrea Fadani, Ph.D. (Museum der Brotkultur, Ulm) and Mr. Laurent Bourcier (Membre-fondateur du Centre de recherche et d'étude de la boulangerie et ses compagnonnages - CREBESC, France).