

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

ALPS AND CARPATHIANS AT THE GREAT WAR

*Entangled Fronts, Hinterlands,
and Memory*

5-6 October 2026

Museo Storico Italiano della Guerra
via Castelbarco 7, 38068 Rovereto (TN)

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

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INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

**ALPS AND
CARPATHIANS
AT THE GREAT WAR**

Rovereto 2026

Conference Venue:

Museo Storico Italiano della Guerra
via Castelbarco, 7
38068 Rovereto (TN)

Partners:



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della Repubblica di Polonia
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ALPS AND CARPATHIANS AT THE GREAT WAR

Entangled Fronts, Hinterlands, and Memory

The aim of the conference is to discuss a comparative analysis of military operations and related wartime phenomena in Galicia and present-day northern Italy during the First World War. The discussions will focus on the experience of war in mountainous environments, including the impact of terrain and weather on winter operations, the logistical challenges of supplying troops in high-altitude regions, and trench warfare in mountain landscapes. The conference will also address the fate of civilians behind the front lines, such as refugees, prisoners of war, repression, occupation, and the situation of national and linguistic minorities, as well as the evolution of war memory cultures, encompassing military cemeteries, transformed battlefields, museums, monuments, education, literature, and the First World War as a tourist and heritage framework.

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

ARRIVAL • 4 October 2026

Arrival of participants and accommodation in Rovereto.

Optional field trip to selected First World War heritage sites in the region, followed by an informal dinner.

DAY I • 5 October 2026

10:00-10:30 Registration, Opening & Welcome Remarks

Agnieszka Gloria Kamińska (Consul General of the Republic of Poland in Milan)

Oswald Mederle (President of the Museo Storico Italiano della Guerra a Rovereto)

Francesco Frizzera (Director of the Museo Storico Italiano della Guerra a Rovereto)

Magdalena Wrana (Director of the Scientific Centre of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Rome)

I

Galicians and Italians at War: Stories Across Fronts

10:30-12:00 | Chair: Francesco Frizzera

10:30-10:50 **Joanna Sondel-Cedarmas** (Sapienza University in Rome) *Polish Soldiers in Italy 1916-1917*

10:50-11:10 **Quinto Antonelli** (Independent Scholar, former Fondazione Museo Storico del Trentino) *"Quando fui sui monti Carpazi". L'esperienza di guerra dei soldati trentini sul fronte orientale* [*"When I was in the Carpathian Mountains"; the war experience of Trentino soldiers on the Eastern Front*]

11:10-11:30 **Piotr Szlanta** (University of Warsaw) *General Military Governorate in Lublin 1915-1918 - the main principles of the Austro-Hungarian occupation policy*

11:30-12:00 Discussion

12:00 Coffee Break

ALPS AND CARPATHIANS AT THE GREAT WAR

Entangled Fronts, Hinterlands, and Memory



Civilians at War: Refugees, Public Health and Nutrition on the Fronts and Beyond

12:30-14:00 | Chair: Kerstin von Lingen

12:30–12:50 **Kamil Ruszała** (Jagiellonian University in Kraków)
Bodies in Transit: Refugee Camps, Biopolitics, and Civilian Resilience in Eastern Europe at War

12:50–13:10 **Liana Popa** (University of Vienna)
(In)voluntary travelers: A gender-sensitive approach to civilians' experiences of war-related migration in WW1 Romania

13:10–13:30 **Oksana Nagornaia** (Humboldt University in Berlin)
Between Warscapes and Imperial Military Medicine: civilian bodies on the Eastern Front in the First World War

13:30–14:00 **Discussion**

14:00 **Lunch Break**

15:30–17:00 **KEYNOTE LECTURE I**
Gustavo Corni
Military occupations in comparison: Eastern Front and North-Eastern Italy

19:00 **Conference Dinner**

ALPS AND CARPATHIANS AT THE GREAT WAR

Entangled Fronts, Hinterlands, and Memory

DAY II • 6 October 2026

9:00–9:30 Registration & Morning Coffee

9:30–10:30 KEYNOTE LECTURE II

Camillo Zadra

Critical Perspectives on the Great War Trench Preservation and Alpine Museums

III

Frontline Space – War and Landscape

10:30–12:00 | Chair: Kamil Ruszała

10:30–10:50

Rupert Gietl, Gianluca Fondriest (ArcTeam/Freie Universitaet Bozen)

Written in the Landscape: Places, Traces, and Memories of the First World War in the Sexten Dolomites – Emerging Technologies and Innovative Data Systems for WW1 Conflict Heritage Management

10:50–11:10

Nicola Fontana (Museo Storico Italiano della Guerra)

Fortificazioni e militarizzazione del territorio. Il caso trentino tra Ottocento e Novecento [Fortifications and the Militarization of the Territory: The Case of South Tyrol Between the 19th and 20th Centuries]

11:10–11:30

Stefano Morosini (University of Bergamo)

High-Altitude Warfare as Ecological Engineering: Mount Scorzuzzo and the Environmental History of the Alpine Front (Stelvio National Park, Italy)

11:30–12:00

Discussion

12:00

Coffee Break

IV

Memoryscapes and Narratives of Defeat, Trauma and Victory

12:30–14:00 | Chair: Piotr Szlanta

12:30–12:50

Francesco Frizzera (Museo Storico Italiano della Guerra)

Nationalizing the frontier dead: Casteldante Ossuary, memory tourism, and the commemorative landscape of Rovereto

12:50–13:10

Stawomir Kułacz (WSB Merito University in Gdańsk, World War One Research Society)

The face of mountain warfare: personal narratives from the Carpathians, 1914–1915

13:10–13:30

Marco Mondini (University of Padua)

Small, Enormous, Useless, Heroic: A Transnational and Cultural Perspective on the Great War in the Alps

13:30–14:00

Discussion

ALPS AND CARPATHIANS AT THE GREAT WAR

Entangled Fronts, Hinterlands, and Memory

14:00–14:15 **Conference Remarks and Closure**

14:15 **Lunch for Speakers**

15:30 **Sightseeing: Museo Storico Italiano della Guerra**

DEPARTURE • 7 October 2026

Con il contributo di Provincia autonoma di Trento e Comune di Rovereto; Il convegno è stato realizzato grazie al contributo della Direzione Generale Biblioteche e Istituti Culturali del Ministero della Cultura /
With the contribution of the Autonomous Province of Trento, the Municipality of Rovereto, and the Ministry of Culture – Directorate General for Libraries and Cultural Institutes

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POLISH SOLDIERS IN ITALY 1916–1917

Joanna Sondel-Cedarmas

Sapienza University of Rome

The paper focuses on the experiences of Polish soldiers from Galicia who were enlisted in the Austro-Hungarian Army and transferred to the Italian front between 1916 and 1917. Particular attention will be paid to the events surrounding Józef Piłsudski's First Polish Legion, which was transferred to the Austro-Italian front in September 1917 following the Oath Crisis. Drawing on autobiographical sources, diaries, and testimonies of Polish soldiers, the paper seeks to reconstruct the experiences of Polish soldiers who served in the Austro-Hungarian Army during the Great War, as well as the conditions of military service on the Austro-Italian front.

BODIES IN TRANSIT: REFUGEE CAMPS, BIOPOLITICS, AND CIVILIAN RESILIENCE IN EASTERN EUROPE AT WAR

Kamil Ruszała

Jagiellonian University in Krakow

The First World War triggered mass population movements on an unprecedented scale, putting Europe quite literally “on the move.” This paper examines this experience from the perspective of the Eastern Front and the Habsburg Empire, where the wartime state developed an extensive system of refugee camps to accommodate civilians displaced from the war zones. While these camps constituted an important mechanism of state assistance, they were created under conditions of wartime emergency and were therefore deeply shaped by military discipline, surveillance, and practices of social control. Focusing on everyday life in Habsburg refugee camps, the paper explores the intersection of forced mobility, biopolitics, and state power. It asks how displaced civilians experienced and negotiated institutional attempts to regulate their bodies, movements, health, work, and everyday routines, and how they developed strategies of adaptation, resilience, and agency within these constraints. Finally, the paper confronts official representations of refugee care with the realities of displacement, examining the tensions between wartime propaganda, humanitarian rhetoric, and refugees’ lived experiences. In doing so, it approaches the refugee camp as both a space of assistance and a laboratory of wartime governance in East Central Europe.

(IN)VOLUNTARY TRAVELERS: GENDERED EXPERIENCES OF WAR, DISPLACEMENT, AND HUMANITARIAN AID IN WW1 ROMANIA

Liana Popa

University of Vienna

This paper examines the trajectories of three groups of women in Romania during the autumn and winter of 1916. Through a gender-sensitive approach, it seeks to show how war-related displacement and humanitarian aid can serve as analytical concepts for understanding women's wartime experiences in WW1 Romania. Following the invasion of the Romanian Kingdom by the Central Powers, more than two-thirds of the country came under occupation. Military collapse and the evacuation of the government and elite, together with fear of violence, insecurity, and material hardship associated with occupation, compelled large parts of the civilian population to leave their homes and seek refuge in the unoccupied region of Moldavia. At the same time, nurses from the Scottish Women's Hospital arrived in the Balkans, including Romania, as part of their international humanitarian mission. By bringing together the realities of displaced refugee women, evacuated elite women, and foreign medical volunteer nurses, the paper understands the provision and receipt of humanitarian assistance as a crucial connecting link between different forms of (in)voluntary wartime mobility. Following a pluralistic and interdisciplinary approach, the analysis enriches its gender-historical focus with aspects from spatial, environmental, and migration history, and aims to investigate and contrast the agency and experiences of these three groups of historical agents in WW1 Romania.

BETWEEN WARSCAPES AND IMPERIAL MILITARY MEDICINE: CIVILIAN BODIES ON THE EASTERN FRONT IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR

Oksana Nagornaia

Humboldt University of Berlin

The First World War transformed the multiethnic borderlands of Eastern Europe into militarized landscapes. Mobile warfare, industrial destruction, scorched-earth tactic, and occupation reshaped not only infrastructures and environments but also the ways in which civilian populations on the front-lines were perceived, classified, and controlled. This study asks: How were warsapes and civilian bodies connected through practices of military medicine in Eastern Europe, and what consequences did this have for civilians and imperial occupation regimes? The research focuses on Galicia, Russian Poland, and Romania—multiethnic regions in which three imperial armies collided and established competing occupation regimes. It draws on German, Austrian, and Russian military sources, medical journals, official reports by military physicians, ego-documents, and photographs. The central argument is that military medicine was not merely concerned with treating wounded civilians. It became a crucial instrument for controlling bodies, populations, and spaces. Epidemiological classifications, hygiene practices, and medical perceptions increasingly linked disease, environment, and ethnic identity, legitimizing interventions such as compulsory vaccination, quarantine, segregation, and deportation. Existing antisemitic and colonial stereotypes could thereby be medically systematized and translated into concrete practices and language of occupation. At the same time, civilians were not passive objects of medical and military control. Through evasion, concealment, resistance, and survival strategies, they actively shaped and constrained occupation policies. The Eastern Front therefore reveals a specific form of medicalization in which the control of entire populations and landscapes became important to imperial warfare—with legacies that extended beyond the collapse of the empires.

WRITTEN IN THE LANDSCAPE: PLACES, TRACES, AND MEMORIES OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR IN THE SEXTEN DOLOMITES - EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES AND INNOVATIVE DATA SYSTEMS FOR WW1 CONFLICT HERITAGE MANAGEMENT

Rupert Gietl

ArcTeam

Gianluca Fondriest

Freie Universitaet Bozen

This study presents the methodology and results of the research project WiL (Written in the Landscape. Places, traces, and memories of the First World War in the Sesto Dolomites), conducted by the Faculty of Design and Arts at the Free University of Bozen/Bolzano and funded by the “Research Südtirol/Alto Adige 2019” program. The initiative provided the first systematic, comprehensive exploration and documentation of an entire World War I front sector, specifically focusing on the Tre Cime di Lavaredo/Drei Zinnen plateau between Großes Wildgrabenjoch and Paternkofel/Monte Paterno. Combining conflict archaeology, historical-archival research, and socio-cultural analysis, the project surveyed over 4.6 kilometers of front lines and an adjacent 300-hectare logistical hinterland. Between 1915 and 1917, military engineering fundamentally transformed the Sesto Dolomites into high-altitude theaters of war, carving out an intricate network of mule tracks, cableways, trenches, artillery positions, and tunnels. Fieldwork adapted modern remote sensing and digital recording technologies to overcome the challenges of rugged Alpine terrain. High-resolution geospatial datasets—including 1-meter digital terrain models and 20-centimeter aerial imagery—were integrated with differential GPS surveys, drone-based photogrammetry (Structure from Motion), 360° ground panoramas, and terrestrial 3D modeling. A specialized approach was applied to document underground complexes, such as the Monte Paterno tunnel system. Post-fieldwork processing over 35,000 GPS points, 325 3D models, 9,500 geolocated photos, and a GIS dataset comprising more than 13,800 polygons. These digital assets were cross-referenced with extensive Austro-Hungarian and Italian archival records, historical photographs, and diaries. The results reveal a dense, highly preserved network of defensive structures, caverns, firing positions, cableways, and barrack foundations across key strategic sectors (including Sextenstein, Toblinger Knoten, Kuppe Ost/West, and Schwabenalpenkopf). Ultimately, the project establishes an empirical, high-resolution spatial baseline representing the state of war remains 104 years after the conflict, offering an integrated model for mountain conflict archaeology and the preservation of historical memory. The data from the WiL project, combined with findings from other initiatives in the region, have now been integrated into a 3D platform – called Vertical War – representing the First World War front line.

FORTIFICATIONS AND THE MILITARIZATION OF THE TERRITORY: THE CASE OF SOUTH TYROL BETWEEN THE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURIES

Nicola Fontana

Museo Storico Italiano della Guerra

Between the early 19th century and the outbreak of World War I, the Tyrol region served as a defensive bastion protecting the southwestern borders of the Habsburg Monarchy. The Tyrolean “fortress region” was therefore the site of numerous permanent fortification projects, which also entailed the regulation and militarization of the surrounding landscape. This paper examines three key dynamics in the relationship between fortifications and the territory in the southern part of Tyrol, corresponding to the present-day region of Trentino-Alto Adige. The first element is the no-building zone (Bauverbotsrayon) surrounding the defensive structures, regulated by the law of January 1860 but fully enforced only from 1895 onward with the installation of boundary markers. The law provided for the establishment of two zones: the “restricted” zone, where there was an absolute ban on construction, and the “extended” zone, within which building permits were subject to the approval of military authorities. These measures led to a decline in the value of land and real estate surrounding the fortresses. Permission to build was contingent upon the signing of the so-called “demolition agreement,” by which the owner undertook to comply with any design modifications imposed by the Military Engineering Corps and, above all, to demolish all existing structures on their property without claiming compensation. In the strongholds of Trento and Riva del Garda, the scope of the building ban also called into question plans for urban expansion and the development of tourist facilities. The significant economic damage inflicted on both private and public property explains the tenacious resistance mounted by the political administration and the efforts made by Trentino’s representatives in the Vienna Parliament to secure a substantial revision of the law. Second, the issue of forest thinning on lands adjacent to the forts—essential for ensuring unobstructed lines of sight and firing ranges—is analyzed. Beginning in 1912, the Command of the 14th Army Corps in Innsbruck was granted the authority to order the felling of trees and regulate agricultural cultivation in the name of national defense. This measure fueled bitter conflicts with municipalities, which were concerned about the loss of forest revenues and the reduction in the rental value of mountain pastures. Finally, the study addresses the impact of artillery firing exercises. In addition to damaging private land and effectively establishing a military easement that diminished land value, the strict security measures had critical repercussions on the rural economy. The forced eviction of herders and livestock, in fact, compromised the use of the alpine pastures and local cheese production, highlighting the deep divide between the Empire’s strategic needs and the livelihoods of the Alpine communities.

HIGH-ALTITUDE WARFARE AS ECOLOGICAL ENGINEERING: MOUNT SCORLUZZO AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY OF THE ALPINE FRONT (STELVIO NATIONAL PARK, ITALY)

Stefano Morosini

University of Bergamo

This paper reinterprets the Italian–Austro-Hungarian Alpine front as a site of ecological engineering rather than merely a theatre of extreme mountain warfare. It focuses on the Austro-Hungarian underground barracks on Mount Scorluzzo (3,094 m), strategically located above the Stelvio Pass and preserved for more than a century beneath approximately sixty cubic metres of ice. Bringing together archival research in Vienna and Rome with geomorphological mapping, cryo-stratigraphic analysis, botanical and archaeozoological investigation, entomology, and environmental DNA metabarcoding, the study reconstructs both the military occupation of the site and its environmental afterlife. The paper argues that high-altitude warfare created a wartime metabolism that redirected biomass, materials, and energy from the valleys into fragile periglacial ecosystems. Timber, metal, fuel, food, and other supplies transformed the summit into a logistical and metabolic node, while excavations, trenches, artillery craters, combustion, and waste altered the terrain, slope processes, and permafrost regimes. Inside the shelter, imported organic material and human habitation produced a temporary domestic micro-ecosystem which, after the position was abandoned, became sealed in ice and formed a stratified cryogenic archive. Botanical remains, animal traces, ice layers, and environmental DNA illuminate everyday military life and the origins of wartime supplies, while surveys of shell craters reveal ecological trajectories that remain visible in contemporary plant and microbial communities. The results of this research now form the basis of an ambitious museum project in Bormio. Scheduled to open in summer 2027, the new museum will illustrate the distinctive environmental characteristics of warfare conducted at altitudes exceeding 3,000 metres. Its central exhibit will be the Scorluzzo barracks, together with more than 300 exceptionally well-preserved artefacts recovered from the ice. Mount Scorluzzo therefore demonstrates how industrial warfare penetrated and transformed remote Alpine environments. At the same time, contemporary warming acts as an archival mediator: glacial retreat exposes material evidence of the conflict while also threatening its preservation. The case reframes the “White War” as a socio-ecological process and provides a comparative framework for investigating the environmental history and heritage of other mountain fronts.

MILITARY OCCUPATIONS IN COMPARISON: EASTERN FRONT AND NORTH-EASTERN ITALY

Gustavo Corni

The international literature on the First World War has reached, in particular in the last decades, gigantic dimensions. The greater part of these publications deal with the military and political-diplomatic history. In the last ten-twenty years new, illuminating contributions have been published on a topic, which was so far relatively under-represented: the military occupations. We assume, often uncritically, that the First World War's archetype was trench warfare along the almost immobile Western Front. On the contrary, for the historiographical common-sense the mobile war, made of *Bliizkrieg* and great advances/retreats on the field, is identified with the following war: 1939 - 1945, when Nazi Germany expanded its domination on a large part of the European continent, with occupations who lasted until the summer of 1944. But also during the Great War there were large and long-lasting military occupations, mostly by the Central Powers. These occupations covered not only Belgium and North-Eastern France, the territories which are best known and studied, but also large parts of the Balkans, the western part of the Tsarist empire, a corner of Northern Italy, as well as regions of the Near East. During these occupations the occupiers installed various forms of governments, in most cases directly managed by the military, and adopted different kinds of politics on the most crucial fields: the economic exploitation, the search for a collaboration by a part of the local ruling elites, policies concerning the national questions, etc., having different, sometimes divergent aims: the absorption, the mere exploitation for the maintenance of the occupying armies, or - as is the peculiar case of the Ober-Ost territory (the actual Lithuania, Latvia, Belarus) - envisioning the project of a new order (socially, economically, nationally) in order to serve the war interests of the German Reich. In the context of a research in progress, which aims to analyse comparatively and from a larger perspective the whole range of occupations during the First World War, I intend to sketch some outlines for a comparison.

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE GREAT WAR TRENCH PRESERVATION AND ALPINE MUSEUMS

Camillo Zadra

From 1919 up to the most recent years, what has survived the First World War (trenches, battlefields, cemeteries, ossuaries, museums) has been a visiting destination. For a few decades such phenomenon affected first of all the families and the comrades of the fallen, then school classes and tourists. Deciding was the relevance that the governments of different countries were ascribing to the effects of the outcome of the WWI in shaping national identity. Visits aimed to celebrate the fallen and remember the war events; the maintenance of the sites had primarily to ensure that monuments and memorial stones could be easily accessible. Since the Seventies, after the inevitable disappearance of the veterans, some important characteristics of the visit to the sites of WWI have changed. In Italy, the outcome of the WWII weakened the former nationalism and promoted the coming into being of a widespread pacifist common sense. War experience of both armies soldiers looked also similar, so commemorations themselves began to involve friends and enemies. The growing of an historiographical interest about the life of the soldiers and the remains of battlefield, and an increasing environmental awareness encouraged visiting sites like trenches, still perfectly visible mainly in mountain areas of the front. For a lot of people involved in hiking clubs was common to find in contact with traces of the war. Based on such new perspectives, associations and local councils – in Italy, Slovenia, Austria - created and developed an action still active today in order to promote the restoration and maintenance of historical sites of WWI with support of national laws, combining cultural, ethical and economic-turistic reasons. In this deeply changed scenario are we faced with a “new” memory of WWI? With what connotations and perspectives? What role could play historical museums? What kind of comparisons with the memories of other wars?

GENERAL MILITARY GOVERNORATE IN LUBLIN 1915-1918 - THE MAIN PRINCIPLES OF THE AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN OCCUPATION POLICY

Piotr Szlanta

University of Warsaw

As a result of hostilities during World War I, after the breakthrough of Gorlice in May 1915, a large part of the Polish lands, including the Kingdom of Poland (called also Russian-Poland) fell under occupation of the armies of the Central Powers. They divided this territory among themselves. The Germans established the General Government of Warsaw in Warsaw, while the Austro-Hungarians established the General Military Governorate in Lublin (Militär Generalgouvernement Lublin - MGGL). The MGGL covered the southern areas of the Polish Kingdom (45,000 sq. km), including two major cities, namely Lublin and Kielce. These predominantly agricultural areas, partially devastated by the hostilities, devoid of major industrial centers, were inhabited by Poles, Jews, and in small numbers, on the eastern outskirts, by Ukrainians and Byelorussians, a total of about 3.5 million people. The paper will address the most important aims of the occupation regime. The most important of these was, without doubt, ensuring security behind the front line as well as along the lines of communication linking the front with the rear. Maintaining law and order on the rear of the fighting troops was a main objective of the occupation administration. The second key task of the occupation authorities was the economic exploitation of the territories under their control due to the protracted war and the depletion of human, material and financial resources. The occupants strict control of the economic life of the MGGL, resulted in altering of the free market. They sought to procure as many agricultural products and raw materials as possible, with a goal to use them for the military efforts of the Danube Monarchy and to feed its population.

THE FACE OF MOUNTAIN WARFARE: PERSONAL NARRATIVES FROM THE CARPATHIANS, 1914–1915

Sławomir Kułacz

WSB Merito University in Gdańsk, World War One Research Society

Drawing on soldiers' memoirs and diaries, this paper explores the experience of mountain warfare in the Carpathians during the first winter of the First World War. Inspired by the Face of Battle tradition, it focuses not primarily on operational developments and commanders, but on how combat was experienced and remembered by those who took part in it. I will examine in detail the physical and environmental conditions that shaped soldiers' experiences: difficult terrain, extreme winter weather, deep snow, cold, and the exhausting movement and fighting in the mountains. Particular attention is paid to fatigue and physical suffering. At the same time, their accounts reveal a less obvious aspect of wartime experience. Even in conditions they frequently perceived as hellish, soldiers could pause to notice and appreciate the beauty of the Carpathian winter landscape. The coexistence of aesthetic appreciation, exhaustion, fear, and physical suffering illustrates the complexity of combat experience and challenges the tendency to treat the battlefield solely as a space of violence and destruction. By bringing these personal voices to the foreground, I intend to present mountain warfare not only as a military operation conducted in difficult terrain, but as a deeply embodied and sensory experience of cold, exhaustion, pain, danger, and – unexpectedly – beauty.

SMALL, ENORMOUS, USELESS, HEROIC: A TRANSNATIONAL AND CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE GREAT WAR IN THE ALPS

Marco Mondini

University of Padua

My paper examines the First World War in the Alps as a cultural artefact, taking as its point of departure the discrepancy between the military reality of the Alpine front and the central place it subsequently occupied in Italian and Austrian collective memory. For most European military leaders—from Luigi Cadorna to his counterparts in both the enemy and Allied armies—the mountains represented first and foremost an obstacle: an environment suited to defence and limited operations, but ill-suited to major mass offensives. The deployment of Italian forces reflected this assessment. Italy concentrated its principal military effort on the Isonzo, while large-scale operations in the Alps remained comparatively rare. Even the Alpini, although valued for their cohesion and fighting qualities, constituted only a limited proportion of the army and did not play a strategically decisive role. The war in the Alps was therefore “small” in operational terms but “enormous” in the prominence it acquired in wartime communication and subsequent memory. This disproportion emerged during the conflict itself, rather than solely through Fascist memory politics after the war. Italy’s intervention, marked by profound domestic divisions and followed by widespread disappointment at the failure to achieve the rapid victories that had been promised, produced an early crisis of legitimacy. Journalists, photographers, filmmakers and military institutions consequently helped devise a narrative capable of making the conflict acceptable. The mountains, already imbued with the imagery of Romanticism and the culture of mountaineering, provided an ideal setting. In place of mud, anonymity and mass death in the trenches, this narrative offered pristine peaks, small patrols, feats of athleticism and individual exploits.

Luigi Barzini’s reporting transformed the Alpine landscape into the protagonist of a picturesque and adventurous war. The illustrated press and the photographic publications issued by the Italian Supreme Command almost entirely excluded death and combat, favouring instead images of sentries, marches, skiing exercises, artillery hauled along precipitous tracks and spectacular “citadels of ice.” This “tourist gaze” concealed the industrial nature of the conflict and presented the Alps as the setting for a sporting contest. A similar process operated in cinema: Maciste Alpino translated the war into a comic and chivalric fable, devoid of bloodshed, in which the hero’s individual strength and virility guaranteed victory and the restoration of order. After 1918, this representation became firmly established in memoirs, literature and film. The myth of the “White War,” then, was founded essentially upon an act of erasure. The technological sophistication and enormous human costs required to fight and survive at high altitude were obscured by an antimodern, chivalric and consolatory image. The war in the Alps appeared as war as it ought to have been: individual rather than massified, noble rather than anonymous, heroic rather than futile. During the conflict, this paradigm helped to build and sustain popular consent by redirecting the collective gaze away from the slaughter on the Isonzo and towards the apparently less bloody exploits of Alpine patrols. After the war, it fostered a distorted memory and a sacrificial myth that proved particularly useful to Fascism, but which survived long beyond the regime and continues to shape representations of mountain warfare to this day.

NATIONALIZING THE FRONTIER DEAD: CASTELDANTE OSSUARY, MEMORY TOURISM, AND THE COMMEMORATIVE LANDSCAPE OF ROVERETO

Francesco Frizzera

Museo Storico Italiano della Guerra

The aftermath of the First World War triggered a transnational revolution in the public and political cult of the fallen, where nineteenth-century practices of individualized mourning were transformed into massive, state-sponsored commemorative programs. In Italy, this process served as a vital instrument of political integration and nationalization, aimed at turning collective trauma into political consensus through the sacred aestheticization of sacrifice. This paper explores the evolution of war cemeteries and monumental ossuaries in Italy, with a specific focus on the former Habsburg borderlands—a region defined by contested allegiances, fragmented identities, and transnational war experiences. Focusing on the town of Rovereto, a pivotal node in the post-war memory landscape, the paper investigates the complex journey from provisional field graves and local civic mourning to the state-driven monumentalization of the dead. At the core of this analysis is the shrine of Casteldante. Conceived as a major military ossuary under the Fascist regime, Casteldante physically and symbolically re-ordered the memory of the conflict. By gathering the remains of thousands of soldiers—both Italian and former Austro-Hungarian combatants—the monumental complex epitomized the tension between local, cross-border mourning and the rigid, nationalizing narrative imposed by the Italian state. By cross-referencing national policies of body management (from local graves to central ossuaries) with the peculiar socio-political dynamics of Trentino, this paper demonstrates how the former Habsburg frontier was transformed into a cornerstone of Italy's public cult of the fallen, shaping the memory of the Great War for generations to come.