

## ‘Popularising the popular’: popular history magazines as a part of transnational and national historical cultures

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## 1. Introduction

Popular accounts of history – as a part of public history – have reached a new worldwide peak in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Significant factors have played a role in this development, namely the increase of leisure time and with this a correspondingly rising thirst for entertainment as well as (cultural) tourism and other cultural needs. Furthermore, higher standards of education in general and partly a greater amount of disposable income can be mentioned as well as possibly also – particularly in the so-called ‘Western societies’ – the demographic development with a growing life expectancy often related to an increasing need for orientation in a more and more dynamically changing world. Last but not least, an increase in (commercialised) mass media representations of history in the form of anniversaries and commemorations can be recorded as a medium for political statements and as a means to create media events.

In this context, an international phenomenon can be observed which initially provokes amazement in light of the quantity and diversity of audio-visual offers of popular historical culture in the field of television, film as well as computer and video games – but at the same time it proves the media studies theory that new kinds of media do not automatically replace older ones. A very traditional medium, which in Europe dates back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>1</sup> and has no moving pictures, sound or interactive options, has been on the rise since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century: more and more titles of popular history magazines have appeared in increasingly dynamic

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. e. g. in the German research field: Werner Faulstich: *Medienwandel im Industrie- und Massenzeitalter (1830–1900)*. Göttingen 2004; Rudolf Stöber: *Deutsche Pressegeschichte. Von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*. 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed. Konstanz 2005; Jürgen Wilke: *Grundzüge der Medien- und Kommunikationsgeschichte. Von den Anfängen bis ins 20. Jahrhundert*. Köln et al. 2000.

and internationally networked<sup>2</sup> markets for history magazines,<sup>3</sup> whereas the situation can differ significantly from country to country: while in some countries the magazines have a long tradition – like in the UK, France, Russia, Turkey or Germany – and have adapted to modern conditions over time, completely new approaches can be found in other countries due to major political and social changes – like in Russia; then again in other countries – which are not to be neglected on a global scale – the culture of commercial history magazines is barely older than ten or twenty years – like in Brazil or PR China.

Even if some newly established magazines – often also as extension lines of established magazines or as imports of other countries' formats<sup>4</sup> – have not been on the market for a long time, the overall conclusion is that media companies are broadening their diverse range of history magazines – which means they assume that a sufficient market demand already exists or they believe that they can create it so that the investment will be worthwhile.

Even if the number of customers and readers of those magazines cannot compete with consumers of TV and other audio-visual media, history magazines appear to be a phenomenon within the international historical culture that deserves attention particularly from the field of history didactics – also because history teachers, pupils and history students are among the readers or buyers. However, until now this medium has not received a lot of attention, neither from history didactics and research on historical culture and 'public history' nor from research on the popularisation of academic knowledge.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Cf. e. g. the (independent) French version of the German magazine GEO EPOCHE (Gruner & Jahr, Hamburg); URL: <http://www.geo.fr/> (1.10.2014).

<sup>3</sup> Susanne Popp/Jutta Schumann/Fabio Crivellari/Michael Wobring/Claudius Springkart (eds.): *Geschichte in Magazinen. Analysen zur europäischen und außereuropäischen Geschichtskultur*. Frankfurt am Main 2015. This volume includes country-specific studies also on China, Russia, Turkey, and Brazil. On the topic of popular history magazines in Europe cf. also: Susanne Popp/Jutta Schumann/Miriam Hannig (eds.): *Commercialised history. Popular history magazines in Europe. Approaches to a historico-cultural phenomenon as a basis for history teaching*. Frankfurt am Main 2014. This volume has evolved from the EHISTO-EU-Project (2012–2014), coordinated by the Chair of History Didactics at the University of Augsburg. Cf. URL: <http://www.european-crossroads.de/> (1.10.2014).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. e. g. URL: [http://www.wuv.de/medien/neues\\_magazin\\_umgarnt\\_geschichtsfans](http://www.wuv.de/medien/neues_magazin_umgarnt_geschichtsfans) (1.10.2014): 'All about history' is an English popular history magazine that was positioned in the autumn of 2014 in German translation in the German market.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. on popular history magazines e. g. Bodil Axelsson: *History in popular magazines. Negotiating masculinities, the low of the popular and the high of history*. In: *Culture Unbound* 4 (2012). pp. 275–295; Claire Blandin: *L'histoire sur papier glacé*. In: *Le Débat* 175/3 (2013). pp. 184–189; Fabio Crivellari: *Die Medialität des Krieges. Der Erste Weltkrieg in der populären Erinnerungskultur nach 1945 am Beispiel populärer Geschichtsmagazine*. Konstanz 2014. URL: <http://kops.ub.uni-konstanz.de/handle/urn:nbn:de:bsz:352-272671> (1.8.2014); Ernst Deissinger et al.: *P.M. History. Wenn Journalisten über Geschichte schreiben*. In: *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht [GWU]* 54 (2003). pp. 82–84; Valérie Hannin: *L'Histoire: revue et magazine*. In: *Le Débat* 175/3 (2013). pp. 190–197; Marlene Hiller: *Der Spagat zwischen Öffentlichkeit und Wissenschaft. Oder: Geschichte schreiben für Liebhaber*. In: Sabine Horn/Michael Sauer (eds.): *Geschichte und Öffentlichkeit. Orte – Medien – Institutionen*. Göttingen 2009. pp. 161–168; Sven Felix Kellerhoff: *Geschichte muss nicht knallen. Zwischen Vermittlung und Vereinfachung. Plädoyer für eine Partnerschaft von Geschichtswissenschaft und Geschichtsjournalismus*.

The following illustrations deal with the questions in how far and in which respect the magazines can be regarded as ‘popular’ (2.), what it is that they do ‘popularise’ (3.), and what the major shaping tendencies of the presentation and mediation of history in this medium are (4.).

## 2. The ‘popular’ dimension of popular history magazines

Popular history magazines<sup>6</sup> are to be understood as a phenomenon of a society’s historical culture. They combine – according to the concept of Jörn Rüsen<sup>7</sup> – a cognitive dimension

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In: Michele Barricelli/Julia Hornig (eds.): *Aufklärung, Bildung, „Histoinainment“? Zeitgeschichte in Unterricht und Gesellschaft heute*. Frankfurt am Main 2008. pp. 147–158; Ulrich Kröll (ed.): *Massenmedien und Geschichte. Presse, Rundfunk und Fernsehen als Geschichtsvermittler*. Münster 1989; Laurène Pain Prado: *La Question de L’Histoire Grand Public: Étude comparée de deux magazines d’histoire: HISTORIA et L’HISTOIRE, 2004–2008*. Grenoble 2010; Marianne Sjöland: *Historia i magasin. En studie av tidskriften Populär historias historieskrivning och av kommersiellt historiebrik*. Lund 2011; Hans Süssmuth: *Erzählte Geschichte in der Massenpresse. Darstellung und Analyse ausgewählter Beispiele*. In: Siegfried Quandt/Hans Süssmuth (eds.): *Historisches Erzählen. Formen und Funktionen*. Göttingen 1982. pp. 171–203; Christian Spieß: *Zwischen Wissenschaft und Unterhaltungsanspruch. Aktuelle Geschichtsmagazine im Vergleich*. In: Sabine Horn/Michael Sauer (eds.): *Geschichte und Öffentlichkeit*. Göttingen 2009. pp. 169–176; Christian Spieß: *Zeitgeschichte in populären Geschichtsmagazinen*. In: Susanne Popp et al. (eds.): *Zeitgeschichte – Medien – Historische Bildung*. Göttingen 2010. pp. 61–76; Christian Spieß: *Zwischen populär und wissenschaftlich: Geschichtsvermittlung in aktuellen Geschichtsmagazinen*. In: Swen Steinberg/Stefan Meißner/Daniel Trepsdorf (eds.): *Vergessenes Erinnern. Medien von Erinnerungskultur und kollektivem Gedächtnis*. Berlin 2009. pp. 133–151. Cf. also Achim Landwehr: *Magazinierte Geschichte* (30.12.2013), URL: <https://achimlandwehr.wordpress.com/2013/12/30/17-magazinierte-geschichte/> (1.8.2014). Popular history magazines are not included in the following (selected) titles about the topics of history journalism, popular history culture, or history in the mass media: Klaus Arnold/Walter Hömberg/Susanne Kinnebrock (eds.): *Geschichtsjournalismus. Zwischen Information und Inszenierung*. Berlin et al. 2010; Wolfgang Hardtwig/Erhard Schütz (eds.): *Geschichte für Leser. Populäre Geschichtsschreibung in Deutschland im 20. Jahrhundert*. Stuttgart 2005; Wolfgang Hardtwig/Alexander Schug (eds.): *History Sells! Angewandte Geschichte als Wissenschaft und Markt*. Stuttgart 2009; Barbara Korte/Sylvia Paletschek (eds.): *History Goes Pop. Zur Repräsentation von Geschichte in populären Medien und Genres*. Bielefeld 2009; Barbara Korte/Sylvia Paletschek (eds.): *Popular history now and then. International perspectives*. Bielefeld 2012; Eva Ulrike Pirker et al. (eds.): *Echte Geschichte. Authentizitätsfiktionen in populären Geschichtskulturen*. Bielefeld 2010; Rolf Schörken: *Geschichte in der Alltagswelt. Wie uns Geschichte begegnet und was wir mit ihr machen*. Stuttgart 1981; Nicholas Siân: *Reconstructing the past. History in the mass media 1890–2005*. London et al. 2008.

<sup>6</sup> In general, history magazines are to be defined as illustrated periodicals addressing a non-expert audience. Illustrations are an integral and constitutive element of the concept, and the amount of illustrations (e. g. paintings, photographs, maps, charts, tables) usually exceeds the amount of text. Compared to other media, popular history magazines feature more text than audio-visual formats and less text than specialised literature or non-fiction. The fact that magazines address a non-expert audience does, however, not imply, as mentioned above, that students of history, history teachers or experts from other professional fields who deal with the past are not included in the group of buyers and readers of these periodicals. For further discussion of the topic cf. Jutta Schumann/Susanne Popp: Introduction. In: Popp et al. (eds.): *Commercialised* (note 3). pp. 18–35.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. e. g. Jörn Rüsen: *Geschichtskultur*. In: *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht [GWU]* 46 (1995), pp. 513–521.

(transfer of knowledge) with an aesthetic and emotional dimension (e. g. illustrations; vivid narrative style) as well as a political dimension. The term ‘political dimension’ does not imply that a direct or indirect ideological alignment or political interference always exists, but emphasises that every historical presentation necessarily unfolds a certain idea of man and a conception of society and therewith also a certain horizon of political values. History magazines are not excluded from this.

The question at the core of this part is in which respect the magazines could be categorised as ‘popular’. The notion of ‘the popular’ possesses a very large range of meanings in connection to cultural phenomena so that some papers in cultural studies do not define the term at all.<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, an attempt shall be made at categorising ‘popular history magazines’. To this end, this chapter focuses on a study by Holt N. Parker<sup>9</sup> which differentiates between the following, partially overlapping areas of meaning.

(a) ‘Popular’ defined by a quantitative aspect: This approach stresses the criterion that cultural products are regarded as ‘popular’ if they address and/or are received by a very large number of people. One of the problems of this approach is that many cultural products produced for mass consumption fail to appeal to a large amount of people: can they, accordingly, be regarded as ‘popular’? Furthermore, the question arises who could define the quantitative distinction line between ‘popular’ and ‘non-popular’. And finally it is to be asked how to deal with this quantitative aspect in the case of popular history magazines as the number of readers of these magazines is much smaller than the audience numbers of television programmes on historical issues.

(b) ‘Popular’ defined by the qualitative aspect of a cultural hierarchy: This approach stresses a normative aspect. Considering cultural products as ‘popular’ means that they are seen as ‘(trivial) entertainment’ in contrast to ‘serious’ elite-culture. Of course, this dichotomy is far too simplistic – since, for instance, not everything beyond the so-called ‘low culture’ of ‘(trivial) entertainment’ can be classified as ‘serious elite-culture’. Moreover, many members of cultural elites selectively participate in non-elite culture; they have ‘two cultural accesses’ and are able to enjoy ‘(trivial) entertainment’ in a sophisticated, intellectual and ‘non-trivial’ way.

(c) ‘Popular’ defined by the qualitative aspect of a commercialised and industrialised ‘mass culture’ producing ‘mass products’ for ‘mass consumption’: The cultural products classified as ‘popular’ are evaluated in a very pejorative way by, for instance, Horkheimer and Adorno.<sup>10</sup> In their eyes, they primarily serve for mass consumption and sales success, thereby sacrificing their quality, become strictly affirmative and do not offer support to their audiences with

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Holt N. Parker: *Toward a definition of popular culture*. In: *History and Theory* 50/2 (2011). pp. 147–170, here p. 147.

<sup>9</sup> Holt: *Toward* (note 8). *Passim*.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. e. g. Max Horkheimer/Theodor W. Adorno: *Kulturindustrie. Aufklärung als Massenbetrug*. In: idem: *Dialektik der Aufklärung. Philosophische Fragmente*. 16<sup>th</sup> ed. Frankfurt am Main 2006. pp. 128–176.

regard to an enlightened orientation in their real life. One of the problems of this approach is that it historically limits the origin of 'popular culture' to the time of industrialisation, which seems questionable. Furthermore, there is no evidence that cultural products produced for mass consumption in general lack an illuminating function. And lastly, many products of the so-called 'serious' elite-culture have become mass products used in commercial contexts, e. g. the composition 'Bagatelle No. 25 in A minor' by Ludwig van Beethoven, commonly known as 'Für Elise'.

(d) 'Popular' defined by the qualitative aspect of a difference between the academic and non-academic (e. g. journalistic) discourses: This approach regards cultural products – e. g. history magazines – as 'popular' in the sense that they are to be seen as the result of an intentional 'translation' and 'mediation' process of scientific knowledge (concepts and research findings) to a non-expert and/or non-academic audience. One problem of this approach is that only some small parts of the wide range of 'popular culture' products can be understood as having the intention to 'translate' academic (research) knowledge to the public. Another problem is that the so-called 'theory of diffusion' of academic knowledge to the non-expert public is no longer fully accepted by research (see the next chapter).

(e) 'Popular' in the sense of 'traditional, folk-like, folksy or folkloristic' (in general: not modern, not industrialised etc.). Even if this approach seems to be irrelevant in our case, it should be mentioned that one of the problems of this understanding of 'popular culture' can be seen in the fact that many of those 'traditional' folk-like cultures live in cultural niches. Another problem is that more than a few of those 'traditional' folk-like cultures are not created by 'folk' (in the sense of ethnic or local/regional groups with their traditions) but are cultural political 'inventions', e. g. of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and of later times, which were supposed to ensure social identity, social cohesion and national (or regional or ethnic) pride in certain contexts.<sup>11</sup>

(f) 'Popular' in the sense of the 'culture of the subordinate' (e. g. the opposition, protest, and fight of the 'people' against the ruling or privileged classes). In this political approach cultural products are regarded as 'popular' in the sense of e. g. Antônio Gramsci.<sup>12</sup> They are related to the 'people' as a politically defined entity that resists against repression or discrimination and fights for its own rights. In principle, this kind of being 'popular' could be relevant for history magazines, but comparing the existing national and international magazines to this concept illustrates very clearly that they are far from being a part of the 'culture of the subordinate'. Evaluating this approach, it should be noted that one of the major problems is the difficulty of the term 'people' and the problem with defining who is included and who is excluded. Another

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. e. g. Eric Hobsbawm/Terence Ranger: *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge 1992.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. e. g. Antônio Gramsci: *Os Intelectuais e a Organização da Cultura* [The Intellectuals and the Organization of the Culture]. Rio de Janeiro 1984.

problem, for instance, is that this sector is far from representing the entire popular culture of a society.

(g) ‘Popular’ in the sense of easily accessible cultural offers for a general non-expert audience as well as for people with low ‘cultural capital’ (Bourdieu<sup>13</sup>). This approach aims at neutralising the qualitatively determined dichotomy between so-called ‘popular culture’ and ‘high culture’ in that a continuum of more or less available ‘cultural capital’ is set out for producers and consumers of culture. A cultural product is regarded as ‘popular’ if it lowers the access barriers for communication partners with a lack of expertise and/or low ‘cultural capital’. In this way, no statement is made about the cultural quality, the political intention or the categorisation of ‘traditional/modern’; furthermore, it is not differentiated whether or not the cultural product derives from the commercial cultural industry.

It became apparent that not all of these different approaches are relevant to popular history magazines. Considering our object, especially the removal of socio-cultural access barriers (= g) seems to be important, which focuses on an expansion of social participation in cultural communication. In this way, popular history magazines lower the threshold for the access to the historical discourse in their choice of topics, design of the content, language register, presentational style and dissemination strategies (sales at kiosks, train stations and in supermarkets).

While the critical approach (= c) is not unimportant to the history didactical evaluation of the magazines and the lowering of the communication threshold is particularly relevant for the magazines’ strategies of mediating history (cf. chapter 4), the concept of defining ‘popular’ with relation to the difference between academic and non-academic discourses (= d) is relevant for the selection of the topics of the magazines and the question what the magazines really popularise.

### 3. What do popular history magazines ‘popularise’?

In line with the emergence of post-industrial societies, which are often referred to as ‘knowledge societies’, a field of research has been established that mainly deals with the historical ‘popularisation’ of academic knowledge, meaning the presentation and mediation of new knowledge – gained by experts using scientific, academic methods – to a broad, non-expert but nonetheless interested audience.<sup>14</sup> This strand of research, it has to be mentioned in ad-

<sup>13</sup> Cf. e. g. Pierre Bourdieu: *Ökonomisches Kapital – Kulturelles Kapital – Soziales Kapital* [1983]. In: idem: *Die verborgenen Mechanismen der Macht*. Hamburg 1992. pp. 49–80.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. about the history of this research field in Germany e. g. Andreas W. Daum: *Wissenschaftspopularisierung im 19. Jahrhundert. Bürgerliche Kultur, naturwissenschaftliche Bildung und die deutsche Öffentlichkeit, 1848–1914*. München 1998. pp. 14–29; Angela Schwarz: *Der Schlüssel zur modernen*

vance, has from its beginning until today been very strongly geared towards natural-scientific, technical or medical knowledge; historical knowledge (as well as the commercial factor) has found little attention so far.

This research initially followed a hierarchical, one-sided linear process model of ‘popularisation’, the so-called ‘diffusion model’, which implies that special knowledge inaccessible to the general public is delivered in a simplified way by the researchers themselves or by journalists.<sup>15</sup> It has been realised that certain factors are significant in this respect: the contextualisation of the topic, the attribution of relevance, the lowering of language barriers (especially, but not exclusively, in the area of specialised terminology), the use of metaphors and analogies that correspond with the everyday life of the audience and especially the narrativization of the scientific research process.<sup>16</sup> The insight into these factors is still valid, but the basic concept has been set against a different, now widely accepted model which describes the popularisation of knowledge as an interactive process that is influenced by the recipients and their interests. In our case, the commercial factor already illustrates that it has to be an interactive process since whatever the customers do not accept is no longer produced. As in many fields of market economy, it is hard to tell whether the consumer’s behaviour or the producer’s strategies exert more influence on the magazines. Both sides interact in a specific way.

Following Carsten Kretschmann’s notion of ‘popularisation’ of knowledge – (a) a striking knowledge divide has to exist between the producers and the recipients, (b) the number of recipients has to be larger than the number of producers and (c) possesses relevance for the entire society, (d) the popularisation occurs intentionally and (e) uses mainstreaming media with multiplying effects<sup>17</sup> – history magazines could also be regarded as using strategies of popularisation which process historical knowledge so as to satisfy communicative needs and which are dedicated to generally understandable and entertaining presentations and not to spe-

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Welt. Wissenschaftspopularisierung in Großbritannien und Deutschland im Übergang zur Moderne (ca. 1870–1914), Stuttgart 1999. pp. 38–47, 95–102.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. in extenso about the two concepts e. g. Roger Cooter/Stephen Pumfrey: Separate spheres and public places. Reflections on the history of sciences. Popularization and science in popular culture. In: *History of Science* 34 (1994). pp. 237–267; Richard Whitley: Knowledge producers and knowledge acquirers. Popularisation as a relation between scientific fields and their public. In: Terry Shinn/idem (eds.): *Expository science. Forms and functions of popularization*. Dordrecht et al. 1985. pp. 3–28. Cf. also Carsten Kretschmann: *Wissenschaftspopularisierung – Ansätze und Konzepte*. In: Bernd Hüppauf/Peter Weingart (eds.): *Frosch und Frankenstein. Bilder als Medium der Popularisierung von Wissenschaft*. Bielefeld 2009. pp. 79–89.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Jürg Niederhauser: *Das Schreiben populärwissenschaftlicher Texte als Transfer wissenschaftlicher Texte*. In: Eva-Maria Jakobs/Dagmar Knorr (eds.): *Textproduktion in elektronischen Umgebungen*. Frankfurt am Main 1997. p. 107–122. Cf. URL: [http://www.prowitec.rwth-aachen.de/p-publikationen/band-pdf/band1/band1\\_niederhauser.pdf](http://www.prowitec.rwth-aachen.de/p-publikationen/band-pdf/band1/band1_niederhauser.pdf) (1.9.2014).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Carsten Kretschmann: *Einleitung: Wissenspopularisierung. Ein altes neues Forschungsfeld*. In: idem (ed.): *Wissenspopularisierung. Konzepte der Wissensverbreitung im Wandel*. Berlin 2003. pp. 7–22, here p. 14.

cialised texts.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, if the criteria of Andreas Daum's concept<sup>19</sup> are used then (a) the 'popularisation of the use of language', (b) the 'perception' as well as (c) the 'effect' as 'popular' and lastly (d) the 'popularisation as intention' can be established for history magazines.

However, this does not yet answer the question of what history magazines actually popularise. In this respect the research before and during the EHISTO-project about European history magazines revealed the following: the classic 'popularisation' of new research results and recent research discussions plays a role only in some cases. A recent example is interviews with Christopher Clark, the author of the successful book 'The Sleepwalkers'<sup>20</sup> in history magazines dealing with World War I. But even if many magazines have sections in which they present newly published academic literature – especially about the main articles – the design of the cover pages and the content of the articles show a clear trend: they 'popularise the popular'.

This is true in two respects: Firstly, the magazines – especially on their cover pages – offer predominantly topics which the potential consumer can link to specific previous knowledge, prevalent imaginations and often a specific 'aura' (e. g. power, crime, exceptional fate). The popularity of those topics provides the function to convey to the readers the impression of historically very relevant objects. This ascription is supported by the fact that most of the magazines' topics are very widespread in public history (e. g. films, historical novels, exhibitions) and, what's more, that they often are known from school. This means that the producers' agenda setting relies on a popular established 'canon' of topics and at the same time reproduces it.<sup>21</sup>

Secondly, the popular topics are presented in accordance with a 'popular' (that means: non-expert) understanding of history. This refers primarily to the fact that in general historical knowledge is presented by the magazines' articles as 'objectively established' knowledge which supposedly informs about how the past 'really' was and ignores the fact that historical knowledge is continuously reviewed, critically discussed and often modified for research reasons. Unlike magazines that popularise knowledge in the field of natural science or – significantly – archaeology, history magazines rarely, if ever, discuss the research process.<sup>22</sup> It is understandable that buyers and readers of history magazines expect correct and verified information; however, the essence is neglected: the constructed character of historiography, the fact that historical questions and answers are bound to place and time, the extent of perspectives that are given in the historical process as well as in often controversial or diverse interpretation processes. The always controversial demarcations between 'objectivity' and

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Daum: Wissenschaftspopularisierung (note 14). pp. 246–249.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Daum: Wissenschaftspopularisierung (note 14). p. 246.

<sup>20</sup> Christopher M. Clark: *The Sleepwalkers*. How Europe went to war in 1914. London 2012.

<sup>21</sup> This does not mean that this 'canon' is unchangeable. In the last two decades, for instance, new academic approaches were in fact partially taken into account in magazines (e. g. women and gender history, social history, environmental history).

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Niederhauser: Schreiben (note 16).

‘subjectivity’ as well as between ‘fact’ and ‘fiction’ are largely blurring: Following the argument of publishers and editors of history magazines, the ‘objectivist illusion’ has to be maintained for the sake of commercial success.

The link to historical sciences is obviously weaker in history magazines than that in natural science magazines. The actual focus is not so much historical science but at best popular, often commercialised historical culture or public history with its agenda of popular films and movies, bestselling books, exhibitions, commemoration days and, not least, cultural tourism destinations. The EHISTO-analyses of cover features revealed that history magazines do not recur to recent topics of historical science: Thus, for instance, the German magazines’ covers and contents of the last two decades give hardly any clues about the research issues that were relevant to German historical science in that period. Moreover, stills taken out of period films which are sometimes used for the cover design, and hints to cultural events with historical themes (e. g. TV, movies, games, exhibitions) underline the magazines’ links to recent historical culture. These references assure potential consumers that the magazines’ contents are up-to-date<sup>23</sup> and moreover have a high communicative factor: readers deal with topics which allow them – that is the promise – to be in the know if history comes up in everyday conversations.

Admittedly, ‘popularisation of knowledge’ cannot be reduced to ‘popularisation of science’. However, given the narrow line between ‘history’ that is ‘popularised’ by magazines and ‘history’ presented by academic literature, there are indications that the presentation of history in the magazines is not to be understood as ‘popularised’ science but rather as a genre in its own right.<sup>24</sup> Of course, the producers provide historical knowledge that in the end has once been scientifically generated, but unlike in ‘popular science magazines’ the concept of ‘scientific research’ and information about ‘new’ research findings do not play a constitutive role. History magazines deal rather about ‘established’ knowledge and already popular and famous topics, selected according to (popular) relevance criteria and made accessible in an easily understandable and catchy way.

Even though the relation to historical science might be very loose and especially selective, which makes a classification of history magazines as ‘popularisation of science’ questionable, the rhetorical reference to science plays a decisive role in the magazines’ self-representation, for example in the editorials. The editors assure their readers that the articles are strictly science-driven and the presented historical knowledge is thus authentic and reliable. According to them, the only difference to science is that the magazines depict the past world in a more ‘graphic’ and ‘vivid’ way. The readers are promised an immersion into the depicted

<sup>23</sup> In relation to the dominant culture of history and public history in the society.

<sup>24</sup> Manfred Nissen’s analysis of historical non-fiction books had a similar result. Cf. Martin Nissen: *Historische Sachbücher – historische Fachbücher. Der Fall Werner Maser*. In: Korte/Paletschek (eds.): *History* (note 5), pp. 103–119. URL: [http://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/volltextserver/12240/1/Nissen\\_Maser.pdf](http://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/volltextserver/12240/1/Nissen_Maser.pdf) (1.8.2014).

past which is enabled by a focus on historical imagination, i.e. the aesthetic dimension, and thereby creating that emotional proximity to a per se distant past that the customers seem to expect. This promise suggests that the transformation of history conducted by popular history magazines is merely a change in the mode of representation. Thereby it neglects the inevitably given historiographical limits to this procedure as well as the fact that actually all issues and topics that cannot be represented in this mode are dropped.

#### 4. Some major characteristics of the magazines' presentation and mediation of history

The following remarks focus on selected aspects: the illustrations, the personalisation, and the main topics of the magazines.<sup>25</sup> But first it has to be noted that the magazines can show huge quality differences in presenting and mediating history.<sup>26</sup> The EHISTO project's research revealed that for instance in covering the 'outbreak' of World War I, differences between the national perspectives on the topic were, on an overall basis, far less pronounced than differences in quality standards within the countries. Some magazines for instance dramatize the 'July Crisis' in a sensation-seeking way by depicting developments from the assassination in Sarajevo to the declarations of war as an inevitable catastrophe that turned a relatively minor regional cause into a global disaster. In contrast, other magazines reconstruct the 'July Crisis' in a far more sophisticated way as an open process which took a specific direction as a result of particular conditions and decisions.<sup>27</sup> In other cases, as for example the presentation of Columbus,<sup>28</sup> not only the quality standards differ within the countries, but also the national perspectives on this European topic.

As already mentioned, the illustrations play a constitutive role for the magazines' concepts of history. Landwehr assumes in his essay,<sup>29</sup> that an article that cannot be illustrated would not be in the magazine. However, what one may assume is that the history magazines can illustrate any topic, as they cultivate a style in which illustrations play a rather independent role even though they supposedly support the presentation of a historical topic. Unlike in academic

<sup>25</sup> For instance, the main strategies of the popular history magazines that lower the threshold for access to the historical discourse are not considered in this chapter, like the choice of topics (e.g. connection to commonly known topics; see chapter 3), the design of the content (e.g. less complex), the language register (e.g. easy words and grammar, no specialist terms), or the presentational style (e.g. vivid narrative).

<sup>26</sup> Cf. for example the article of Felipe Fernández-Armesto: Columbus – hero or villain?. In: *History today* 42 (1992), pp. 4–9. It deals on a very sophisticated level and on the basis of historical sources with the change of the image of Columbus during the course of the centuries.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. the report about the EHISTO-project 3.1.1 in: Popp et al. (eds.): *Commercialised* (note 3).

<sup>28</sup> Cf. the report about the EHISTO-project 3.1.2 in: Popp et al. (eds.): *Commercialised* (note 3).

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Landwehr: *Magazinierte Geschichte* (note 5).

articles, there are rarely references between illustration and text.<sup>30</sup> In most cases the links between images and the historical event are not explained and those illustrations that depict iconic sources of the period of the historical event are not analysed as historical documents. The captions mostly do not inform the non-expert reader sufficiently; very often not even the year of production of the image on display is mentioned. This is important due to the fact that many of those illustrations are not historically appropriate as they do not originate from the period the corresponding article covers. Articles about Antiquity, Middle Ages or Early Modern Times are often illustrated with historicist 19<sup>th</sup> century history paintings as these prefer to depict charismatic persons and dramatic events in an 'illusionist' and emotionalising way that gives the viewer the impression of directly glancing on bygone times through an assumed 'window to the past'.

The use of iconic illustrations very often points to the aspiration level of the history magazines: stills taken out of current historical films mostly refer to a low aspiration level – exempt from articles dealing with the historic-cultural reception of a certain topic in the public history.<sup>31</sup> The same can be said for the use of photographs: the magazines with low aspiration levels can also be recognised by the fact that their use of historical photos is careless and inaccurate,<sup>32</sup> and they do not even refrain from the manipulation of photographs, apparently relying on the readers' inability to discover these interventions.

The illustrations have a function in their own right in the magazines' presentation of history. On the one hand, they serve to enhance the vividness of the topic, to emphasise the aspect of entertainment, and to convey a specific historical atmosphere or 'aura'. On the other hand, the iconic presentations of the past suggest or even create the illusion of authenticity of the representation of the past and help to reinforce the illusion of an 'objectively fixed' knowledge of the past. It supports the magazines' 'disambiguation of historical knowledge': limits of knowledge, different degrees of certainty or research controversies are usually not discussed.<sup>33</sup>

One reason for this might be the fact that a 'good story' – a vibrant, vivid, exciting, atmospheric and emotionally appealing 'narrative' – is mostly at the centre of the magazine articles' representation of history and is considered as essential for sales success by all responsible journalists we had interviewed. These narratives are in general of the 'traditional' type: the events are depicted mainly chronologically and basically concentrating on 'persons',

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Niederhauser: Schreiben (note 16), pp. 112 f. URL: [http://www.prowitec.rwth-aachen.de/p-publikationen/band-pdf/band1/band1\\_niederhauser.pdf](http://www.prowitec.rwth-aachen.de/p-publikationen/band-pdf/band1/band1_niederhauser.pdf) (1.8.2014).

<sup>31</sup> Cf. note 26.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. the report about the EHISTO-project 3.1.1 about the photograph allegedly presenting Gavrilo Princip at his arrest in: Popp et al. (eds.): Commercialised (note 3).

<sup>33</sup> However, there is a controversial approach in anti-academic affects of a certain group of sensationalist magazines: they promise to reveal 'truths' which the official historical sciences supposedly conceal or keep secret.

‘acts’ and ‘events’. Moreover, in most cases there is an omniscient narrator who has the sole power of interpretation<sup>34</sup> and – by nature – does not refer to historical sources and secondary literature and in general does not reflect upon the own point of view. In this respect, it seems quite adequate that the articles come without the bibliographic apparatus which provides evidence of the statements are based on.

A central requirement for the narrativisation is, as we know, personalisation. One could bluntly say that what most of the magazines declare as ‘history’ is almost exclusively the depiction of intentionally acting individuals, whereby – again borrowing from historicism – the ‘great men that made history’ set the scene.<sup>35</sup> ‘Personalisation’ in history and political didactics means the biased attribution of agency for historical and political changes or of the power to effect such changes to individuals, especially to outstanding personalities.

In the narratives of the magazine articles, personalisation is the central factor for the stimulation of the recipient’s emotional and aesthetic proximity to the temporally distant and factually alien world of the past without which an immersive quality of experience would become quite impossible. Furthermore, the positive or negative identification of the recipient with the key figures is only possible if the depicted motivations and intentions – e. g. ambition, courage, envy, lust for power, heroism – stay within the familiar frame of alleged ‘human continuities’ within the reach of layman’s psychology. While the depicted ‘stories’ offer a very colourful spectrum regarding space and time, peoples and persons, atmosphere and costume, scenery and anecdote, the depicted action schemes tend to have a fairly narrow and familiar set of scenarios and plots, patterns and stereotypes. This means that beyond the historical surface a profound historicisation of the events of the past is largely missing.<sup>36</sup>

The central significance of personalisation for narrative representations of history implies that the boundaries between fact and fiction blur. This is especially true for scenic, often dialogical representations of the action that achieve a level of detail which goes far beyond the information the sources can provide. This is even more true – by nature – for the figure-centred indirect speech and the ‘inner monologue’ which is per se not accessible for historians. These ahistorical elements might remain unnoticed if the recipient is intrigued by the action and appeased with various strategies suggesting authenticity<sup>37</sup> – especially by mentioning historical

<sup>34</sup> Cf. also Dagmar Stegmüller: *Popularisierungsstrategien in Friedrich Christoph Schlossers „Weltgeschichte für das deutsche Volk“*. In: Kretschmann (ed.): *Wissensverbreitung* (note 17), pp. 197–210.

<sup>35</sup> Interestingly, a study about video games dealing with Early Modern Times concludes that the depiction of Early Modern Times is closer to the 19<sup>th</sup> century historicism than to the academic understanding of this period in the present. Cf. Florian Kerschbaumer/Tobias Winnerling: *Postmoderne Visionen des Vor-Modernen. Des 19. Jahrhunderts geisterhaftes Echo*. In: idem (eds.): *Frühe Neuzeit im Videospiele. Geschichtswissenschaftliche Perspektiven*. Bielefeld 2014, pp. 11–26.

<sup>36</sup> John Caughie’s study of the British television drama came in respect to the role of historical dramas to a quite similar result. Cf. John Caughie: *Television drama. Realism, modernism, and British culture*. Oxford et al. 2000, pp. 209–215.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. e. g. Pirker et al. (eds.): *Authentizitätsfiktionen* (note 5).

names, accurate details or experts. Finally, strong personalisation allows the reduction of the historical context and the shortening of the cause analysis and, moreover, usually leads to the overemphasis of psychological assumptions about the character, intentions and motives of the acting persons. At the same time, it conveys a feeling to the reader of being very close to the events.

Finally, those topics shall be considered which the European history magazines preferably cover and which the EHISTO project has analysed in great detail based on the title pages.<sup>38</sup> One of the findings is that the thematic focus of the history magazines throughout Europe lies on national history culture and emphasises – not least due to the language and the previous knowledge of the customers – national history. However, the international comparisons during the EHISTO-research revealed trans-national convergences: there are certain topics – particularly the First and Second World War – which play a part in many of the national magazines. Regarding European history, one could speak of ‘European History Crossroads’ (EHC) which reflect Europe’s ‘shared history’: the European regions and states have shared many historical experiences which they have, however, experienced from a different perspective and still remember in a national way today.<sup>39</sup>

As the cover features of the magazines are often connected to topics known from school or public history, it is not surprising that a great part of the topics cover, as stated above, topics the audience is conversant with, whereby the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are overrepresented. Especially in Danish and Swedish magazines, World War II plays a dominant role and Hitler and the Third Reich are top sellers everywhere. The number of articles about older topics depends on whether certain periods played a crucial role in a country’s national history, e. g. as ‘golden age’ or ‘zenith’ or the source of national identity. Besides, there are topics which are attractive across nations without necessarily being connected to national history, e. g. the culture of Ancient Egypt, the Vikings, the spread of Islam or the crusades.<sup>40</sup>

In terms of space, in all European magazines the European space of history is clearly dominant and within that the space of the respective national history. It is surprising how little multicultural societies in Europe, the growing mobility of people or globalisation are mirrored in the magazine covers.

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<sup>38</sup> Cf. Popp et al. (eds.): *Geschichte* (note 3).

<sup>39</sup> Such EHC – this is a finding of the EHISTO-project – which are part of the national history syllabi as well as of popular history magazines (PHM) in the EHISTO-partner countries (Germany, Poland, Spain, Sweden, UK) – are the following ones: Columbus and the ‘great discoveries’, World War I, World War II, Holocaust, Hitler, Migration. Other EHC, which are part of the national history syllabi as well as of PHM in most of the EHISTO-partner countries’ magazines, are the following ones: Alexander the Great, Islam, Charlemagne, Reconquista, Crusades, Vikings, Wars of Religion in the context of Protestant Reformation, Absolutism (Louis XIV of France), French Revolution, Napoleon, Industrial Revolution (modernization, change of living conditions), Imperialism, Colonialism, Cuban Missile Crisis/Cold War.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. the list of the ‘European History Crossroads’ (EHC) in European history magazines in note 27.

In terms of topics, historical figures are dominant, often followed by issues related to war; here the importance of the First and Second World War for the magazines becomes apparent. The topics connected to ‘myths and mysteries’ are not solely but predominantly covered by magazines that prefer a more sensationalist style. These magazines can play a strong or marginal role in each country, but they exist everywhere.

The quality of the magazine articles can well be in line with reliable accounts of history; however, there is a tendency towards the spectacular and to depict ‘celebrities’, whether famous persons or well-known events or locations. Invasively approaching the private and advertising with ‘sex and crime’ or the unveiling of ‘mysteries’ or thrilling ‘secrets’, in contrast, characterise only magazines of a quality that is not too far from ‘tabloids’.

Finally, it can be noted that the magazines have a tendency towards traditional gender concepts even though this can be more or less strong in different countries and within the countries in different magazines. Regarding Swedish history magazines, for instance, Monika Vinterek points out that the scheme of ‘mighty men and naked women’ on cover illustrations is especially striking.<sup>41</sup>

Regarding the trend of the cover topics towards illustrious (and predominantly male) personalities and acts of war, it becomes clear which price is paid for the ‘good story’ and an ‘entertaining narrative’ as a driving force of commercially successful popular history magazines: All those topics which offer little vividness and have an analytical rather than a narrative character – such as the analysis of basic structures and changes in economy and society, culture and politics – get little or no attention. Consequently, non-expert readers can hardly widen their historical consciousness when reading those magazines: not only non-European or global issues, but also unpopular realms of history or unusual topics are left out as well as recent topics of social and political relevance that are not consensual.

## 5. Conclusion

Concerning the evaluation of history magazines from a general view it is a common opinion that it is *per se* positive that history is prevalent in the public: after all, dealing with history is better than not dealing with it.<sup>42</sup> This opinion is understandable; however, there are limits to that. Implicit views on the world and society conveyed by representations of history in mass media affect the historical consciousness and a general understanding of the present in democratic, pluralistic and multi-cultural societies. This is even more true if non-expert recipients feel well informed by the richness of details of the historical world depicted in the magazines’ articles and illustrations and do not critically reflect upon the underlying structures of selec-

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Monika Vinterek’s article in: Popp et al. (eds.): *Commercialised* (note 3), pp. 308–330.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. e. g. Landwehr: *Magazinierte Geschichte* (note 5).

tion, representation and interpretation – whether they are not capable to do this or because it would disturb the immersive experience.

One of our main research results is that the 'historicist' account of history portrayed by the magazines – under the pressure of commercial success, as the persons in charge are saying – together with strongly emphasised personalisation does not really meet the requirements of a democratic concept of history that would make the readers understand that 'history' is not merely made 'bottom-down'. Moreover, even if there are huge differences in quality between the history magazines, it needs to be noted that the concepts presented are far from a critical understanding of the construction and societal use of history in public. The history that magazines sell to their readers is hardly a history that serves as orientation in a complex world; instead, they are made spectators who observe an exciting stage performance, detached from the reality around them. But in the end, this can only mean that from the view of history didactics, the aim is not to disparage these magazines but to do further research in the direction of exploring possibilities to raise the qualitative standards of the mediation of history without undermining the economic success. In any case, the results obtained by the EHISTO-analyses show that popular history magazines offer an illuminating field of (comparative) research on national, international, and trans-national history cultures.