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The Faculty of History

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Ph. D. candidate,
Victorița Aneculi

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THE GERMAN OCCUPATION OF ROMANIA
BETWEEN 1916 AND 1918

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Introduction

The bullet fired by the Yugoslav student, Gavrilo Princip, ended a relatively quiet period, which lasted from 1815 to 1914. Starting 1914 the world, and especially Europe, have changed their historical progress. An unprecedented war broke out, which escalated even out of Europe. This has changed the world, torn apart an entire civilization and claimed a bloody tribute of millions of lives and, at the same time, a perpetual fear has been ingrained to participants, soldiers and civilians. For the first time in history, the army interfered dramatically in people's life, either by changing the workers or peasants into soldiers in no time, or by involving civilians, because the war extended to the areas inhabited by civilians, engaging in the fight and killing sometimes elderly, women and children. It was the first partially mechanized war, which was behind an unprecedented development of arms industry, preparing the field for the Second World War.

The objective of the thesis *The German occupation of Romania between 1916 and 1918* is the improvement of the view over the occupation economically, the organization of the German occupation institutions and the Romanians' attitude towards the Great War. To realize this objective we have analyzed: the territorial division into military occupation areas, the organization of German institutions, the management of the Romanian institutions under occupation, the measures taken for the civilians' organization and their engagement

in the war effort, the methods applied by the Germans for a more intense exploitation of all economic sectors of the occupied territory, the analysis of products quantities exported from Romania and the effects of the two year occupation.

To our knowledge, there are three PhD theses dealing with the German occupation in Romania during the First World War. The first one is *La situation économique et financière de la Roumanie sous l'occupation Allemande* (The economic and financial situation of Romania under German occupation), submitted by A. Berindey. The second one is *Ocupația străină în timpul primului război mondial cu specială privire pe zona montano-deluroasă* (The foreign occupation during the First World War, concerning especially the hilly-mountain area), submitted in 1976. The last one is *Zwischen Freund und Feind – Deutsche Besatzung in Rumänien 1916-1918* (Between friend and enemy – the German occupation in Romania between 1916 and 1918), submitted by Lisa Mayerhofer and published in Munich in 2010.

Among the works referring to the German occupation in Romania, we should also mention: *România sub ocupațiune dușmană*, Fascicolul II *Exploatarea economică a țării. Organizația și activitatea Statului Major Economic* (Romania under enemy occupation, Chapter II The economic exploitation of the country. The organization and the activity of the Economic Major State) written by Ilie I. Georgianu, managing director of the department of statistics, and

published in 1920, *L'occupation ennemie de la Roumanie et ses conséquences économiques et sociales* (Enemy occupation of Romania and its economic and social effects) written by Gr. Antipa, and the last work: *Ocupația germană în România din 1916-1918 în lumina memorialisticii germane despre Primul Război Mondial* (German occupation of Romania in 1916-1918 in the view of German memoirism about the First World War), written by Günter Klein and published in 2008.

In this thesis we analyse the period between 1914 and August 1916, the date of Romania's entry into war, the organization of occupation institutions and of Romanian institutions under occupation, the measures entailed to civilians and the methods wherewith the Romanian resources had been intensely exploited, Bucharest Peace Treaty of 1918, signed on May 7, 1918 and its impact on English, French, German and Italian media. We will also analyse the two types of Romanians' actions, being at opposite poles towards occupation, and we will make the balance of German occupation in Romania.

The three works edited in Berlin had a major contribution in writing this thesis, being very good reference books about the occupation troops. The purpose of those three works was to facilitate the intense exploitation of 2/3 of Romania. These were published immediately after the occupation of Bucharest and during the occupation.

We had the chance to consult them thanks to Interlibrary Loan Department of B.C.U. Iași, which facilitated the loan from the libraries of the Universities from Illinois and Germany. We also consulted: *Die rumänische Volkswirtschaft* (National economy of Romania), *Rumänien, Kleines Wirtschaftspolitisches Adreßbuch* (Small economic and political agenda of Romania) and *Sammlung der kriegswirtschaftlichen Vereinbarungen mit den verbündeten Ausland* (The collection of war and economic agreements of allied states).

Besides the above-mentioned works, we also used the following types of sources: **a. archivistic documents** from the Archives of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, National Historical Archives, National Archives of Vrancea and National Archives of Piatra Neamț. Among those, the corpus of German Democratic Republic Microfilms had an important function in writing this thesis, where we identified the German official statistics with all the products exported by the Central Powers from the occupied area of Romania between December 1, 1916 and December 20, 1917; **b. media of those times**, especially Germans publications „Bucharest Gazette” and „Rumänien in Wort und Bild” (Romania in images and words) magazine. We also used Romanian publications issued before the war and after the occupation: „Bursa” (The Bourse), „Independența Economică” (The Economic Independence), „Monitorul Oficial” (Official Monitor), „Moniteur du Pétrole Roumain” (The Monitor of Romanian Oil); **c. volumes of documents**, from which we should mention *Ordonanțe*

pentru populația României în coprinsul Administrației militare (Ordinances for Romanian people within the Military Administration) from 1917 and 1918, and the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907; **d. the memoirism of the period**, although often subjective, was important both to complete the overview of the occupation, but also to recreate the mood of Romanians under occupation; **e. the manuscripts** from the Romanian Academy Library, Ion Bianu archive, *Din jurnalul de operații al grupului de armată Arhiducele Iosef, Jurnal din timpul ocupației* (From the journal of operations of Archduke Iosef army troop, The journal during the occupation; **f. war journals; g. general and special works.**

Among the special works used for this thesis we mention: *Ein Jahr Militär-Polizeimeister der Festung Bukarest* (Sergent for one year in the Bucharest citadel), which was published in 1917 in Bucharest. *War Land on the Eastern Front. Culture, National Identity and German Occupation in World War I*, written by Gabriel Vejas Liulevicius and published under aegis of Cambridge University in 2004, is also very useful to complete the overview of the Romanian occupation in contrast with the German occupation, in the Eastern Europe. The Internet sources were also very helpful.

The methods used in writing the thesis are: assessment of historical sources, critical analysis of documents, comparative research and interdisciplinary approach. In the thesis, there are also used law, statistics and banking concepts.

The originality of the thesis is the innovation of documents, which were written by Germans, as those from the Archives of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, National Historical Archives and those three works edited in Berlin.

Another innovative element is the comparison between the occupied area in Romania and the other in the Eastern Europe. We have tried to prove that, as for Romania, Germans had used their amassed experience. The analysis of military occupation in Romania through the documents of Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907 is also an innovative element.

The research for this topic is not ended yet. The continuation of the research implies finding the German documents towards the products exported in the member states of Central Powers during 1918.

CHAPTER I.

Romania and the Great War

Romania entered the war with the optimism and the confidence gained after the Balkan Wars. For most Romanian people and the army, the dream to reunite the Romanian provinces controlled by the Austro-Hungarian Empire becomes an immediate reality. The Romanian Army's entry in Transylvania fuels this hope. Shortly, the situation on the front changes radically. The Romanian Army's tragic defeat in Turtucaia and the following ones showed that Romania had not been ready for a modern

war carried out on multiple fronts, either mentally, or in terms of technical equipment, instruction and military training.

Furthermore, the Allies' promise to support the Romanian army didn't materialize in good time. They had to live the harsh experience of defeat and the division of a great area of Romania. The leaders of the Romanian Army became aware of the fact that they could win back the country only by reevaluating and reorganizing the combat forces, at the expense of sacrifice and blood shed, which would increase the symbolic value of the Romanian territory. There were two hard years of occupation not only for two thirds of the country, but also for the national army.

CHAPTER II.

German occupation of Romania

Shortly after the German airplanes' raids, the capital was seized. The occupied territories were reorganized, German institutions were created and ordinances were enacted in order to organize down to the smallest detail the social, economic and cultural life under occupation. At the same time, drastic requisitions of all alimentary products, raw materials and buildings were initiated. These requisitions were followed by a period of food restrictions.

All actions taken by the German Administration were meant to ensure the supplies for the Central Powers

armies from the recently occupied territory, to cover shortages among German people and to maintain the productivity of Germany's industry. The measures taken by the German Administration were dramatically felt by the Romanian population. Being a very rich country in August 1916, after the Treaty of Bucharest Romania became a country indebted to the Central Powers for almost a century.

CHAPTER III.

The agriculture under the regime of occupation

The conquest of a large part of Romania meant for the Central Powers the opportunity to renew their troops' forces, exhausted because of the shortages during the first two years of the First World War. They found in the recently occupied territory an abundance of cereals and a wide range of alimentary products that would be used to cover the severe food shortages faced by the military troops and the civilians in the Triple Alliance countries.

The Military Administration took action to exploit as efficiently as possible the Romanian territory. The measures adopted implied using agriculture equipment, cultivating all vacant lands, including parks, and employing specialists to put into service, at full capacity, the exploitation of the fishing areas in the Danube Delta and the Black Sea. At the same time, the Romanian population aged between 14 and 60 years old was obliged to work for the benefit of the Germans.

Due to these measures, the production increases. Every day, trains loaded with food and animals went mainly to Germany, but also to Austria-Hungary. The distribution was made according to the quotas established by the Central Powers representatives that met in Vienna and Berlin, in October and November 1916.

CHAPTER IV.

The Economic Major State's exploitation of Romanian raw materials

Besides food resources, the Germans exploited intensively Romania's natural resources. A major interest of the Military Administration was to put into service the exploitation of oil wells, the oil being the essential element for carrying on the war and winning the final victory. The seizure of the most important oil fields by the German occupation was a major support for the Central Powers armies, but it was a real blow to the Romanian army.

Other important natural resources were also seized by the German troops: most state and private forest areas, coal and salt mines were intensively exploited during the two year occupation.

The German occupants took action on obtaining oil and other materials. For this purpose, they created new sections in the Bucharest slaughterhouse. The oil was

extracted from cereal seeds through the process of degermination. After the degermination process, cereals were used for the population's consumption.

The entire industry in the occupied area contributed to increasing the combatant potential of the occupants. All finite raw materials and residues in warehouses and private households were requisitioned.

CHAPTER V.

Romanian institutions and other economic sectors under German occupation

Another form of exploitation of Romania during German occupation was the appropriation of the National Bank of Romania's private accounts deposited at the German Reichsbank. The right given to the General Bank of Romania to emit paper money without coverage considerably increased Romania's damages during the First World War.

Besides financial damages, Romania was obliged to cover the maintenance expenses of the military administration and occupation troops.

The Military Administration requisitioned the means of transport and communication. Rail and ship transports were intensively exploited as, every day, food, raw materials and technical equipment were sent to the occupants' countries. That is why the transport of civilians was restricted during the first part of the

occupation. Gradually, certain routes of the public transport were allowed for the population under occupation.

The requisition of the postal services was in the interest of the occupation army and avoided the exchange of information between the front and the occupied area. Gradually, a freedom of the correspondence between civilians and prisoners was given.

CHAPTER VI.

Romanians' attitudes in the occupied area towards the war

During the Great War, two types of attitudes towards the occupants manifested. There were either attitudes of collaboration with the enemy, or of military treason. The treason of the Colonel Alexandru D. Sturdza marked the political and military background.

On the opposite side, there were the Romanians' actions of resistance that frustrate the Germans' efforts in the occupied area.

CHAPTER VII.

The economic consequences of the German occupation

After two years of German occupation, Romania was drained of its resources, remaining with huge debts, with houses destroyed, with over half a million of deads and many other maimed. A mobilization without precedent of all Romanians was necessary in order to rebuild the country, since the great advantage of the war was the return of the three historical provinces- Bessarabia, Bukovina, Transylvania- within the boundaries of Romania, after a long period of division.

Conclusions

According to the decisions taken within the common meeting of the Central Powers, which took place in October and November 1916 at Berlin and Vienna, the economic measures of exploitation of the new taken territory have been following out. Their first action was the creation of a well organized administration, to which all the institutions and economic departments have been subordinated.

To assure the exploitation of all the resources they created a special institution: the Economic Major State (Wirtschaftsstab). The mission of this institution was organizing all economic departments in order to assure not only the food for the occupation troops, but also to

ameliorate the commonwealth of the population, especially in Germany and Austria-Hungary where there was lack of food and the civilians died of malnutrition.

Most part of cultivated products by the population under occupation was confiscated.

At the moment of sharing these products they applied the sizes established at the common meetings of Vienna and Berlin.

The most important oil zone entered under the Central Powers' occupation. In order to restart the oil well, destroyed at the pullback of Romanians 'troops, the Germans brought some experts and they have also used the prisoners' work.

In order to extract oils and fatty matters they have supplemented the areas of cultivated land with specific plants and they have made arrangements for fatty matters' extraction in the factories from the occupied area.

Germans have also turned their attention to Romanian industry. The raw materials discovered in the stock building have been embargoed; they have decided to keep only the factories which the delivery was immediately necessary. The agriculture equipments left have been disassembled and they have been sent with the raw materials in order to assure the run of the economy in the countries of origin. Beside the raw materials from the stock buildings of the factories, there were also confiscated those of the population, including the old ones. The population's rebellion, who witnessed helplessly to the dismantling of the bells, comes to a climax.

The occupants have intensely exploited and have drastically cut the forest, mines and salt mines' resources. The Military Administration has subordinated the banks, the post and the transports from the occupied area. As opposed to other areas under German occupation, they have decided from the very first meetings in 1916 that the General Bank of Romania has the emitter right, although the only which has this attribution was the National Bank of Romania.

The Treaty of Bucharest, signed on 7 May 1918, has enslaved Romania for almost a century, which determined the feedback of European press, put in front of a new reality at the end of the war, a Germany which would occupy the first place in the European economy.

The end of the war has found Romania allied again to the Entente Cordiale. The population's happiness caused by the pullback of Central Powers' armies is quickly replaced with the sadness. The country image after the liberation is melancholy; devastated houses, uncultivated land, blunted families. All their hopes get better to the state, and the state through its representatives makes a lot of demarches in order to reclaim most part of losses caused by the war.

Key words: First War World, neutrality, occupation, German occupation institutions, agriculture, industry, resistance, treason.