REVIEW

Grant T. Harward, *Războiul Sfânt al României. Militarii, motivaţia şi Holocaustul (Romania`s Holy War. Soldiers. Motivation. And the Holocaust),* traducere de Alina Pavelescu, Editura Corint, Bucureşti, 2024, 527 p.

The Romanian Army, as an institution, pursued an antisemitic policy during the war fought between June 22, 1941, and August 23, 1944, and Romania was not a reluctant ally of Nazi Germany during World War II. These are the most significant conclusions of American historian Grant T. Harward in his doctoral dissertation, defended at Texas A&M University (College Station, USA), translated and published in Romanian.

In an interview with Ada Codău, conducted during an event hosted by Ovidius University of Constanţa, Grant T. Harward emphasized that the Romanian Army, during its operations between 1941 and 1944, operated not only with strategic and military objectives but also underpinned by a distinct ideology. "There were many who became bystanders, allowing atrocities to occur because, in their minds, Jews were associated with communism, and they believed that if such orders were given, they had to follow them," the American historian stated (https://www.presshub.ro/istoricul-grant-harward-despre-implicarea-romaniei-in-holocaust-ideologia-a-legitimat-atrocitatile-trebuie-sa-intelegem-si-ce-a-fost-rau-in-istoria-noastra-352828/).

The volume is structured into eight chapters, all organized chronologically and thematically: I - The Ideology of the Holy War, II - Military Culture, Interwar Politics, and Neutrality, III - 1940-1941: From Neutrality to the Axis, IV - 1941: Holy War and the Holocaust, V - The Holy War Doubles Its Stakes, VI - 1942-1944: The Defensive Holy War, VII - Propaganda and Discipline, VIII - Women and Minorities.

The motivation of Romanian soldiers, writes Grant T. Harward, was rooted in four powerful ideologies that convinced them that joining other European states under Nazi Germany's leadership against the Soviet Union was in the nation's best interest: nationalism, religion, antisemitism, and anti-communism (pp. 46–48). Harward explains that Romanians believed Jews were satanic, portraying them as both exploitative capitalists and revolutionary communists (p. 48). Religion legitimized the war as "holy," framing it as an apocalyptic battle to save humanity from "godless atheism" (p. 47).

Furthermore, anti-communism united Romanians across social classes against the Soviet Union. Romania's decision to join the Axis is often described as a calculated Realpolitik move, but it was largely a visceral reaction rooted in fear and hatred of communism. The Soviet occupation of Northern Bukovina and Bessarabia in 1940, notes Harward, along with the Romanian soldiers'

firsthand experiences in the Soviet "paradise" after 1941, only reinforced the anti-communism of ordinary soldiers (pp. 48–49).

In exploring the ideological premises of the so-called Holy War, the military conflict against the USSR initiated by Germany on June 22, 1941, in which Romania participated, the author emphasizes that "the mere existence of nationalism, religion, antisemitism, and anti-communism—even fascism—in the interwar period did not predetermine" the military invasion of the Soviet Union (p. 89).

However, Harward writes that even though "Romania's path to the Holy War was not a straight line," it was built on a solid ideological foundation (p. 89), shaped precisely by the identified four constituent elements.

In the second chapter, the author, an academic researcher at the U.S. Army Center of Military History, examines the evolution, education, recruitment, and training of Romanian officers and non-commissioned officers from the second half of the 19th century to the onset of hostilities in 1941. Harward's conclusions converge on several key points that later explain the actions and behavior of the Romanian Army on Soviet territory, particularly its attitude toward non-Romanian ethnic citizens.

The Romanian officer corps, writes Grant T. Harward, possessed a certain level of professionalism but was generally less competent than other European armies (p. 101). This was partly because many officers treated soldiers as a source of unpaid labor. Soldiers, the author explains, were "rented out" to large estates as field laborers, with the earnings going to regimental finances—a practice particularly encouraged during the Great Depression (1929–1933) but not limited to that period (p. 112).

Although military expenditures, limited by budget constraints after 1918, increased significantly in the latter half of the 1930s (29% of the budget in 1935, 35% in 1936, 33% in 1937), the eastern border (along the Dniester, with the USSR) was virtually unfortified (p. 138). On paper, Harward adds, the Carol II Line (the official name of the fortification) seemed impressive: bunkers, protected crossings, observation/command posts, anti-tank ditches, minefields, and barbed wire. In reality, however, the so-called "Carol's Dyke," as it was ironically nicknamed, was largely unfinished (p. 138).

The cession of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina, the abrupt withdrawal in the summer of 1940, and the frustrations of the officer corps over the humiliation caused by the corruption and impotence of the political class, led by King Carol II, form the backdrop of the book's third chapter.

King Carol II's decision not to fight for Bessarabia and Bukovina, the author writes, shocked the Romanian people. As evidence, the testimony of General Nicolae Ciupercă, commander of the 4th Army in Bessarabia, is cited. He explained that no withdrawal plans had been made in June 1940 because "no indication, however vague, was given regarding a possible retreat" (p. 147).

The onset of the war on June 22, 1941, did not solely involve military operations, Grant T. Harward emphasizes, but also addressed the frustrations caused by the territorial concessions of 1940, alongside the fulfillment of nationalist, antisemitic, and anti-communist ideologies.

The pogroms in Iaşi (June 1941), Galaţi, Dorohoi, and various towns and villages in Bessarabia during the summer and autumn of 1941 were considered punitive measures by Romanian Army officers and soldiers in response to the humiliating withdrawals of June 1940. Following the full occupation of the territory between the Prut and Dniester rivers in the summer of 1941, the Romanian Army and central authorities in Bucharest established the Transnistrian Government and numerous ghettos, where Jews, particularly from Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina, were forcibly relocated.

Harward estimates that after gendarmes "plundered, raped, and killed thousands of people along the way," 86,000 Jews from Bukovina and 56,000 Jews from Bessarabia reached Transnistria. Simultaneously, the Transnistrian Government began rounding up the 100,000–150,000 Soviet Jews remaining in Transnistria into ghettos and camps (p. 253).

The ideological foundations of Romania's participation in the war against the USSR, which began on June 22, 1941, are presented and argued throughout the fourth chapter. This chapter establishes that "the myth of Jewish betrayal in 1940 contributed to the paranoia among Romanian soldiers" (p. 193).

The pogroms in Iaşi (June 1941), Galaţi, Dorohoi, and other towns and villages in Moldova were also justified using this theme of "betrayal" by Jewish communities.

The actions of the Romanian armies following the occupation of Odessa and operations in Crimea intertwined with the Antonescu regime's policy of using the Transnistrian Government "as a pen for Jews" (p. 269). This policy led "some mid-level officials" to initiate genocide behind the frontlines even before the crisis on the front line itself (p. 269).

Many Soviet Jews, Grant T. Harward explains, were confined in camps along the Bug River without food, medicine, or shelter. The author further notes that the Transnistrian Government had fewer than 600 gendarmes to guard at least 300,000 Jews, forcing them to rely on local Ukrainian police, which sparked fears that the camps and ghettos might become centers for partisan activity (p. 269).

The ongoing precarious situation in Crimea, Harward concludes, contributed to the genocide in Transnistria (p. 274). Reports of massacres in the counties of Golta, Berezovca, and Ochakiv, as well as widespread famine in the counties of Balta, Tulchyn, and Mogilev, began reaching the Transnistrian Government from Odessa. The 3rd Army dispatched investigators to assess the situation. An inspection of the Domanovka camp found unburied corpses being

eaten by dogs, while sick or dying Jews looked on at the grim scene. In the ghettos of Obodovka and Bershad alone, 5,000 Jews perished from disease (p. 281).

The alliance between Nazi Germany and Ion Antonescu's Romania was never the same after Stalingrad, the author notes in the sixth chapter of the work. Romanians, Harward writes, believed that if the USSR was so vengeful toward its own citizens, it would treat its enemies even worse.

Moreover, the possibility of a Soviet victory was closely tied to the Romanians' fear that they would be punished for persecuting the Jews (p. 344). This fear convinced the Antonescu regime, as the Soviet advance continued across the entire front, to alter its policy toward Romanian Jews in Transnistria (p. 361).

The objectives, strategies, and means of propaganda during the period 1938–1944, controlled first by King Carol II and later by Ion Antonescu, are fundamental elements of Romania's participation in the war alongside Nazi Germany. These aspects are detailed in the seventh chapter of the book, alongside the use of human resources from women's organizations and ethnic or religious minorities in the military effort (chapter eight).

On April 9, 1941, the Council for the Patronage of Social Works was established (led by Maria Antonescu) as a competitive counterpart to the Red Cross (where Queen Mother Elena served as honorary president). The author notes that after Stalingrad, "the enthusiasm of nurses for the Holy War diminished, even though the army needed increasing support" (p. 433).

Ethnic minorities, particularly Jews and Roma, were consistently placed in subordinate positions within the military hierarchies and decisions dominated by the Romanian majority. Slavic minorities (Ukrainians, Russians, Bulgarians), predominantly from Bukovina, Bessarabia, and Transnistria, were less often employed for direct military purposes and more for agricultural activities, transportation, or regional infrastructure work.

Grant T. Harward's volume offers a fresh interpretative approach that challenges the dominant narratives of Romanian military history and likely marks the beginning of a necessary scientific debate.

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