

## THE TESTIMONIES GIVEN BY THE INHABITANTS OF BAIA AND IAȘI COUNTIES ON THE KILLINGS, CRIMES, AND PLUNDERS PERPETRATED BY THE SOLDIERS OF THE RED ARMY AFTER THE BREAKING OF THE WAR FRONT LINE IN APRIL 1944\*

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**Abstract:** At the beginning of April 1944, the Red Army crossed the Prut River and occupied the counties of Dorohoi, Botoșani, and Baia, as well as part of Iași county. In Baia county, Soviet troops were stationed in the communes of **Hărmăneștii Noi, Ruginoasa, Costești, and Stolniceni - Ghițescu**. In Iași county, the troops occupied the communes of **Belcești, Băiceni, and Războieni**, and **Tg. Frumos** town. The memos of the General Police Directorate and the approximately 100 statements of the refugees from the above mentioned communes, given in the presence of an officer of the Army's Special Intelligence Service, are written testimonies of the killings, crimes, and plunders perpetrated by the Soviet soldiers and officers, accompanied by civilians as well. The file researched also comprises two testimonies according to which some of the Russian troops behaved like a genuine, disciplined army, despite the fact that they were an actual army of occupation.

**Keywords:** Red Army, communes, Hărmăneștii Noi, Ruginoasa, Costești, Stolniceni - Ghițescu, Tg. Frumos town, killings, rapes, plunders/looting, displacement, Marshal Antonescu, King Carol II, King Michael.

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The so-called “Moldavian - Bessarabian front” stretched along the line Tg. Neamț, southern Pașcani and Tg. Frumos, the southern bank of the Bahlui River, northern Iași, the Prut River, Cornești, northern Kishinev, Tighina, and the Dniester River. Its fortification had already begun in 1939, under Prime Minister Armand Călinescu, and continued under the Government led by Gheorghe Tătărescu, despite opposition on the part of General I. Antonescu, “who did not trust permanent defensive works made of concrete.”<sup>1</sup>

Second World War military historians reported on the powerful offensive of the Red Army in the spring of 1944. During the offensive, the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 4<sup>th</sup> German Guards Tank Armies were pushed towards the Luck - Tarnopol front, the left wing

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<sup>1</sup> Constantin I. Kirițescu, *România în al Doilea Război Mondial*, București, Univers Enciclopedic, 1995, vol. II, p. 166.

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of the 8<sup>th</sup> German Guards Tank Army reached as far as Uman, while the 6<sup>th</sup> German Guards Tank Army was pushed to the Bug River. By 15 March 1944, the left wing of the 8<sup>th</sup> German Guards Tank Army had been crushed, creating a wide breach between itself and the 1<sup>st</sup> German Guards Tank Army; the breach opened the way for five Russian Armies to get to Bessarabia and Northern Moldavia. Some of the frontline troops encountered no opposition and managed to cross the Prut River at the beginning of April 1944.<sup>2</sup> Dorohoi and Botoșani counties “benefited” from the intervention of the “liberation” army, the same as the communes at the outskirts of the former Baia county (having Fălticeni as its capital), the communes of **Hărmăneștii Noi**, Vașcani village, **Ruginoasa**, Reditu and Dumbrăvița villages, **Costești**, Giurgiulești village, and **Stolniceni - Ghițescu**, all on 9 April 1944. In Iași county, at its northernmost border, the communes of **Belcești**, **Băiceni**, Bărbătești village, **Tg. Frumos**, Jora village, and **Războieni** were also occupied, the locals being taken by surprise in the middle of the day by soldiers who “were coming while playing the harmonica.”<sup>3</sup> In Jora village, Tg. Frumos commune, the troops marched their way in, led by Romanian Lipovans who “**were saying they have nothing against the Romanians, that they are friends with the Romanians** ... and just want to go to Bucharest and then to Berlin, only **to retreat in the Prut River region, where they will settle the border.**”<sup>4</sup>

The same promise is reported by other statements as well: “they told us not to run away, since they have nothing against the Romanians” or “they have nothing against the Romanians, they have something against the Germans and want to reach Bucharest” or “they pointed their guns at me..., after which they spoke to me in Romanian and told me that we should not worry, that everything is going to be alright.”<sup>5</sup> It was in this atmosphere marked by “the sound of the harmonica” and promises, that Soviet soldiers invaded all the local households to establish their headquarters and obtain food. However, many statements point out to the fact that the invaders were a mixture of soldiers and civilians,<sup>6</sup> with civilians sometimes exceeding the number of soldiers.<sup>7</sup> Until the war front was established, in a period of time of approximately one month of harassing fire between the Russian troops on the one hand and the German and Romanian troops on the other, when the

<sup>2</sup> General Platon Chirtoagă, *Istoria politică și militară a războiului României contra Rusiei sovietice 22 iunie – 23 august 1944*, Iași, Fides, 1997, p. 200

<sup>3</sup> Statement given by Ion V. Mercaș, Băiceni commune, Iași county, on 3.VII.1944, acc. to ANIC, Special Intelligence Service, file no. 1-1944, appendix no. 569.284/1944, sheet 40.

<sup>4</sup> Statement given by Gheorghe Adam, 59 years old, Jora village, Tg. Frumos commune, *ibidem*, sheet 8.

<sup>5</sup> Statement given by Gheorghe Profira Bejan, Vașcani village, Hărmăneștii Noi commune, Baia county; Elisabeta N. Mercaș, Băiceni commune, Iași county; Maria I. Velniceru, Războieni commune, Iași county, *ibidem*, pages 16, 38, and 56.

<sup>6</sup> “In Belcești commune, there are approximately 1,000 Russians, all wearing civilian clothes, always drunk, always shooting someone in the village” – the statement of Petrilă Ioan, 49 years old, *ibidem*, sheet 29.

<sup>7</sup> ANIC, Special Intelligence Service, file no. 1-1944, appendix no. 569.284/1944, sheets 1 - 2.

Russian troops successively retreated and then returned in the region, many local residents managed to escape the “benefits” of Russian presence and fled southwards, to Roman, Neamț, and Bacău counties, taking with them only the clothes on their backs and horse-drawn carriages carrying children, the elderly, and the sick. The nightmare lived by the inhabitants of the communes in Baia and Iași counties at the time is reported in the memos of the General Police Directorate concerning the state of affairs in the territories occupied by the advancing Soviet troops and particularly in the statements taken by the governors of the counties where people found refuge, in the presence of an officer of the Second Bureau of the Defence Department (the Army’s Special Intelligence Service).<sup>8</sup> **The testimonies of the approximately one hundred refugees** who had experienced the terror inflicted by the Russian soldiers are overwhelming. They speak about **killings/shootings, rapes at gunpoint sometimes followed by the killing of the victims and the desecration of the dead bodies by dismemberment, as well as of the looting of household items** (including carriages, small and large household animals, such as horses and bulls, cows, bullocks, and calves, sheep and swine, grain crops, such as wheat, barley, oat, and corn, bedclothes, such as quilts, pillows, and bedsheets, decorative or dowery items, such as mats, carpets, tapestry, duvets, etc., clothes, clocks, and money.

As far as this particular topic is concerned, Romanian historiography had two different approaches: the first, adopted until the end of the 1970’s, relied on mystification and praised the “benefits brought about by the liberating Red Army”; the second, adopted until 1989, treated the topic as taboo, as a result of censorship. In the last 30 years, with the demise of censorship and the lifting of restrictions on researching Romanian as well as Russian archives, documents were prepared<sup>9</sup> and studies and articles were published on the abuse perpetrated by the Russian occupation armies in **Banat**<sup>10</sup> or in **Hunedoara**<sup>11</sup> or **Vrancea**<sup>12</sup> counties, particularly after 23 August 1944.

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<sup>8</sup> Flori Stănescu, Dragoș Zamfirescu, *Ocupația sovietică în România Documente, 1944 - 1946*, București, Editura Vremea, 1998, p. 237

<sup>9</sup> Constantin C. Gomboș, *File din istoria militară a Banatului – Armata Roșie în Banat (1944 - 1958)*, Timișoara, Eurostampa, 2018.

<sup>10</sup> Constantin C. Gomboș, *File din istoria militară a Banatului – Armata Roșie în Banat (1944 - 1958)*, Timișoara, Eurostampa, 2018.

<sup>11</sup> Daniel Guță, *Filmul crimelor comise de Armata Rosie în România după 23 august: femei împușcate în cap sau călcate cu camionul de sovietici, execuții mafiot, violuri* cf. [adevarul.ro/locale/hunedoara/filmul-crimelor-comise-armata-rosie-romania-23-august-femei-impuscate-cap-calcate-camionul-sovietici-executii-mafiot-violuri-1\\_5620b3dcf5eaafab2cb70555/index.html](http://adevarul.ro/locale/hunedoara/filmul-crimelor-comise-armata-rosie-romania-23-august-femei-impuscate-cap-calcate-camionul-sovietici-executii-mafiot-violuri-1_5620b3dcf5eaafab2cb70555/index.html)

<sup>12</sup> Horia Dumitrescu, Ramona Miron, *Abuzurile Armatei Roșii în Vrancea în Cronica Vrancei*, vol. V, Editura Pallas, Focșani, 2006, pp. 312 – 326

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The promises made by the Russian soldiers, according to which “they have nothing against the Romanians, they have something against the Germans”, proved to be outright lies. Profira Mihai Haliga, a 31 year old resident of Ruginoasa commune, a married woman with four children, remembered the horror of what happened then: “On 9 April this year, at approximately 3 o’clock in the afternoon, the Russians entered our commune; they wore civilian clothes and shot our pig and our poultry, then robbing us of all our belongings, leaving us with no food, no clothes, and nowhere to live; they defiled women, were drunk all the time and practiced target shooting, committing all kinds of acts of cruelty.”<sup>13</sup> Most statements report on rapes, displacements, plunders, and, sometimes, shootings.

**Killings.** If we consider the fact that the statements refer only to two counties and a short period of time, of only two to three weeks, the time it took the locals to find refuge somewhere else, the number of murders committed by the Russian soldiers is particularly high. Costache Gheorghe Dodoae, a 64 year old resident of Dumbrăvița village, Ruginoasa commune, who lived under Russian occupation for only about 7 to 10 days - “more than one week but less than two” – stated that “local resident Dumitru Ciobanu had two of his sons killed by gun fire, while they were hiding in the house’s basement, for fear of the dropping bombs. They shot them through the basement vent. The man and his wife and the other children were also there and they remained in hiding near the corpses for some time until they were able to get out. No one buried the dead boys, they were just left there”.<sup>14</sup>

The killing of the children of “the local resident Dumitru Ciobanu” is also confirmed by Gheorghe Rarița Radu from Rediu, a village neighbouring Dumbrăvița.<sup>15</sup> This manner of killing was not reported in Dumbrăvița village only. “The local resident Gh. Ilie Burlacu, who was also hiding in his basement, was killed in the same way”, states the witness. In Dumbrăvița village, “the local resident Vasile Dumitru Maghercă was found murdered in his home. It is believed that a Russian came to his house and asked for something, and because he was not properly served, he shot his gun”.<sup>16</sup> The use of the expression “he shot his gun” shows clearly that Vasile Dumitru Maghercă died as a result of a shotgun.

Petrilă Ioan, a 49 year old man who managed to escape “with his entire family” as late as 10 May 1944 gave testimony on three murders which took place in Belcești

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<sup>13</sup> *ANIC, Special Intelligence Service* (hereinafter referred to as *ANIC, SSI*) file no. 1-1944, appendix no. 569.284/1944, sheet 78.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, sheet 19.

<sup>15</sup> “Local resident Dumitru Ciobanu had two of his sons killed through the vent of the basement where they were hiding for fear of the dropping bombs”, *ibidem*, sheet 25.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, sheet 19.

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commune. Before he ran away, crossing the Bahlui River, the Russians “had already shot one of Ilie Zaharia’s boys, Constantin Costache, and Constantin Stan’s wife”.<sup>17</sup>

A similarly brutal murder is reported by Maria V. Nistor, a 38 year old mother of three children from Ruginoasa commune, who managed to escape after only six days of Russian occupation. After entering “our house at night by breaking the windows” and unsuccessfully attempting at raping her, “On 12 April, five soldiers arrived at our house; one shot me in the leg, another Russian shot a 10 year old in the calf, while a goddaughter of mine, Maria P. Bostan, was shot several times in the chest and head and killed because she refused to let them molest her”.<sup>18</sup>

**Rapes.** According to Milovan Djilas, the raping of women by the soldiers of the Red Army wherever they were present in Europe was well-known and accepted even by the highest ranking Soviet Union leaders. While explaining to his interlocutor the psychological makeup of the Russian soldier “who has fought from Stalingrad to Belgrade - over thousands of kilometres of his own devastated land, across the dead bodies of his comrades and dearest ones”, Generalissimo Stalin, himself the perpetrator of millions of murders, including the killing of his own people, expressed the following opinions: “And what is so awful in his amusing himself with a woman, after such horrors ? You have imagined the Red Army to be ideal. And it is not ideal, nor can it be, even if it did not contain a certain percentage of criminals - we opened up our prisons and stuck everybody into the army... One has to understand the soldier. The Red Army is not ideal. The important thing is that it fights Germans - and it is fighting them well; the rest doesn’t matter”.<sup>19</sup>

The testimonies of inhabitants in the aforementioned communes of Baia and Iași counties are rich in statements referring to the rapes committed by the Russian soldiers. Of the 122 file sheets researched, only a couple lack in such references. For instance, almost each and every sheet comprises statements such as the following: “they tried to rape my 16 year old daughter” (Ion V. Mercaș from Băiceni, sheet 40); “they were drunk and they were harassing my daughters and my wife” (Dimitru C. Maghercă from Ruginoasa, sheet 42); “they were after women, particularly girls and young women” (Ruxandra Gh. Becheru from Băiceni, sheet 43); “I kept my daughter hidden at all times, because they were trying to molest her [...] They were chasing women through the village, naked, in plain sight. You could hear women scream throughout the night” (Costache Bârleanu from Hărmăneștii Noi, sheet 44); “I spent the entire time in hiding, with my daughter. As soon as we got out of the holes in the ground, the Russians were pointing their guns at me [...] to give them my daughter, so they could molest her” (Catinca I. Andreescu from Hărmăneștii Noi, sheet 45). On file sheet 46, the refugee Gh. T. Simionescu from

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, sheet 29.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, sheet 120

<sup>19</sup> Milovan Djilas, *Conversații cu Stalin*, București, Editura Corint, Istorie, 2015, pp. 146 - 147.

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the same commune states the following: “They were chasing women around the village, exposing their genitals; they were shooting at the women who refused to submit”.<sup>20</sup>

**Debauchery, plunders, and sex crimes** seemed to be the focus of all Russian soldiers and officers alike. Two refugees, Vasile Munteanu and Costică Gh. Bătăușu from Belcești commune, stated that: “A Russian officer came by carriage to the house of a young married woman, Miluca Costache Zaharia, and attempted to abduct her in order to rape her; the woman managed to escape and ran across the garden, followed by the officer shooting at her”.<sup>21</sup> The story completes the picture of a part of the advancing Russian army and fully supports the opinion of another refugee who believed that the crimes, rapes, and abuses of all kinds were the signs of “an army without any sort of discipline. They all do as they please, while plunders and abuse are at the center of the actions pursued by all the soldiers present in the village”.<sup>22</sup> The Russians entered villages and communes “by carriage”, tens and tens of such carriages, one after the other, just like nomads, many of them wearing civilian clothes. The file also comprises two testimonies according to which some of the Russian troops behaved like a genuine, disciplined army, despite the fact that they were an actual army of occupation. Costache Adam, 59 years old, and Ciobanu Gheorghe, 60 years old, both residents of Jora village, Târgu Frumos commune, stated as follows: „we were occupied by the Russian army; the Russians came marching in”, but “They did not engage in beatings or torture; they only stayed for 24 hours”. However, the same statements show that, in the neighbouring villages “Giurgești and Costești, Baia county, the Russians molested old women, young women, and even girls as young as 12 - 13 years old; they were abused in a barbaric manner, as we were told by the locals we met, who also told us they were occupied by the Russians as well.”<sup>23</sup> The facts are supported by further statements. Constantin I. Hohan from Giurgiulești village, Costești commune, states that: “after I gave them food and drinks, one of the Russians grabbed a 20 year old daughter of mine and tried to forcibly molest her, threatening her with his gun, but my wife started to scream and even I screamed, so he eventually and very reluctantly decided to let her go.” Local residents such as “Gheorghe Dragoteanu, Gheorghe Nastasia, Nicolae Bodoagă, and Gh. Liteanu had their wives and daughters molested”, adds the same Constantin I. Hohan.<sup>24</sup>

There were also instances when the rapes were followed by acts of sheer sadism. Catinca I. Andreescu from Hărmăneștii Noi tells the following story: “for ten days,

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, sheets 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, sheet 28.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, sheet 36.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, sheet 8

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, sheet 14.

we endured the terror inflicted by the bolsheviks; the Russians molested an 80 year old woman, and then, they cut her with their knives”.<sup>25</sup>, while Maria I. Perju told the investigators that “they molested an 18 year old girl from Giurgești village, Costești commune, and then they cut off her breasts”.<sup>26</sup>

While the rapes referred to above were reported by other village residents from the stories they heard, others are reported by witnesses or by the rape victims themselves. The age of the victims ranged between 10 and 100 years old. The statement given by one resident of Ruginoasa village, according to which the Russian soldiers “Molested women and girls as young as 10 years old”,<sup>27</sup> is confirmed by several documents. “I managed to escape when the Russians were defeated by the German soldiers. They pointed their guns at me and ordered me to give them my 10 year old daughter so they could rape her, as they did with other girls”, stated Maria Gheorghe Curcă from Vașcani - Ruginoasa village, a 38 year old woman, a war widow since 1942, who was left with three under age children.<sup>28</sup> In Bărbătești village, Băiceni-Iași commune, four Russian soldiers raped a 14 year old girl”.<sup>29</sup> The savageness and sadism of some went so far that, after raping the 38 year old daughter, they also raped her 100 year old mother.<sup>30</sup> A similar act of savageness was committed by “five or six soldiers” who “took turns in violating the daughter of Silvica Gh. Bătăușu in front of her uncle and her sister who managed to escape by running through the window”.<sup>31</sup> The girl’s rape is also confirmed by the statement given by Petrilă Ion, a 49 year old resident of the same commune. “I fled from Belcești,” he reported, “because the Russians started to molest the women and girls in the village; they molested Gheorghe Bătăușu’s daughter, Gh. Bobolea’s daughter, and many more wives”.<sup>32</sup>

The same witnesses, i.e. Vasile Munteanu and Costică Gh. Bătăușu, when reporting on the assault committed against the girl Silvica Gh. Bătăușu by five-six Russian

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*, sheet 45

<sup>26</sup> Statement given by Maria I. Perju, 45 years old, a mother of four children, from Costești commune, *ibidem*, sheet 83

<sup>27</sup> Statement given by Vasile C. Cojocaru, 60 years old, Rediu village, Ruginoasa commune, *ibidem*, sheet 15

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*, sheet 100

<sup>29</sup> Incident reported by Ion Neculai Ciobanu, the son of Neculai and Ruxandra, 49 years old, married, a father of six children: “*They were always threatening us with their guns. They were always looking for wine and brandy. They were getting drunk and chased the girls in the village and defiled them. They came across a girl from a neighbouring house, Aneta Toader Fecioru, 14 years old. The Russian soldiers took her to a basement and four of them molested her there*”, *ibidem*, sheets 5 - 6.

<sup>30</sup> Catinca Gh. Țibulcă, 62 years old, Vașcani village, Hărmaneștii Noi commune, gave the following statement: “*My mother, Ioana C. Botezatu, 100 years old, who was walking around in crutches was assaulted by force, the same as I*”, *ibidem*, sheet 107.

<sup>31</sup> The story is told by Vasile Munteanu and Costică Gh. Bătăușu, Belcești commune, *ibidem*, sheet 28

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, sheet 29

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soldiers, stated that: “They did the same to women such as Ileana Mihai Zaharia whose husband was away at war, Victoria G. Ciobanu, Maria Gh. Didică, and Profira Costache Popa”.<sup>33</sup> Another victim who reported on her own humiliation was Elena N. Manole from Războieni - Iași commune. “I was under bolshevik occupation for 3 days; they abused me and I ran away from home because I was afraid”.<sup>34</sup> The rapes were frequently committed in front of the victim’s parents and children. The same humiliation was endured by Ortansa Gh. Nistor from Ruginoasa who stayed under Russian army occupation for only five days; she stated as follows: “I was hit by the Russian soldiers and **two of them took turns and molested me in front of an elderly man and one of my daughters**” (our emphasis); the woman was then forced to do their laundry and was robbed of 14,000 Romanian lei.<sup>35</sup> In the same commune, Gheorghe T. Ispir, a 48 year old resident, complained: “I was insulted, kicked out of my own house, they took my wife and they molested her”.<sup>36</sup> The Sârbu spouses from Hărmănești had to endure the same humiliation; their statement said: “They took my wife by force and they molested her”.<sup>37</sup>

However, the documents in the same file also report on an instance when a Russian soldier intervened to save a girl who was about to be raped. The testimony belongs to a resident of Ruginoasa commune. “I have a 16 year old girl” states the girl’s father. “One day, at around 8 o’clock in the evening, some Russian soldiers came to my place and took my daughter to molest her in front of me and my wife. Both me and my wife pleaded with them and eventually **succeeded to save her due to the intervention of another Russian soldier**”.<sup>38</sup>

The **displacement** of innocent civilians were also actions carried out by the Russian troops with the objective to cause terror immediately after the breaking of the war front line and the invasion of Romanian territory. The reason given was that they “were displacing the population because the Germans and the Romanians displaced their population as well”. The statement belongs to Petrilă Ioan, a resident of Belcești – Iași who took refuge together with his entire family because “the Russians started to remove the commune residents and take them to Ukraine; they took Neculaie Bloga, Vasile Anuleanu’s daughter, and Marina Ciornei”.<sup>39</sup> Maria Dumitru Mânjescu from Stolniceni - Ghițescu, Baia county, endured the abuse until one “of the army leaders asked the translator [to tell us] that, in 2 or 3 days, we

<sup>33</sup> The story is told by Vasile Munteanu and Costică Gh. Bătăușu, Belcești commune, *ibidem*, sheet 28

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, sheet 52

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*, sheet 119

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*, sheet 115

<sup>37</sup> Ioan Sârbu, Hărmănești commune, a refugee relocated to Săcusești commune, Bacău county, *ibidem*, sheet 72.

<sup>38</sup> Statement given on 3 July 1944 by Gheorghe Șt. Haliga, 53 years old, married, a father of six children from Ruginoasa, relocated to Valea lui Ion commune, Bacău county, *ibidem*, sheet 34.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*, sheet 29.



should be ready to go to Russia, which is what he wrote on our gate”.<sup>40</sup> We also learn about the displacement to Russia of other innocent Romanian civilians from the statements of Neculai Costea, a resident of Băiceni – Iași<sup>41</sup> and Maria Petre Beceru, a resident of Tg. Frumos.<sup>42</sup>

The **desecration of places of worship and icons** is mentioned in several statements. Icon destruction by shooting is the most frequent incident reported. Reports on the desecration of Orthodox places of worship are recorded in places such as Rediu, Baia county and Belcești, Iași county. The first is a statement by Gheorghe Rarița Radu, according to whom: “They took their horses inside the Rediu village church. They destroyed my holy icons depicting our Lord Jesus Christ and Saint Paraskeva”.<sup>43</sup> In Belcești, “the village’s new church was vandalised and is now used as the occupying army’s toilet; in the old church, there are the horses of one troop”.<sup>44</sup> Since in this last stage of the war, due to the huge loss of human lives, Stalin was forced to enlist the very last of the human resources available, including convicts, as Stalin himself admitted,<sup>45</sup> it is our assumption that the persons who desecrated the places of worship were of a different religion.

**Plunders**, the same as **rapes**, were the primary characteristics of the behaviour exhibited by Russian soldiers. Of the more than one hundred statements given, only those of a few residents of Tg. Frumos town report no abuse or plunders perpetrated by the occupying army.<sup>46</sup> All the other refugees from Tg. Frumos confirmed the

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<sup>40</sup> The statement continues as follows: “Then, both I and my girl, *Catinca Mânjescu*, fled at around 12 o’clock on Easter day through the ravines, towards Blăgești village, until we reached Hâncestii Noi, where we blended with the convoy of people evacuated from the village and headed to the bunkers facing Volintirești village, where we were received by the Romanian guards”, *ibidem*, sheet 30.

<sup>41</sup> Neculai Costea stated: “I know that the Russians displaced several village residents who were taken God knows where, while others were even shot”, *ibidem*, sheet 37.

<sup>42</sup> Maria Petre Beceru, 35 years old, a resident of Tg. Frumos, married, with no children, stated as follows: “They were looking for virgins to defile, telling them they were taking them to Moscow, where life was better than in Romania. People from the commune were removed and displaced and no one knows what happened to them”, *ibidem*, sheet 85.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibidem*, sheet 25

<sup>44</sup> Statement given by two residents of Belcești, Vasile Munteanu and Costică Gh. Bătașu, *ibidem*, sheet 28

<sup>45</sup> Milovan Djilas, *op. cit. loc. cit.*

<sup>46</sup> Mention should be made that they are residents of Tg. Frumos town: Gheorghe Chelărescu, 60 years old; Costache Adam, 59 years old, and Ciobanu Gheorghe, who all stated that „On 9 April this year, we were occupied by the Russian army, marching in. In our village, no one was hurt, no one was molested”, *ibidem*, sheet 8. One possible explanation could be the presence of a disciplined army since, as opposed to all other reports, the troops entered the town “marching in”; the army was most likely an artillery regiment under the command of some educated and well-mannered officers. At the time, Tg. Frumos town had a large, tight-knit Lipovan community. One of the Lipovans, the refugee Vartolomei Artenie (a name frequently encountered even nowadays in the Lipovan community living on the outskirts of the town) stated that, since he did not have enough food for the 12 Russian soldiers present, he “went to his carriage and brought a

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same abusive behaviour on the part of the Russian soldiers.<sup>47</sup> Except for the few Tg. Frumos residents, all the other refugees from the aforementioned places in Baia and Iași counties (but also some refugees from Tg. Frumos, Jora village) reported the abuse and the plunders perpetrated by the Russian soldiers. But what were the Russian soldiers looting? Anything and everything! From household items – ordinary bedclothes such as quilts, pillows, and bed sheets, everyday textiles or decorative items such as mats, tapestry, and carpets, frequently used as dowry items for eligible girls – to male or female clothing items, shoes, clocks, etc. While some abusive actions such as the confiscation of everyday food items like bread, dairy products, eggs, meat, and melted lard were understandable and somewhat excusable during times of war, the “hosts” themselves preparing the food for the “guests” (Russian soldiers) who were eating the food and “washing it down” with alcohol, all the other actions exceeded the normal limits by far.

The inventory of reported stolen items included poultry, swine, cattle, such as oxen, cows, calves, and bullocks, horses, sheep, rams, and lambs. The inventory of reported stolen household items also included carriages drawn by oxen or horses.

The exact quantities and numbers of grains, small and large cattle, poultry, carriages, indoor and outdoor household items looted by the Russian soldiers in just the two or three weeks when the local inhabitants were under Russian army occupation before they managed to flee or take refuge is difficult to summarise. We make a presentation in the two Appendices attached. However, we are not able to show the extent and severity of the plunders and the attacks. That is also because, very many times, Russian soldiers were vandalising or even setting fire to what they were not able to loot. Of particular relevance in this respect is the statement of a female witness from Costești commune, Baia county, concerning the behaviour of the Russian soldiers in the days following their invasion, on 9 April 1944. “I’m telling you one thing, so that it becomes common knowledge now that I can reveal it”, confessed Elena Timofte; “After the Germans, who had their headquarters established in Costești, left, we found everything as we left them, but, when the

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*chunk of beef which he put in the cauldron to boil; in the meantime, he was also talking to them, asking whether Bucharest or Berlin were very far away” (ibidem, sheet 20), a sign that he knew their language, ibidem, sheet 20.*

<sup>47</sup> Two examples: Elena N. Aștefanei, 41 years old, married, a mother of eight children, a resident of Tg. Frumos, stated as follows “*They were robbing us of everything we had: poultry, cattle, grains, household items, and carriages; they were shooting their guns and molested the girls who escaped by running away...*”; Lina Vasile Pânzaru, 17 years old, not married, a resident of Tg. Frumos, stated, among others, that: “*...they shot one of our calves and, after forcing us to cook for them, they shot at us demanding that we give them wine or procure wine if we did not have any, no matter how, or, otherwise, they would shoot us. ... They chased us, the girls, to molest us and we escaped by running away...*” *ibidem*, sheets 77 and 78

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Russians left, everything was in ruins. They even burnt the wooden floors, the fences, and the barns!”<sup>48</sup>

The history of our country shows that the Romanian nation always had foreign, but also local “tools” who helped the enemy. According to a memo reported by the General Police Directorate and recorded by the Army’s Special Intelligence Service on the period immediately before the Russian occupation, the Jewish population in Fălticeni stayed indoors to avoid “the massacres of the German troops”, however “poor people were seen every day, cheerfully waiting for something, some wearing red scarves, sweaters, ties, and headscarves”. In the period before the Russian occupation, “the leaders of the local Jewish organisation decided that the Jews should avoid any action as long as the Romanian authorities were still in power, while, after the arrival of the bolsheviks, they continued to be very cautious” for fear that the Romanian troops would return to power. However, while waiting for the Russians, “the president of the Jewish organisation, Lustgarten Natan, tried to find Romanians who wanted to cooperate with them under the Soviet regime as early as possible”. Looking for pensioners in particular, he identified “Chirică, a former judge, Costăchescu, a former primary school teacher, and others”.<sup>49</sup>

Another memo of the same General Police Directorate reported that “the Soviets were trying to maintain the Romanian administrative bodies in the occupied territories, while also appointing local communist leaders in positions of authority”. This is exactly what happened in Fălticeni, Baia, where Gutter Constantin, a retired attorney was appointed as mayor, while in Ciumulești - Gane commune, Schapira Fișel, a Jewish ethnic was the new mayor”.<sup>50</sup> In the same battle zone, shortly after the invasion of the Russians, Sargeant Samson Petru was able to identify other “tools”: “... in my home village, he stated, I saw the Jewish ethnics Șmil Tâmpescu Aizic and Wagner, a forestry worker, both wearing Russian uniforms and carrying guns, providing information to the Russians and interrogating Romanians around the village”.<sup>51</sup> The statement is partly confirmed by another statement according to which, when Bogdănești commune was occupied, Tâmpescu Șmil and Max Gutman “who is selling colonial items in Fălticeni arrived in the commune first and guided the Soviet army, as they knew the local places well. They were carrying guns...”.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Vasile Iancu, *Ispita singurătății. Eseuri și dialoguri*, Iași, Editura Timpul, 2009, in the chapter “Dumnezeu nu poate primi rugăciunea unui sclav”, pp. 106 - 121. At the time of the interview, in 2002, Elena Timofte was 87 years old, which means that, in 1944, she was 29 years old, so a fully mature person.

<sup>49</sup> ANIC, SSI, file 1/1944, sheet 1.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem*, sheet 2

<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*, sheet 31,

<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem*, sheet 32.

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The recruitment of “tools” from among the Romanian locals took place on site. In Belcești commune, two such persons are identified. The refugees Vasile Munteanu and Costică Bătăușu identified “Vasile Constantin Plăcintă who, in order to secure his life and well-being, became the person who provided the Russians with all the information they needed to either identify former soldiers on the Russian front as well as the injured and disabled, or the houses where women were hiding, so that they could abuse them”.<sup>53</sup> Another supporter of the occupying Russian troops stationed in Belcești commune was “the local resident Ogloghea Dumitru, the commune mayor appointed by the Russians, who also gave him a pair of winter boots. He walks the Russians around the commune and then, the Russians take the locals’ cattle and swine”, according to Petrilă Ioan’s statement”.<sup>54</sup>

I have left at the end a political matter I have encountered in the documents of the file on which my research is based, a matter which I see as of outmost importance. From the statements made by the Russian soldiers in their discussions with the residents of the communes referred to above, we may infer that they were aware of the talks concerning the future of Romania. Neculai Ciobanu was told that “they would defeat Romania, which will become one and the same with Russia”.<sup>55</sup> The same future for Romania may also be inferred from the fact that the Romanians were urged to plough the land, “as they were now the owners”.<sup>56</sup> A similar item of information is present in a memo of the General Police Directorate reporting that “the rural population is urged to go and work the fields”.<sup>57</sup>

Costache Adam, a resident of Tg. Frumos, who was probably accompanied by Lipovans working in the town as translators, was told by the Russian soldiers that they “just want to go to Bucharest and then to Berlin, **only to retreat in the Prut River region, where they will settle the border**”.<sup>58</sup> (our emphasis)

It is also surprising to see that the locals were questioned by Russian soldiers with respect to the future of royalty in Romania. They were shown pictures of the former King, Carol II, who was “*harasho*” (meaning “good”)<sup>59</sup> and “would come” to the throne left vacant by His Majesty, King Michael, who “will be brought down”, the same “Marshall Antonescu”.<sup>60</sup> Costache Gheorghe Dodoae reported that: “They were showing us pictures of the former King, Carol II. and of His Majesty, King

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibidem*, sheet 28/2.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibidem*, sheet 29

<sup>55</sup> *Ibidem*, sheet 6.

<sup>56</sup> Statement given by Elena N. Aștefanei, 41 years old, a mother of eight children, from Tg. Frumos, *ibidem*, sheet 76

<sup>57</sup> *Ibidem*, sheet 2.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibidem*, sheet 8

<sup>59</sup> Statement given by Vasile Haralambie Bârzu, 59 years old, from Bărbătești-Băiceni, *ibidem*, sheet 3

<sup>60</sup> Statement given by Ion Neculai Ciobanu, 59 years old, from Bărbătești-Băiceni, *ibidem*, sheet 6.

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Michael, asking us which one of them we liked. Russian officers were also present”.<sup>61</sup>

We are of the opinion that the questioning of Romanian locals on their opinion and preference for the former King Carol II or his son, Michael, with pictures prepared on purpose, in the presence of Russian officers. was not a random event that could be explained by the Russian soldiers’ sheer curiosity. It was, obviously, an action decided by the high ranking politicians of the then Soviet Union. **Historians should ask themselves whether King Michael was aware of Moscow’s political plays aimed at replacing him with his father and if the answer is “yes”, how important the information was in his decision to get rid of Ion Antonescu.**

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<sup>61</sup> *Ibidem*, sheet 18.

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