

CLAUDIU-LUCIAN TOPOR*

MEMORIES OF THE GREAT WAR IN DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENCE.
GRAVES OF GERMAN SOLDIERS WHO FELL IN BATTLE IN ROMANIA
(Summary)

Keywords: War, Romania, cemeteries, soldiers, diplomacy, historical memory.

For many years, posterity painted a separate picture of the Romanians and Germans who fell in the battles of the Great War. The old military cemeteries, with their funerary monuments, could hardly conceive in the interwar years that that symbolic embrace in the face of death placed them all in the silence of the same sinister landscape. In January 1918, Gerhard Velburg, a war veteran, visited the “city of the dead”, a place of remembrance located on Giurgiului Road, south of Bucharest. There he saw how, one after another, the Romanian cemetery, separating civilians from military personnel, was followed by the Roman Catholic cemetery and, finally, that of the German heroes. People, Velburg noted, had not yet reached the point of lying dead in a single cemetery. The German Foreign Ministry Archives (Politisches Archiv des Auswärtiges Amtes) preserve the correspondence of Karl Stauss, acting president of the Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge in Rumänien association, with the German Legation in Bucharest (Deutsche Gesandtschaft Bukarest) and the Society for the Cult of Heroes in Romania. This correspondence reveals both an attempt to defuse disputes over the commemoration of combatants and the affirmation of different principles for interpreting the belligerent past. Stauss proposed to the Romanian authorities that the rest of the fallen should not be disturbed by the removal of remains from existing cemeteries. This was a principle established during the German military occupation, according to which those who fell in battle (friends and enemies) would rest for eternity side by side (*Im Leben Feind, im Tod vereint*). Although the Cultul Eroilor association showed some understanding for this principle, despite the influence of the French model of preserving the memory of heroes in large mausoleums, Germany’s former wartime allies (the Turks and Bulgarians, in particular) demanded the excavation and relocation of the remains of those of other religions or nationalities. Former comrades no longer shared a common past. They cultivated a different kind of memory. Karl Stauss’s correspondence spans a period of two years (1932-1934). This study aims to interpret the diplomatic correspondence in light of the disagreements that monopolized the cultivation of war memory and the understanding of the common past among Germans and Romanians alike for a long period of time.

* Prof. univ. dr., Facultatea de Istorie, Universitatea „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” din Iași; e-mail: claudiulucian@yahoo.com.