

Dennis Deletant. *British Clandestine Activities in Romania during the Second World War*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. 257 pp. \$100.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-137-57451-0.

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A much-needed contribution to the understanding of the British intelligence activities targeting Romania during World War II, Dennis Deletant's *British Clandestine Activities in Romania during the Second World War* complements the recent scholarly literature examining the regime and policies of Romania's wartime military dictator, Ion Antonescu.[1] Additionally, Deletant's book fits very well in the latest scholarly trend of books depicting the activity of foreign intelligence services in Romania during the 1930s and 1940s, including Vadim Guzun's *Complimente de la Tanti Haritina: Spionajul Sovietic în România, documente, 1924-1944* (2018) and Sorin Aparaschivei's *Spionajul American în România, 1944-1948* (2013).

Based on important primary documents collected in Romanian, German, British, and US archives and libraries, Deletant's book offers a balanced account of Romania's domestic and foreign policies, including the country's relations with local minorities during the King Carol II, Antonescu, and early communist regimes. The book is written in a clear style and has a balanced structure, being divided into ten chapters organized mainly chronologically. Covering not only the World War II but also the interwar and postwar eras, the book provides an excellent contextualization of wartime British intelligence activities. Additionally, the book includes several short biographies of

its key characters, which are very useful to readers less familiar with these periods of Romanian and British history.

Deletant skillfully depicts the complicated geopolitical relations in east-central Europe during World War II, and the ways in which Nazi Germany tried to exploit the tensions between Romania, Hungary, and the USSR in order to pursue its military and economic interests (especially in connection to oil production in the case of Romania). Deletant explains how Romania's 1940 territorial losses, which led to waves of ethnic Romanian refugees, significantly impacted Romanian decision-makers and the broader public and became the crucial factor that shaped the strategic goals of Antonescu.

Deletant contends that, because of its isolation and remoteness in southeast Europe, Romania was not of strategic importance for the British government before and during WWII. The only thing that sparked some British interest after the Anschluss was Romania's growing economic connections to Nazi Germany, especially Romania's massive delivery of oil to the German war machine. Britain's main strategy in Romania in 1939 and 1940 was cultural diplomacy through the British Institute, the School of English, visiting lecturers, and English classes at local universities. However, as Deletant shows, these efforts to

spread British culture at local universities were completely outnumbered by French and Italian cultural initiatives.

On the eve of World War II, British officials concluded that due to Romania's geographical location and Nazi Germany's political, economic, and military goals in southeastern Europe, "the only weapon against German ambitions in countries like Romania were clandestine operations" through the Special Operation Executive (SOE) (p. 66). And so they tried. As a result, British intelligence agents attempted to sabotage the delivery of oil to Germany by blowing up key installations and refineries in the Ploiești oil fields and by disrupting the main routes of oil transportation to Germany, namely the railroads, the Danube, and the ports. However, these sabotaging efforts generally failed because of Romania's opportunistic stand (switching its allegiance from the Allies to Germany), the changing geopolitical context (such as the defeat of France), and Britain's reluctance to allocate substantial resources to these endeavors. As Deletant has uncovered, by fall 1940, Britain withdrew from Romania most of its agents and technical experts who could have sabotaged the oil production and export routes to Germany.

During the war, the priority for the British continued to be the interruption of the production and delivery of Romanian oil to Germany. After the British declaration of war on Romania in fall 1941, British relations with its Soviet ally—based on the common goal of defeating Axis forces and preserving Allied unity—shaped British attitudes toward the Antonescu regime. During the war, the SOE used its agents in Istanbul and Cairo to maintain connections with its Romanian collaborators.

British Clandestine Activities in Romania provides a wealth of details regarding British agents, their local collaborators, and their deeds in Romania, including collecting information, communicating with the Allies, and bribing local officials. British authorities planned their wartime strategy to build an anti-Axis movement around Iuliu Ma-

niu and the National Peasant Party (PNȚ), the main pro-Allied political force in Romania. Between 1941 and 1943 British subversive activity in Romania consisted mostly of propaganda on radio, in leaflets, and through Maniu and his PNȚ circles. By 1944 the Red Army's westward advance and the fears it triggered in Romania reduced the effectiveness of Britain's anti-German propaganda, and aerial bombing became the main strategy to destroy the morale of the Romanians and disrupt the delivery of oil to Germany.

Resistance against the Antonescu regime consisted of political opposition (mostly by PNȚ), protest letters, and a few isolated acts of sabotage until Romania's King Michael and several army officers engineered a coup. Deletant persuasively argues that Romania lacked a substantial armed resistance movement such as in France and Yugoslavia, mainly because of the complicated political-military situation of Romania combined with the Romanian population's mostly positive perceptions of the Antonescu regime and its nationalist goals. While pointing out the war crimes and mass murder of the Jews perpetrated by the Antonescu regime, Deletant also emphasizes the paradoxes and the difficult domestic and foreign policy choices that characterized the rule of Antonescu, particularly regarding the status and fate of the Jews in different parts of the country and at different times during the war.

From 1943 onward, British and Allied demands that Romania surrender unconditionally were difficult to accept for both the opposition circles in Romania and for Antonescu's emissaries negotiating with the Allies. The Romanians were suspicious of the USSR and thus only wanted to deal with and surrender to Britain and the United States. Deletant rightfully emphasizes Maniu's and Antonescu's failure to understand that British and US attitudes toward the USSR had become more positive. By the end of the war, the Allies were more willing to accept Soviet demands for expanded western Soviet borders within the new

political and military reality shaped by the victories of the Red Army on the eastern front.

Deletant notes that even the limited results achieved by Britain's Secret Intelligence Service, commonly known as MI6, in Romania were due mainly to the courage of its foreign agents—most of them Romanian, French, and Polish. Their fate was particularly grim in the postwar period, and many of them paid a heavy price for their collaboration with British intelligence. The Romanians who had connections with the British, in particular, and the West, in general, became the object of suspicion and surveillance for Romania's new communist authorities. Many of the local Romanian employees of the wartime and early postwar British agencies and organizations were arrested and sentenced to harsh prison terms. However, subsequent British diplomats did not forget these former agents and employees and tried to help them whenever possible, for example by intervening with Romanian authorities on their behalf or by providing financial subsidies. Some of these Romanians died in the brutal conditions of the Romanian penitentiary system, and only a small number managed to emigrate to the UK or other Western countries. Deletant also highlights the British diplomats' lack of support for PNT leaders during the most difficult postwar years in 1946-47, when they were persecuted and arrested by the communist regime. Trying to avoid further tensions with the Soviets, the British sometimes seemed to believe or at least accept the communist propaganda that demonized the postwar democratic political opposition in Romania.

Overall, this highly readable book is a must-read for students of Romanian and British history, especially for those interested in the history of espionage and international, political, and military history, the Holocaust, and the early communist regime in Romania.

Note

[1]. See, for instance, Jean Ancel, *The History of the Holocaust in Romania* (Jerusalem and Lin-

coln: Yad Vashem and University of Nebraska Press, 2011); Dennis Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally: Ion Antonescu and his Regime, Romania 1940-44* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Diana Dumitru, *The State, Antisemitism, and Collaboration in the Holocaust: The Borderlands of Romania and the Soviet Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Alexandru Florian, ed., *Holocaust Public Memory in Postcommunist Romania* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018); Hildrun Glass, *Deutschland und die Verfolgung der Juden im rumänischen Machtbereich, 1940-1944* (München: Oldenburg, 2014); Armin Heinen, *România, Holocaustul și logica violenței* (Iași: Editura Universității "Al. Ioan Cuza" din Iași, 2011); Radu Ioanid, *Evreii sub regimul Antonescu* (București: Hasefer, 1998); Ion Popa, *The Romanian Orthodox Church and the Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017); and Vladimir Solonari, *Purifying the Nation: Population Exchange and Ethnic Cleansing in Nazi-Allied Romania* (Baltimore, MD and Washington, DC: Johns Hopkins University Press and the Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2010).

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