

Miscellaneous**Iulius Scriban in the German Occupied Bucharest (1917-1918) and the Accusations that Followed****Adrian Duțuc¹**

Abstract: This study focuses on a particular period in Romania's history, namely the occupation of Bucharest by the German army during the First World War. From This short and intense chapter in Romania's history, a subchapter is under analysis: Iuliu Scriban's activity in this period of time and especially the character of its work. The reason of our interest in this subject has to do with the allegations that have been made by many contemporary personalities (I.G. Duca and Nicolae Iorga being the most important) that Iuliu Scriban betrayed the national interests.

Keywords: German occupied Bucharest; First World War; treason accusations

1. Introduction

The article focuses the critical eye of historical research on a particular period in Romania's history, namely the occupation of Bucharest by the German army during the First World War. From This chapter, infamous in Romania's history, we intend to analyze a subchapter: Iuliu Scriban's activity in this short period of time and especially the character of its work. The reason of our interest in this subject has to do with the allegations that have been made by many contemporary personalities (I.G. Duca and Nicolae Iorga being the most important) that Iuliu Scriban betrayed the national interests, charges brought not only against him, but also against the Romanian clergy in Bucharest.

The purpose of this study is to bring to light a thorough analysis of the facts that are quantifiable in terms of historical research in order to determine whether the allegations we mentioned were substantiated. Since Iuliu Scriban and several other

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clerics were accused of being pro-German, our analysis will look at facts that are relevant to the relationship between the Church institution and the German High Command.

2. Bucharest under Central Powers Occupation.

The situation in the country's capital city was one rarely experienced in its entire history. Apart from the humiliation brought by the military defeat and the need to shelter the Monarchy, Parliament and the other Romanian institutions of governing in Iasi, the military occupation of Bucharest by the Central Powers “*was one of the hardest forms of foreign domination the Romanian people experienced during their history*” (Platon, 2003, p. 450)

With their specific German rigor, the occupiers have set up ten sections of supervision and control of the city. The German economic general-staff economic, Wirtschaftsab, controlled the maximum exploitation of the resources from the occupied territory. Thus, in the short period of occupation, Romania's strategic products (oil, grain, wood, industrial and agricultural production units, etc.) were requisitioned, then transported across the border. (Platon, 2003, p. 450)

During this period, the Romanian Orthodox Church has gone through a series of infamous events. A number of articles and notes published by Iuliu Scriban after the war, most of them in the journal “*Biserica Ortodoxă Română*” (Romanian Orthodox Church) recounts in detail the shortcomings suffered by the Romanian Orthodox Church due to the German occupation. These shortcomings included: “*The commandeering of the bells from churches*” (Scriban, 1922, p. 381) “*Church budget under the Germans*” (Scriban, 1922, pp. 381-382), “*Marauding of churches during German occupation*” (Scriban, 1922, pp. 697-699), “*Bulgarian Te Deum at the Metropolitan Church*” (Scriban, 1922, pp. 379-380)

The episode with the most powerful impact in the collective mind was the stealing of Saint Demeter Basarabov's relics. The stealing of the relics by Bulgarian troops caused huge indignation among Bucharest population, but, following the insistent requests of Metropolitan Konon Arămescu, the German High Command intercepted the Bulgarian soldiers on their way to Sofia and the relics were given back. In fact, almost all the memoirs written about that period of occupation state that Bulgarian soldiers have committed much more detestable acts than their German allies. With the help of Bulgarian soldiers several Slavic language documents were taken from

the Romanian Academy Library in a totally unjust manner, arguing that they were once taken from Bulgarian by Romania. Another infamous fact was the commandeering of most church bells.

This very difficult context was obviously anticipated by many personalities, and consequently, most of them left the city and moved to Iasi. Some, in order to keep a minimum of Romanian administrative authority, remained in Bucharest. Among them, the most important were Lupu Costache as head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Dumitru Nenițescu appointed head of the War Ministry and General Mustață as head of city Police (Platon, 2003, p. 450). Among those who remained were also the best-known representatives of conservative Germanophiles: Petre. P. Carp, Maiorescu, Alexandru Marghiloman. They enjoyed the respect of German occupiers, being preferred to the Germanophiles of conjuncture, namely, agents that were paid before the occupation.

From the Orthodox Church administration clergy many left the capital city for Moldova, but the most important figures remained. (Tutuianu, 2003) Some of them, including Iuliu Scriban, were subsequently accused of being Germanophile and of committing acts of treason. However, things are far from clear in this aspect.

3. The Manifesto Signed by Church Leaders and the Subsequent Charges

What has led many to speak in very negative terms against Orthodox Church administration during the German occupation was the signing of a manifesto that was later thrown out of airplanes over the Romanian army trenches in Moldavia. This manifesto, backed by several personalities of the time, apparently urged Romanian soldiers to cooperate with German forces.

Historian Ioan Nistor claims that Virgil Arion, the endorser of the Ministry of Cults and Education, contacted the “*senile*” Metropolitan Bishop Konon Arămescu, managing to obtain his signature on the manifest. Moreover, the well-known historian mentions that the defeatist manifesto was drafted by Gala Galaction and Iulius Scriban. Ioan Nistor cites only the part of this manifesto that he considered incriminating for the clergy involved: “*Good Lord was gracious to our country, He tamed the heart of the conqueror towards us and made out of him our fellow in labor for the salvation of Romania. Peasants, townsmen, officers and whatever you are, have good faith that the conqueror entering Moldova is not thirsty for revenge, does not kill, and rob, burns, does not lay waste. Here, in Muntenia, your homes and*

honor have been kept. You have only one more duty towards your country: do not leave the country, do not deprive Romania of your powers, do not put your arms in the service of any foreign causes". (Nistor, 2003, p. 298)

Packages containing this manifesto, described by Nistor as a "*defeatist and treacherous call*" (Nistor, 2003, p. 298), did not reach the soldiers. After being thrown from planes, the copies of the manifesto were gathered by the Romanian High Command, together with two pro-German publications ("*Gazeta Bucureștilor*" and "*Lumina*") and destroyed.

Pia Alimăneștianu in "*Însemnări din timpul ocupației germane*" (Notes from the time of the German occupation) writes in the same critical tone about Gala Galaction and Iulius Scriban. The sustained idea is the same: the Metropolitan Bishop, an "*old and exceedingly weak man*", was used by two younger clergy members to endorse the manifesto entitled "*The call of the Primate Metropolitan Bishop*" (Alimăneștianu, 1929, p. 103).

Once the German occupation ended in 1919, steps were taken for a very trenchant moral purification, which consisted mostly in punishing those suspected of collaborating with German forces. Eugen Pohonțiu in his book entitled "*Alexandru Alex. Macedonski, Viață, Atitudini, Adversități*" (Alex Alexande. Macedonski Life, Attitudes, adversity), when referring to these actions states that there were brought "*fairly and unfairly*" heads of accusation to C. Stere, Alex. Marghiloman, S. Mehedinti, Vasile Pârvan, Archimandrite Scriban and G. Galaction (Pohonțiu, 1934, p. 30). It is important and suggestive that Pohonțiu does not give a verdict, but describes the actions implying that mistakes could have been made, misunderstandings or overzealous actions normal and highly probable in such circumstances.

I.G. Duca, in his political memoirs, writes about these facts with obvious emotional involvement, primarily, due to the fact that this gesture of supposed betrayal came in such difficult moments and, secondly, because the list of those accused contains a former high school "*comrade*" and close friend, Grigorie Pișculescu, known under the pseudonym Gala Galaction (Duca, 1981, p. 157). The prolific politician deplors the gesture made by Church leaders, stressing that Metropolitan Bishop Konon Arămescu "*pushed by Virgil Arion, with a reprehensible passivity lend itself to all requirements of the German High-Command*" (Duca, 1981, p. 156).

Also, I. G. Duca claims that General von Mackensen allegedly asked the Metropolitan Bishop to sign the manifesto, a fact actually denied by Iulius Scriban

as we shall see below. Duca gives the names of all clergy that signed the manifesto: Metropolitan Bishop Konon, Vicary Bishop Nifon Ploeșteanu, Bishop Valerian Râmnicéanu, Meletie Constanța, Joseph, Archimandrite of the Metropolitan See, Ic. Ovidiu Musceleanu, Director of Chancellery, Synod and High Ecclesiastical Consistory, Ec. Gibescu, Chancellor of the Metropolitan, and Iulius Scriban, Director of Central Seminary, described as “*a strange mix of versatility and perfidy, whose name could not miss on this document*” (Duca, 1981, pp. 156-157)

Moreover, Nicolae Iorga, perhaps the most insistent advocate of Iulius Scriban in the prewar period and a personality who has worked with Archimandrite (mainly at the Romanian nation publications (“*Neamul Românesc*” and “*Neamul Românesc Literar*”)) says in 1939 during a lecture that in the election of Metropolitan Bishop of Bukovina could not be elected Iulius Scriban because he “*signed the treason act, in the most painful moments of the great War. Whatever his merits are, it’s not possible. We will not resurrect a suicidal!*” (Iorga, 1943, p. 53).

4. Iulius Scriban’s relation with the German High Command

That being reviewed, we have to present Julius Scriban’s account of those events. In an article entitled “*Din vremea nemților în București*” (From the time of the Germans occupied Bucharest) (Scriban, 1926, p. 111), Iulius Scriban responds to accusations made in the press to Metropolitan Bishop Konon Arămescu, who was accused of being obedient and devoted to the German High Command.

First, Scriban stresses that the Germans never came to the Metropolitan Bishop to ask anything. Then, referring to the case of the “*so-called manifesto*”, Scriban shows that not the representatives of the German High Command were the ones that came at the metropolitan chancellery, but Virgil Lupu and Costache Arion, the Romanian government representatives. These two had asked Metropolitan Konon to urge Romanians in the territories occupied by the Germans that, if they will be invaded by the German army, not to flee to Russia, because being refugees in Russia would have been much more dangerous than living in German occupied territory.

Iulius Scriban insists on the correctness of such an action bringing to memory a similar one which happened in France accounted in a number of the journal “*Revue hebdomadaire*” of 1916 in which the author urges readers not to run, showing similar circumstances where fugitives have been killed in large numbers. Moreover, Scriban confesses that he started to translate that article with the intention of publishing it in

the magazine "*Neamul Românesc*" before the German occupation of Bucharest "*in order to reassure those who are terrified and show them the danger of escaping into the unknown*" (Scriban, 1926, p. 111). So, when Metropolitan Konon consented to sign that manifesto, he did so after Lupu Costache (old acquaintance of the bishop) presented him with the situation. The Metropolitan Bishop was, according to Scriban's article, "*in full awareness that he serves the Romanian*".

In the same article one can find references, even if they are sketchy, to another aspect regarding this historical episode. The final text of the manifesto was not the one Metropolitan Konon initially signed, but as it turned out into the lawsuit against those accused of signing the manifesto (i.e. Scriban and Pisculescu) (Scriban, 1926, p. 111), the text that was considered incriminating due to its defeatism was later added to the lithography of the manifesto, according to Niculescu Bolintin, royal commissioner of the Court Martial (Scriban, 1926, p. 111). Moreover, as written by Scriban, the relationship between German authorities in Bucharest and Metropolitan Conon was very bad. One of the first oppressive measures taken by the Germans was to arrest the Metropolitan Secretary, Hrisant Popescu, as a gesture of retribution for a speech held by the Metropolitan on the unification of all Romanian provinces.

As a first important aspect of the Church's relationship with the German occupation force we remember that priests were accused by the German High Command of being pro-Russian because it strongly supported Romania's entry into war in alliance with Russia. Iuliu Scriban said he was personally accused of this and explains that it is not so in the political sense, but a Russophile in the sense that he wants the flourishing of the Russian fellow Orthodox (Scriban, 1922, p. 378). Furthermore, during the German occupation, the Romanian Orthodox Church was forced to follow the Gregorian calendar, Julius Scriban being called to translate to the Metropolitan Bishop the act that demanded this

Another very unpleasant situation was the commandeering of church bells, brass keys and brass roofs by the occupying force. The only bell that was left was the one at the Metropolitan Church, which, tragically-ironic little later would announce the citizens of Bucharest the stealing of St. Demeter's relics. On the issue of bells commandeering, Iulius Scriban alongside Professors Mihălcescu and Bărăcilă, wrote a protest in German which was then submitted to the German High Command (Scriban, 1922, p. 381)

Another event which shows that Iulius Scriban was actually against the German occupation is the episode when the Germans pulled churches from the public budget.

Scriban was part of a committee (with the bishop Calist and priest Negulescu) that went into audience at P.P. Carp to remedy the problem (Scriban, 1922, p. 382)

Moreover, in 1917, on May 18, bishop Calist was buried. The following day bishop Sofronie of Râmnic was arrested by the Germans. With the arrest of bishop Sofronie, the seat of Bishop of Râmnic Noul Severin became vacant. Iulius Scriban was proposed for this position, but the Germans did not accept, instead Meletie was elected in the fall of 1917 (Scriban, 1922, p. 460).

Aside the aforementioned article by Iulius Scriban and the numerous notes in the press, a brochure wrote by the Romanian cleric must be taken into account: “*Lămurirea unei situațiuni*” (Clarification of a certain situation). Published in 1925, this small book Scriban aims to clarify a number of episodes of his life in which he was accused. But before seeing his explanation on the controversy of the manifest, for more eloquence, we reproduce the full text of it:

“The call of the Primate Metropolitan Bishop

Romanian, Moldavian and Romanian everywhere gathered between the Carpathians and Prut, hear the voice of your brethren in occupied Romania. Central Powers armies are in the Carpathian Mountains’ passing, they are at the top and bottom gates of Moldavia, they advance and they country will again be crippled.

We, the Primate Metropolitan of Romania, knelt before the altar and prayed to God for the salvation of our people and the church was filled with light and the glory of the Lord and the good spirit came upon us, to advise counsel of peace in our city. The country wants peace. Too much the country has been made desolation.

Over the four wings of the earth came upon us our end. The country's highest perished. Our powers were crumbling. Many of his sons were killed, others were scattered in foreign countries, where they sigh of hunger and end. But the Lord God was gracious to the land; he tamed the heart of the conqueror towards us and made of him our fellow to work for the salvation of Romania.

Peasants and townsmen, officers or whatever you are, have good faith that the victor entering Moldavia is not thirsty for revenge, not killing, not robbing, not burning. Here in Muntenia, the wealth, the honor and our homes were respected, together we worked the plains of the country and they paid off. God has tempered the wrath of war and blessed our joint work. Do not be afraid and do not take the path of exile. With longing and thoughts of peace we turn to you and send you counsel to stay where you are. You defended the country worthily, debt ye did it fully. Many of you

have fallen defending the ancestral estate. Today your powers are broken. One more debt you have: Do not leave the land of the country; do not let Romania deprived of your powers. Do not put your arms in the service of a foreign cause. Stay put, brothers. Stay between the Carpathians and Prut! Do not turn this river into a border between our hearts. Stay on your ancestral lands near the tombs of your ancestors and your brothers in fighting, near standing crops which henceforth will feed our nation. Trust in the great and merciful God. Trust in Providence's wonderful that lifts the collapsed and from rubble raises him out again in the sun light more beautiful than before. Trust the future of Romanian stem.

Dr. Konon Al. Donici

Primate Metropolitan and Archbishop

Th. M. Ploeșteanu

Arh. Valerian Romniceanu

Iosif Archimandrite of St. Metropolitan Seat

Ic. Orden (?) Musceleau

Ic. G. I. Geblescu” (Alimăneștianu, 1929, pp. 101-103).

Returning to the brochure in which Iulius Scriban explains the situation, since the introduction one can see that, particularly in the period immediately following World War, numerous accusations against him have spread, but he did not bother to counter them because it would have taken him too much time. *“I said to myself I’d better work and my continual and silent work would show what my being is”* (Scriban, 1925, p. 1). The accusations Scriban addresses in this book are several: 1. leaving of the dogmatic teachings of the Orthodox Church through proximity to the Church of England, 2. betrayal of Romania’s interests during the German occupation, 3. Irregularities as director of the Central Seminary in Bucharest (1909-1919). Of these, obviously, we shall analyze the second charge.

The first thing Iulius Scriban contradicts is the public opinion that the Metropolitan Bishop, together with other clergymen, were forced under threat by German agents to sign that manifesto. Scriban states that the act was signed at the Metropolitan chancellery on July 18, 1917. He explains that everyone trusted Lupu Costache, who at that time was head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, in particular for championing the cause of Church and Romanians during the German occupation. The Church leaders had no reason to suspect irregularities on that manifesto. Lupu

Costache had defended the Church against the forced introduction of the Gregorian calendar and also in the issue of removing from the metropolitan chancellery of an official that served the interests of Catholics and Germans.

In the discussion with Metropolitan Konon Arămescu, Lupu Costache notified the church heads that the German army was to enter Moldavia, a very good reason to warn the Romanian forces and advise them to stand still and not cross the Prut River to Russia, so nothing tragic would happen to them. *“The issue with the manifesto (writes I. Scriban) was portrayed as an act useful for the Romanian population; [...] there was no question of anything useful to the Germans or of any German involvement”*. Moreover, regarding those who signed, Lupu Costache just asked for the Metropolitan’s signature, but the latter demanded his subordinates to sign as well. However, Iulius Scriban was not among them.

How did his signature appeared on that manifesto is a chapter about which one can only find references in his writings. Iulius Scriban mentions the witnesses to the fact that he had not been in that day at the metropolitan chancellery: Gh. Ghibescu, director of Seminar *“Nifon”* and Ovidiu Musceleanu, professor of the same seminar. Moreover, the manifesto initially appeared without his signature, for which some have accused him of wiping his signature, when in fact he never signed (Scriban, 1925, p. 9).

Iuliu Scriban describes circumstances in which his signature reached the manifesto. 10 days after the meeting between Lupu Costache and Metropolitan Konon, he visited the then administrator of the Church House, an old colleague and friend Gr. Pişculescu. The latter said he had taken a new signature for the manifesto from archimandrite Teofil because the lithographic stone had worn out. It was then when Gr. Pişculescu asked Scriban to add his signature. Although Iulius Scriban refused at first, Pişculescu insisted repeatedly arguing that the whole Scriban family is in Moldova and, because Iulius is well known, his signature would add a certain weight to the manifesto. At the end of a long discussion, Iulius Scriban gave Gr. Pişculescu his signature but required that he give him a signed statement that contained the conditions in which he had signed: without reading the document and according Pişculescu’s words (Scriban, 1925, pp. 10-11).

Later, Scriban found out the final version of the text printed on the manifesto. *“Saddened”* by what he had read, he went to the Church House to blame Gr. Pişculescu, but the latter showed him the version of the manifesto as it was written in his notebook and told him that the phrases for which he could be accused of

betrayal do not belong to him. Hence the suspicion that the text signed by the Metropolitan and other clergymen had been subsequently changed, suspicion that, in the words of Iulius Scriban, was officially confirmed (Scriban, 1925, p. 11).

Regarding the trial and acquittal of Iulius Scriban after the war, he underlines a fact that deserves attention: the process was conducted in 1920, when the atmosphere in Bucharest was quite tense, even passionate. Moreover, he was not judged by a court of law that is fenced in deciding compliance with the articles of law, but by a panel of judges, which may verdict beyond legal confines. Being declared not guilty in these conditions is a fact that speaks for itself. Regarding the actual process, Iulius Scriban notes that there were tried only three of the signatories "*the smallest, while the higher have not been touched*". In the process, the Commissioner of the Royal Court Martial, Major-Bolintin Niculescu, said before the committee: "*We have found at Iasi that the document signed at Bucharest was not the same with the one that reached Moldova. The signatures were too stuffed into text [...]. One could see that the signature had been taken from another text.*" (Scriban, 1925, p. 12).

Also in this publication, Iulius Scriban defends himself against allegations that his actions during the German occupation were anti-national. He begins by emphasizing that he suffered because of German occupiers, describing a few episodes to support his claim. Scriban says he started to feel the pressure of the German persecution after he signed the manifesto, which shows that Germans actually had nothing to do with that signature. The first action against him was the moving of the process of plagiarism in the work "*Mica Biblie*" (The Small Bible) from the Romanian court to the German Court of law (Scriban, 1925, p. 13). As reported by Iulius Scriban, the German lawyer for the prosecution, a major, forgot the process dossier in Bucharest when the German army left. In the building where the German court functioned moved an acquaintance of Iulius Scriban, thus, the files from the dossier reached the Romanian cleric. In this dossier Iulius Scriban saw what the Germans planed against him. In the copy of the letter sent to Germany, the German lawyer described the meeting he had with the Catholic Archbishop of Bucharest, Netzhammer. The latter allegedly said to the German lawyer that Iulius Scriban must receive a negative verdict in that process. Although it was not hard to guess, the Catholic Archbishop saw this action as being in the interests of Catholicism as the Romanian cleric was "*one of the most dangerous agitators against Austria*" (Scriban, 1925, p. 13). This letter was in possession of Iulius Scriban at that time and was published in the newspaper "*Universul*", November 1918.

Beyond the Catholic schemes, somewhat expected in respect of Iulius Scriban, he was closely watched. The insistence of Iulius Scriban in numerous articles against Catholics, especially the polemic with the Catholic magazine “*Albina*” (The Bee) have made him a very dreaded enemy, and their schemes against him should not be a surprise to anyone.

Germans suspected him of hostile actions against the occupation and therefore sought evidence to arrest him. In a brief description, the Romanian cleric recalls such an episode which took place in March 1918 at a religious service of “*Te Deum*” held for the Orthodox Society in the “Balaşa” Church in Bucharest. In his speech, Iulius Scriban spoke of the need for sustained efforts to forge a better future for the Romanians. For these things, Marshal von Mackensen was informed that the Romanian cleric spoke against the Germans. The situation was remedied with the help of Mrs. Alexandra Cantacuzino. After learning the information that was circulating in the German High Command, she warned Iulius Scriban, and the latter, after an audience obtained at the German Marshal, defended his person and the Orthodox Society, both on the German High Command blacklist.

Another relevant episode unfolded during a conference held at the Society “*Tibişoiul*”. Again, Alexandra Cantacuzino was the one who warned Iulius Scriban. Cantacuzino had been notified by the French wife of a German policeman that Iulius Scriban would be spied at the conference in order to be arrested if one could find evidence of hostility to the Germans. Thus, writes Julius Scriban, Mrs. Cantacuzino wrote in pencil on the first paper that she could find warning him and telling him to throw the note into the fire (Scriban, 1925, p. 14). The author describes the life he had in the German-occupied Bucharest as a relentless work for the Romanian cause, citing a number of facts, especially speeches on different occasions, which at that time were a dangerous thing to do. Occasions such as the speech at the celebration of the Unification of Romanian Principalities on January 24, 1918, or when he took part and praised the Royal House for sending aids to families of those mobilized on the front.

5. Conclusions

In the light of what we mentioned above, one can see that, despite numerous criticisms from contemporary personalities, the accusation of collaborating with the German occupying force does not have very strong arguments. The accusation is understandable given the context in which it was made.

Back then, anti-German feelings were intense, and against those who betrayed the Romanian cause there were even higher. The pain caused by the military defeat against von Makensen's offensive along with the humiliation of leaving the capital city to the German occupation caused many to seek scapegoats. Most likely this mindset has led many to accuse those who remained in Bucharest, judging them all the same.

In the case of Iulius Scriban, despite all the accusations, he was found not guilty. But the fact that in 1926 he considers himself obliged to write a book to explain what happened shows that in the period after the German occupation, either his enemies made efforts so the public remembered his accusation and not that he was found not guilty, either that, due to misinformation, this had remained the general opinion about him. What we can clearly state about the controversy surrounding Iulius Scriban's activity during the German occupation is that he was not pro-German. Although some significant data about him might fall into this category (he had studied in Germany at Baden-Baden, he had an affinity for German theology and culture, he spoke German, he had chosen to stay in Bucharest at that time) Iulius Scriban had belonged before the war to "*Liga Culturală*" (the Cultural League), an entity insistently fighting for Romania's entry in the war alongside the Allies.

A pro-German intense activity before Romania entered the war would have been a clear sign that Scriban was an agent of the Germans, but this activity never existed. The most important arguments that defend Iulius Scriban are the events that took place under German occupation. These events broadly suggest the relationship between the Church and the German High Command in general and between Iulius Scriban and the German occupation force in particular.

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