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Bucharest “Mundanity Experiences” in the Wartimes. Scraps of Life between the Bulgarian Campaign (1913) and The Great War (1916)

The obviously dramatic experience of the war tends to confuse the audience when it comes to topics concerning social life. When one sees soldiers, wounded, prisoners and weapons everywhere, one hardly can think about dances and vaudeville shows. However, in the modern world, war cohabits with social life, in a symbiosis that is strange at times, but which has its explanations. Firstly, the civilian population, the same as the army, needs to keep up its morale, and this can only be achieved by travelling to choice destinations and by attending shows designed in such a way as to chase away sadness. The same as other European capitals, Bucharest, the capital of the Old Romanian Kingdom, is living its own wartime adventure at the beginning of the 20th century. Bucharest has its own story, its own places, people and events. While Berlin, Paris or London would experience an atmosphere of war starting with 1914, the dwellers of Bucharest become familiar with it as early as 1913. It is true, for the Romanians, World War I meant two years of neutrality, while for the Germans, French and Brits the war went on until 1918. However, the mobilisation and the Bulgarian campaign look more like a wedding party than like a real war. The establishments of the capital are not closed down, the theatres, the cinemas, the beer gardens continue to stay open. The signs of war are visible, but people seem to want to ignore them. Functions are organised for the benefit of the Red Cross and, between two waltzes, the scarcities of life during war are discussed – pure blindness as to what war really meant. At the time the hospitals had not filled with wounded, not all families had been in mourning garb; the name of the big enemy had been "cholera", but it had been stopped before reaching the gates of the capital. In just three years, another mobilisation and the ensuing commotion in Bucharest. Capşa is boiling over again. The café, the restaurant, the pastry shop and the garden on the sidewalk are thronging with crowds on the warpath. After the mobilisation, the usual countenance of the capital is changed by the war. Army vehicles rush everywhere at illegal speed, the walls are covered with posters with proclamations. No establishment serves liquor anymore, nor wine, nor beer, and bread is scarce. A new life, full of shortages, is about to start. Trains for the general population no longer run, the post offices and the telegraph are closed to civilians, carriages and automobiles become a rarity. Everyone has relatives – sons, brothers, fathers or husbands – going to a war that does not promise to be easy on the Romanian front, once it had been so terrifying on all the other fronts. Enthusiasm is soon replaced by concern. The ensuing years of the war, however, put Bucharest through many hardships.

Bombed during the day by planes and during the night by airships, the city feels the harshness of the German military occupation.