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## MILITARY PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDIES IN ROMANIA IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY: THE MAIN MOMENTS

**Eugenia BÎRLEA**

Library of the Romanian Academy, Cluj-Napoca Branch

**Abstract:** Psychology made its official entry into the curriculum of the Superior School of War only in 1909, and on the level of Officer and Sub-Officer Schools, the role of these sciences of education was even more modest, concerns of military psychology are precursory to this stage. In 1902 the Romanian army doctor Marcu Câmpeanu published in Paris a work entitled *Essai de psychologie militaire individuelle et collective*, with a glorious preface by Théodule Ribot. The book knew several translations: in the USA, Bulgaria, Serbia, Russia, Italy etc. and was awarded a prize from the Romanian Academy.

In 1922 Dumitru Caracostea, an important teacher of literature, critic and folklorist during the Interbellum, published *The Psychological Aspect of War*, as a result of his teaching activity at the Superior School of War, between 1919-1922. While Marcu Câmpeanu's work was an application to the military environment of the theories enunciated by the famous theorist of crowd psychology, Gustave Le Bon, Dumitru Caracostea elaborated his study from an obvious interdisciplinary perspective of a rural world and country folklore connoisseur, integrating the dramatic experience of war, which his students at the School of War made available for him under the form of war memoirs written at his request.

**Key words:** military psychology, Romania, the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Marcu Câmpeanu, Dumitru Caracostea

We believe we can talk about quite an early interest displayed by Romanians towards psychology in general and social psychology, considering the publishing period of the first studies. Already in 1895 Nicolae D. Xenopol, brother of historian A. D. Xenopol, published in the series *Conferences of the Romanian Athenaeum* the study called *Crowd psychology*. Frankly speaking, N. Xenopol was doing not much more than spreading the ideas of the Italian school of criminology, which was attributing to the crowds criminal only instincts. In the year 1900 the posthumous work of Nicolae Vaschide, a former collaborator of Alfred Binet, about imitation as a social phenomenon, added to the studies done in the same field by Professor

Constantin Dimitrescu-Iași, published during the same period (Chelcea 2002: 38-39). Only a few years had passed since the publication of Gustave Le Bon's *Psychologie des foules*, in 1895, until a young Romanian doctor, Marcu Câmpeanu, was applying these ideas to the concrete case of an army, publishing in Paris, in 1902, the *Essai de psychologie militaire individuelle et collective*. The book became remarkably popular among army officials in Europe and not only. The story of this success is worth being rediscovered, even if there are a lot of unclear aspects.

The French edition of his book was accompanied by a eulogistic foreword written by psychologist Theodule Ribot. He was noting that the first systematic approach of army psychology was due to M. Câmpeanu;

even if a lot of servicemen made valuable remarks about the capital importance of moral and intellectual dispositions to the formation of armies, it is to M. Câmpeanu that comes the merit of being a path opener (Câmpeanu 1902: 7). The French edition enjoyed a warm welcome within the military milieu, according to the author, and specialised magazines in the European countries, America and Japan publishing “flattering reviews”. In Norway, a military magazine dedicated nearly an entire issue to the book. The book had simultaneously caught the attention of the Russian General Staff, which ordered its translation, in 1903. During the same year two Bulgarian translations were issued, one by Major Futacov, in Razgrad, the other one by Major Tricikow, in Sofia, the latter being published by the Ministry of War Printing House. In the USA it was partially translated and published by Captain Dr. Jarivis in a New York magazine. The German translation was made by Romanian captain Strișca, the author making his choice between his compatriot and a translator from Germany, and was released in Bucharest, in 1904. In 1904 appeared in Belgrad the Serbian translation (Câmpeanu 1907: Prefață). The Romanian edition ended with a chapter signed by Alexandru Sturdza, the son of politician D. A. Sturdza, directed against parade training, apparently excessively practiced in our country to the detriment of training for war. The success of the book was rewarded by the Romanian Academy, which bestowed on it the Adamachi award in the session of 1907, so the author had a reason to be content. Even though, after nearly two decades, Dumitru Caracostea was excessively critical to him, he couldn't help but note that “ever since Cantemir's *History of the Ottoman Empire* hardly was there greater demand among foreigners for any book issued from under a Romanian's quill.” (Caracostea 1922: 6-7)

In our attempt at getting out of oblivion the biography of a character so famous for a while within the military societies, few sources are available. He was born in 1872 and studied at the Faculty of Medicine in Bucharest, after which he was, for five years, an army doctor in Roman. At the

time his book was published in France in 1902, the author had already renounced his career of an army doctor for the Romanian army, preferring to work as a civil doctor in Focșani. He published, beside the book on military psychology, over 50 medical articles, a booklet dealing with the anti-Semitic problem, published in France, and two novels (Câmpeanu 1935: 49-53). The novel *Căpitanul Cordea [Captain Cordea]*, inspired „from the military life”, according to the subtitle, released in Focșani, was inspired by the French naturalism, but unfortunately had a non-realistic intrigue and conventional characters that do not manage to liven up the story.

Marcu Câmpeanu was a Jew; his name was on the list of forbidden Jewish writers published by Antonescu's regime in November, and lived until 1948 (Contribution of Jews 2004: 252). Practically, after the success recorded at the beginning of his career, this author became a plain provincial doctor.

How can we explain the success of his book of military psychology? Without the pretence of originality, Marcu Câmpeanu was ready, based on Le Bon's theory and few other French and Italian works about the expression of crowds, to apply these theories to the concrete case of a human group – the army – and yield a practical work, full of commonsense remarks. Most of them were not even his own remarks, he did nothing but synthesize articles scattered throughout the military press of the time. The unexpected success of his book is explained by the fact that it came to meet a need. Historian and General Radu R. Rosetti remembered the early years of his career as an officer, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when, feeling completely unprepared to train soldiers, Doctor Câmpeanu's book on military psychology was a real help. (Rosetti 1940/I: 128)

After an introductory part on general psychology, M. Câmpeanu reiterates G. Le Bon's fundamental ideas on crowds, their special irrational character and the special relationship between a crowd and its leader. Parts III and IV enjoyed real appreciation in



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military environment, being dedicated to the psychology of armies, the military leader, and troop psychology respectively, according to their different weapons: infantry, cavalry, artillery.

Even though he did no more than resuming and systemising older remarks, his merit was no small. The few passages are worth noticing draw attention on soldiers recruited amongst peasants, usually considered stupid because of their shyness. Reaching an environment they were completely unfamiliar with, they were intimidated by the novelty of a soldier's life and behaved awkwardly, being hard to train and considered idiots by their training officers and sub-officers. (Câmpeanu 1904: 62-64) Officers must avoid excessive harshness, which is harmful to these shy soldiers. (Câmpeanu 1904: 64)

One must note that, when his book was released, soldier battering was still practiced in the Romanian army, although being forbidden as early as 1868 by Charles I ("The Army Gazette" 1868/15); in 1910 it was again forbidden, but this time it imposed itself, despite the opposition of some officers. (Rosetti 1940/II: 44-45)

The remarks of young doctor M. Câmpeanu are noticeable when referring to the military spirit specific to Germans at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the following century, propped, among others, by the quasi-military organisation of student associations practising duel on a daily basis. The prestige of great victories as those in Napoleon's time or German victories against French in 1870/71 contribute to supporting the military spirit of a people. (Câmpeanu 1904: 82-83)

In the chapter referring to military leaders and their relations to subordinates he is also inspired from Le Bon's opinions about

crowd leaders, but brings a few remarkable personal notes, as well: the importance of military eloquence, quality difference of an army that submits to its leader out of sympathy as compared to an army that submits only for fear, the prestige of the leader and the factors determining it. He insists on different types of officers, frequently met, having negative repercussions on troops. "One could object that subordinates should love their boss. Normally such subordinates are happy when they are able to love the one they should fear. If a boss does nothing to inspire that feeling, commits injustice, treats his men meanly, it is impossible even for the most disciplined individual to nurture a feeling for which there is no interest, to possess a quality that is stifled to him." (Câmpeanu 1904: 108) The first condition an army leader should fulfil is to know the feelings of the troop he leads. (Câmpeanu 1904: 110) Officers who use their position to satisfy their desire of power and believe to make a good impression on their superiors by behaving like tyrants to their inferiors will destroy everything around and the soldiers would become a gang of discouraged, unsatisfied, unconfident men.

In the last part of his book, M. Câmpeanu refers to the psychology of troops according to the weapon they fight with: infantry, cavalry, artillery. The pertinence of remarks referring to cavalrymen's psychology was noted by the French General Canonge, in the preface of the French edition. (Câmpeanu 1902: 11-12)

In his conclusions, young doctor Câmpeanu insists on repeating what he had underlined throughout the book: the decisive factor in battle is the moral factor. Causes of defeats are not as much the number of military fatalities as the panic invading following tactic or strategic surprises or even an overnight enemy attack. (Câmpeanu 1904: 152-154)

We do not believe that in the Romanian army the influence of the book was considerable. It was rather known and appreciated in certain General Staff milieu. Radu Rosetti, who was very interested in reading M. Câmpeanu, was part of the elite of Romanian officer body, being a passionate reader. He confesses having read the works of G. Le Bon, A. Comte, Nietzsche, Marx etc. (Rosetti 1940/II: 19) but, generally speaking, officers did not read much. During the first years of his career he had been entrusted the library of a Bucharest regiment to which he had been assigned and found that the greatest part of books' pages were not cut; except for his commander, almost nobody asked him for a book, although his regiment's library was quite well furnished. (Rosetti 1940/I: 128-129) In the Superior School of War in Bucharest, psychology was introduced only in 1909, at the same time with logics and Romanian literature (*The History* 1939: 168), and in the schools of officers and sub-officers, the status of sciences like pedagogy and psychology was marginal throughout the Interbellum (Buricescu & Stoka, 1931: V).

Things were no different in the German army that, along the French one, was the indisputable model of the Romanian army. After the last change of the curriculum at the War Academy in Potsdam, in 1912, along the military subjects there were only subjects such as History and Law, Mathematics (7 hours weekly) upon choice, with a foreign language; as early as 1904 Japanese was introduced in schools (10 hours during the first year, 6 hours in the second and third years). (Schwertfeger 1940: 58) There was no longer place for subjects such as History of literature or Philosophy, which had been studied all along the 19<sup>th</sup> century. (Scharfenort 1910: 118-121, 308-312)

From 1909 until World War I the psychology course at the Superior School of War in Bucharest put at the disposal of future General Staff officers only some knowledge of general psychology. Suspended during the war, the courses were resumed in 1919, when the school management entrusted the course, surprisingly, to Dumitru Caracostea, a high-school teacher (1914 – 1923), graduate *magna*

*cum laude* of his studies in Vienna with the most famous Romanist of the time, Wilhelm Meyer-Lübke, and, for the next few decades, an important teacher of literature and author of fundamental books about Eminescu and the Romanian folklore. Caracostea had made himself noticed by 1919 by publishing a consistent study about the Miorița in Moldavia (1916) and by the 1915 debate with critic Eugen Lovinescu, where he was warmly defending the beauty of the folklore creation against the latter's irony. Caracostea's task was to elaborate a course that should synthesize the experience of war as well as his knowledge about popular culture and mentality, as he confesses in the book.

After setting about to achieve the task, he had to notice that there was very little material. Both foreign and Romanian works did little to satisfy him, the only one he admits as a starting point being Dr. Marcu Câmpeanu's work. "Where there was psychological and philosophical training one would not find material on the military experience, and where there was such a material, one would not find a true psychological interpretation." (Caracostea 1922: 6) It is more worthy to reveal the way in which he created the documentary basis of his study. Not having at hand documents and methods allowing him to draw conclusions on manifestations related to the collective life of soldiers, a rather unusual idea struck him: his students, all former fighting officers, should describe the barely ended war under its psychological aspect. He was emphasizing that he acted like a folklorist appealing to field investigation (Caracostea 1922: 7-8), but we cannot help not noticing the aspect of the real experiment created by war, at the country level. Starting from the dominant social theories of the time, Caracostea made a far more complex study of social psychology, which was not limited to one subject only. The hope of subsequent perfection was not fulfilled.

The book retains nowadays researcher's attention by its interdisciplinary approach, methodological and theoretical openness, but mainly by the attempt to offer a display of the individual and group psychic



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reactions during war. Even if the effects of being hastily written are felt, and given the absence of foregoing studies, and the author not having reviewed the book, as he used to, leaving the School of War after just three years, and preoccupations of the kind, his work is unique within the Romanian body of research. Caracostea had to create both the sources and the methods of a research conceived from its very beginning as interdisciplinary. In spite of having started from Wilhelm Wundt's school of thought, with an overwhelming prestige within the Romanian science at that time (Rădulescu-Motru 1990: 68), and Gustave Le Bon's ideas of crowd psychology, his study is intended as an original approach, even critical mainly toward the interpretation of Le Bon's ideas within some military societies. Peasants, hostile to military service, may become very good fighters if their mindset and system of values is known, and the author did his best to give as many example of bravery as possible of soldiers recruited amongst peasants.

A chapter in Caracostea's book is called *Crowd psychology* and starts, inevitably, from Le Bon's writings. He is critical towards vulgarisation of his ideas in Dr. Marcu Câmpeanu's book of military psychology. The very work of Gustave Le Bon is not spared from Caracostea's criticism: "conceived in a dilettante manner" it brings forth an interesting material and satisfies readers' penchant for hastily uttered generality." Very similarly, Serge Moscovici was saying about his books: "Most of them are written from one day to another, with the intention to like, to strike the reader's imagination, to tell them exactly what they want to hear." (Moscovici 2001: 73)

Interdisciplinary interpretation between Wilhelm Wundt's ethnopsychology and crowd psychology represented by Gustave

La Bon, his vision as a fine knower of linguistics and Romanian folk creation creates from the very start the premises of an interesting book.

This unique book had, to say the least, a strange destiny in the Romanian intellectual environment. The few works of military psychology during the Interbellum done by Preda (1926 and 1933), Coman (1929), Buricescu and Stoka (1931) are, generally, ready to summarize G. Le Bon and Marcu Câmpeanu's ideas, without having the concrete and interdisciplinary character of Caracostea's book, which results from personal and collective experiences told by its students. Some of them do not even mention Caracostea's book, as brochures that do not even rise to the level of Marcu Câmpeanu's book. A special mention deserves only C-tin Cleanoveanu's book, *The Psychology of Fighters*, published in T. Severin, in 1940. Its special quality as related to the other works during the Interbellum is given by the fact that it synthesises remarks pertaining to soldiers' psychology that are included in regulations, works of tactics and other military works. It is, however, regrettable that he ignored the efforts of his forerunners, namely M. Câmpeanu and D. Caracostea, thus missing the chance to systemise these previous efforts.

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