RUINS OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR, ARCHEOLOGY AND MEMORY: ON THE CULTURAL HERITAGE MANAGEMENT POLICY IN POST-COMMUNIST ROMANIA[*]

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Abstract: The text refers to a neglected category of monuments from Romania, namely the Second World War blockhouses built on the Black Sea shore against a possible invasion by the Soviet Union. Starting from the premise that the archaeological vestiges constitute the "material memory" of the past (Olivier 2008), I argue that the Second World War blockhouses from Romania are ignored because of the memories they contain – memories that can not be used in "heroic" narratives about the recent past and unconfortable for the socio-political projects of the present.

Rezumat: Textul se referă la o categorie neglijată de monumente din România, și anume cazematele din al doilea război mondial construite pe malul Mării Negre împotriva unei posibile invazii a Uniunii Sovietice. Pornind de la premisa că vestigile arheologice constituie "memoria materială" a trecutului (Olivier 2008), susțin ideea conform căreia cazematele din cel de-al doilea război mondial din România sunt neglijate datorită amintirilor pe care le conțin – amintiri ce nu pot fi utilizate în narațiuni "eroice" despre trecutul recent și inconfortabile pentru proiectele socio-politice ale prezentului.

Introduction: forgotten ruins

The ruins of the ancient (but also medieval) cities of Romania attracted and continue to attract the interest of the archaeologists, evidence, among other things, the longevity of the excavations carried out in such sites, as is the case of those from Histria (Constanța County), started by Vasile Pârvan, the founder of Romanian archeology, and being continuously unfolded. The ancient ruins have been the subject of numerous studies, such are those dedicated to the system of fortifications, architecture or the so-called "sacred area" of the fortress of Histria. Neither are missing analyses of how some of these monuments, such as the Roman mausoleum from Adamclisi (Constanța County), were (re)invested with new meanings and manipulated in different socio-political contexts of the recent past.[1] In an entire series of ancient sites, restoration works were done (or at least preservation works), the gates were opened to the "general public", guide books were drawn up for visitors[2] and even site museums were built, for example at Histria.

In deep contrast with the interest in ancient ruins, the monuments from the recent past are almost completely ignored from the archaeological point of view, a good example being the blockhouses of the Second World War in Dobrogea, on the shore of the Black Sea. The main reason behind the lack of interest towards the monuments from the recent or contemporary past is that, explicitly or implicitly, the archeology continues to be understood by many as a historical discipline, which has as a purpose the restoration of some past "realities" for which there are not or there are few written sources.[3] According to the dominant philosophy of research, through their quest the archaeologists discover the past, reveal it, or, given the fact that the past of the blockhouses was already known as many historical data are available, this type of monuments was not considered "archaeological". Moreover, unlike many ancient ruins, the blockhouses (or at least some of them)

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[1]   Panaite, Barnea 2010.
[2]   *E.g.* Buzoianu, Chera 2009; Suceveanu, Angelescu 2012.
[3]   See, for example, Babeș 1994; Petrescu-Dîmbovița, Vulpe 2001.

Fig. 1. The map of Dobrogea with the places where the discussed blockhouses are situated.

were not included in the category of "monuments", and much less of the "historical monuments", which suggests that in the heritage management, not even the historical value of the blockhouses was considered important.

From historical point of view, the blockhouses in question were built during the regime of the General (later the Marshal) Ion Antonescu (1940-1944) and were part of a defensive system which had as a purpose the defense of the Romanian territory for a possible invasion from the sea by the Soviet Union. The construction of the blockhouses took place in the context of Romania's adhesion to the Axis alliance in November 1940 and the Romanian participation at the invasion of the Soviet Union, in June 1941. Effectively, during the military conflict with the Soviet Union (1941-1944), the blockhouses did not play a role, the Soviets never invading Romania by the sea. Most of the blockhouses discussed in this article are today in the perimeter of Constanța city, to which three blockhouses from Mangalia are added, two blockhouses from Vama Veche, one from Corbu and one located between Eforie Nord and Eforie Sud (all in Constanța County) (Fig. 1).

In the present analysis I started from the premise that archeology deals with the memory.[4] As Laurent Olivier shows, the archaeological vestiges are the "material memory" of the past and represent one of the types of the memory through which the past continues to exist today, along with the "psychic memory of the past" (*i.e.* the testimonies and collective traditions which commemorate places or events of the past) and the written memory (*i.e.* the written sources or the historical records).[5] Therefore, in this text, the archaeological analysis of the blockhouses of the Second World War does not seek to better understand the events, but the manners in which the materiality of the blockhouses currently contains the memory of the conflict that gave them birth. I will try to show that the analysis of the materiality of the blockhouses can yield a different picture than the one promoted by the dominant discourse.

Blockhouses: on the material memory of an anticipated conflict

At the time on which I carried out the documentation (July 2005 – Vama Veche; November 2010 – Constanța and Corbu; April 2012 – Constanța, Mangalia and Eforie), an entire series of blockhouses was whole, visible, easily reachable. In one case it was possible to visit the entire interior of the blockhouse, in other two I could just walk the steps from the entrance, the inside access was blocked, while in the rest of the others I could not enter, because the access was blocked or was not visible. Due to changes in coastline appearance over time, some of the blockhouses reached the water, and some are now directly on the beach; others were included in the embankment or embedded in later urban projects (Fig. 2). The location of some blockhouses seems to have been less affected; they were located on the waterfront or on the cliff top, in the latter case dominating the coast (Fig. 3). The blockhouses come in different sizes: from modest dimensions (*e.g.* Corbu) to large dimensions (*e.g.* Eforie). The blockhouses on the beach are not related in any way to each other; instead, about

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[4]   Olivier 2008.
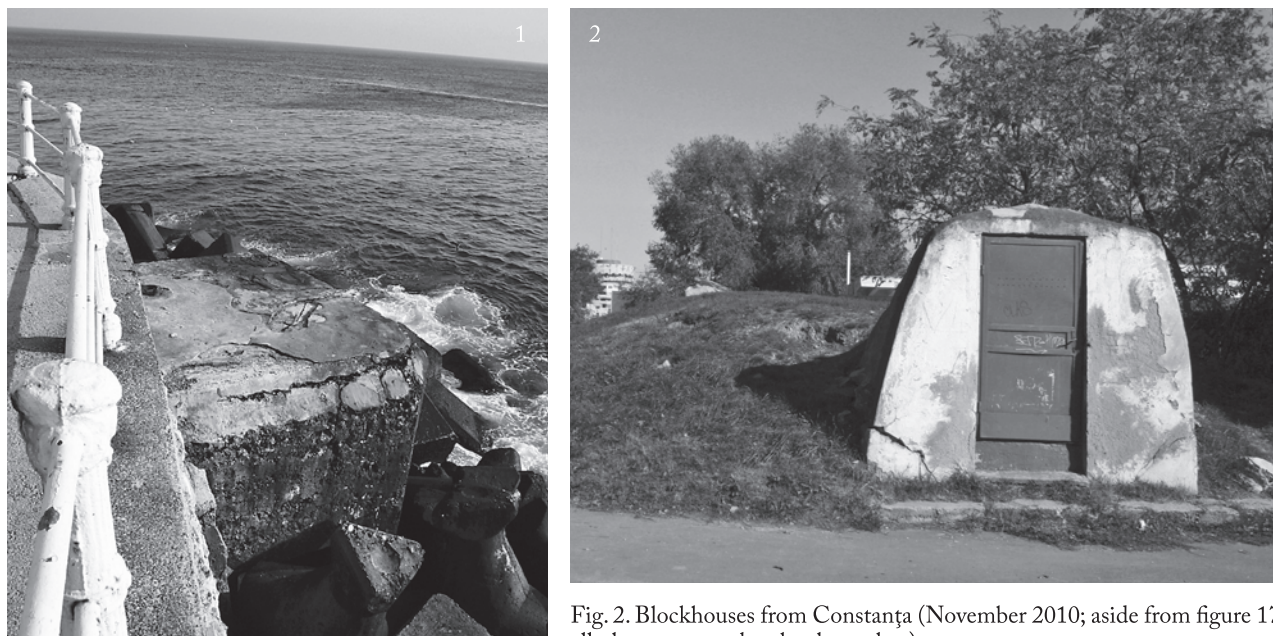[5]   Olivier 2000, pp. 398-399.

Fig. 2. Blockhouses from Constanța (November 2010; aside from figure 17, all photos were taken by the author).

Fig. 3. Blockhouses from Constanța (November 2010).

the blockhouses situated on the waterfront in the harbour of Constanța, some locals affirm that they would have made connection with each other by tunnels, where they played when they were children, but that would have been closed at some moment.

According to Paul Virilio, by the fact that they are made of concrete, by their massiveness, by their form of monoliths with smooth angles and by their small number of openings (Fig. 4), the blockhouses represent the materiality of a new era, that brings along the emergence of a new type of war and, therefore, a new type of military space – they are constructions designed to withstand bombings, arsons or gas attacks from any direction; they can be considered monuments of a time when, thanks to the new weapons and technologies, the total war became a reality, including not only the earth's surface, but also the air and the water depths.[6] Yet, despite their
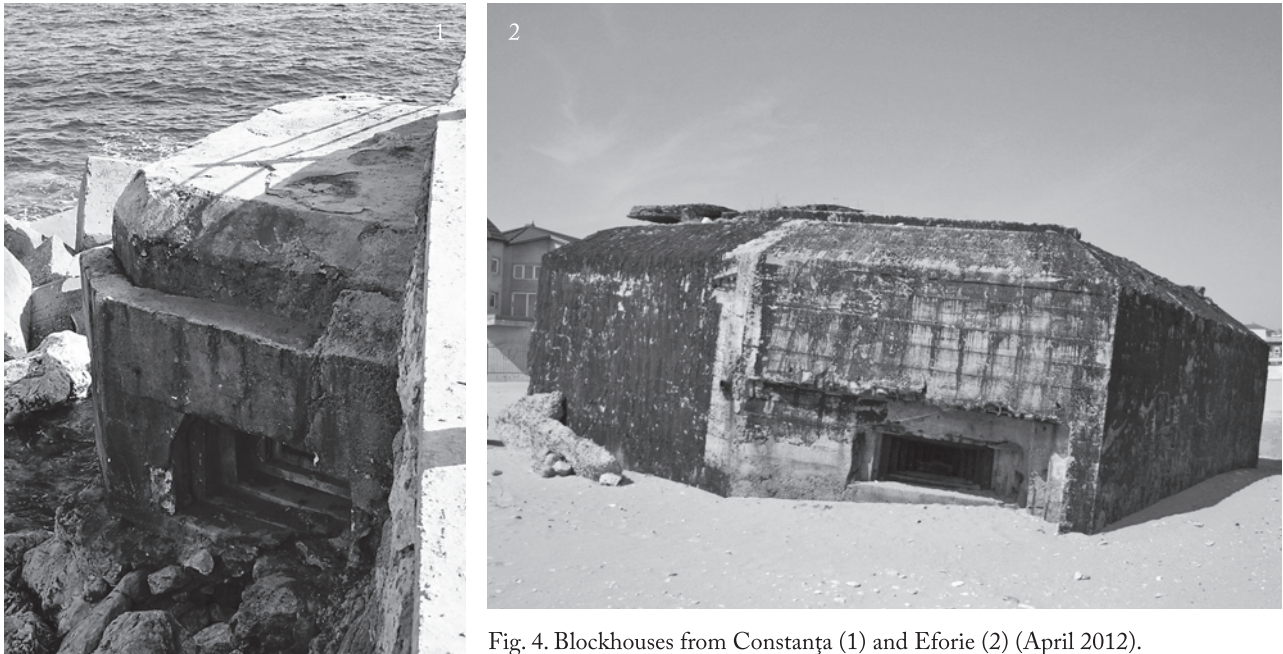
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[6]   Virilio 1994, pp. 39-40.

Fig. 4. Blockhouses from Constanța (1) and Eforie (2) (April 2012).

military character and the context in which they were built and used, the suggested image of the blockhouses along the Black Sea Shore is not only that of a conflict. They do not keep traces of any fights and contain anything of the mobile, fast and fierce confrontations fought with the Soviets on the Eastern Front. Although sometimes the blockhouses are visible between them, their appearance is not that of a "wall" or of a "fortified line". The massiveness and the sizes of some of the blockhouses impress the visitor due to the effect produced by the contrast between their form and the wide open space around – the beach and the sea. They do not transmit the image of an impregnable defensive, but a fragile one's. The blockhouses are not accompanied by other elements of fortification visible on the surface, such as anti-tank barriers, commonly found in other conflict zones, such as the Siegfried Line in Western Germany. Especially, when the beaches are deserted, the blockhouses seem "lonely", isolated presences. Walking around, among the blockhouses and reflecting on their appearance, you realize that the memory of the war is not mainly evoked by the fact that these military buildings are made of concrete, a material per excellence associated with the war, nor the shape or the size or that are part of a line of defense, but their orientation - petrified constructions, "looking" continuously to the sea (Fig. 5). This orientation guides the look of the visitor towards the line of the horizon – limit beyond which once was the enemy. The sea is like a "no man's land" between two trenches. Thus, the blockhouses evoke not only the condition of the total war, but rather the process of the expectation of an attack which is not known when and where to come. The blockhouses do not send to military actions, but to the vigil routine and, eventually, to the tension created by the possibility of a confrontation with the enemy.

        In deep contrast with the bright and open space of the beach and the sea, always in constant motion by the permanent dynamic of the dunes and the waves, the interior space of the blockhouses, including those of large sizes, is very dark, even in the middle of the day, very close and reduced in size, fitting a relatively small number of people. Inside the air is stale, while outside is always fresh. All of these make the interior of the blockhouses to be inappropriate to permanent occupation. Moreover, in terms of body movements, the contrast between the inside and the outside is itself significant: inside, the visitor is directed to the arrangement of the openings, must stoop to enter through the various openings, his/hers horizontal view is extremely limited due to the sizes and the arrangement of the rooms, and cannot visually cover every single compartment than once; outdoors, starting from the blockhouse, the visitor can choose which way he/she wants, can turn to another lane than one which he/she left, can look in any direction up ahead and doesn't have to change his/her posture.

Fig. 5. Blockhouses from Eforie (1) and Mangalia (2) (April 2012).

Fig. 6. Blockhouses from Constanţa: stratifications (November 2010).

Fig. 7. Graffiti on a blockhouse from Constanţa (November 2010).

The atmosphere inside the blockhouses indicates that some of the time of the militaries possibly associated with these blockhouses would have been spent outdoors. The blockhouses were more "looked at", rather than seen from them. Paradoxically, the memory of the wartime of these militaries is evoked not so by the inside of the blockhouses, as their outer surface.

Similar to the human memory, during the time, the material memory of the Second World War has undergone transformation. Following on L. Olivier, we deal with three main types of transformations of the materiality: the assemblies (consisting of objects of different origins being in the same archaeological context), the stratifications (consisting of overlaps occurred, in time, at the same support) and the obliterations (especially, relating to the removal of the materiality or, in a broader sense, to the erosion or the wear of physical supports)[7] (Fig. 6). Many of the blockhouses became supports for graffiti decorations, which can certainly be attributed to the period after 1990 (Fig. 7). By the act of decorating, the blockhouses are "demilitarized", integrated in the urban space, becoming like any other support, such as a block wall or a fence (Fig. 8). Other blockhouses, located outside the living space, have been "domesticated" by their symbolic transformation in billboards, becoming holders of the property adverts (Fig. 9).

In other cases, we witness to a radical transformation of the functionality - some of the blockhouses were transformed into beach terraces/bars: a good example of this is the terrace *Expirat* in Vama Veche, party-place during the summers (Fig. 10). I met a similar case also in Constanţa (Fig. 11).

Fig. 8. Graffiti on a blockhouse from Constanţa transformed into a garage (1) and on a nearby wall of a block (2) (April 2012).

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[7]   Olivier 2000, pp. 400-401.

Fig. 9. Blockhouses from Vama Veche (1) and Corbu (2) used for "real estate ads" (July 2005 and April 2012).

Fig. 10. Blockhouse from Vama Veche transformed into a beach bar – *Expirat* (July 2005).

Fig. 11. Blockhouse from Constanţa transformed into a beach bar (November 2010).

Fig. 12. Blockhouse from Constanţa transformed into a bar (April 2012).

Fig. 13. Blockhouse from Mangalia transformed into the restaurant *Puius Cazematā* (April 2012).

Fig. 14. Indicator from Mangalia towards the restaurant *Puius Cazemată*.

Not only the blockhouses from the beaches were transformed into terraces/bars, but also some military constructions from the cliff without direct view to the sea (Fig. 12). Other blockhouses were transformed into restaurants, such as *Puius* in Mangalia (Figs. 13-14). A special case is that of a native of Mangalia who built his house just across an old blockhouse (Fig. 15). At the same time, inside the blockhouses are abandoned all sorts of scraps, especially plastic containers, and the walls are engraved with names or other notations – signs of ephemeral events such as parties, short visits through the blockhouse (Fig. 16). All these material changes indicate

a conversion process of a materiality of the war, in one of normality, of life: parties, goings out to a terrace, sales-purchases of lands and building of houses. The blockhouses cease to be exclusive material symbols of a past marked by conflict.

The blockhouses in the context of the official policy of "recovering the memory"

The political changes occurred after the events of December 1989 have brought by themselves a real explosion of the concerns related to the "recovery of the memory" censored and repressed during the communist dictatorship. Just a few years after 1989, the Civic Academy Foundation, a private institution, succeeded the transformation of the former political prison in Sighet into the Memorial Museum of the Victims of Communism and of the Resistance, found from 1995 under the auspices of the Council of Europe (http://memorialsighet.ro/). In 2007, the Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes in Romania, an institution subordinated to the Romanian Government and coordinated by the Prime Minister took the administration of the former political prison in Râmnicu Sărat in order to transform it, into the Memorial Museum of the Victims of Communism.[8] Alongside other partners, the same institution (renamed in 2009 the Institute

Fig. 15. Mangalia blockhouse incorporated in a residence (April 2012).

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8   *Raport* 2006, p. 19; *Raport* 2007, p. 25.

Fig. 16. Scraps and scratches inside a blockhouse from Eforie (April 2012).

for the Investigation of Communist Crimes and the Memory of the Romanian Exile) has proposed turning the Fort 13 into a museum of the victims and of the communist repression in Romania – the Memorial Museum Jilava.[9] In 2009, the former political prison of Piteşti was classified as a historical monument. It is possible that other prisons with a sinister notoriety for their role in the communist repression to have been turned into memorial museums themselves, if not still in use (for example Aiud and Gherla). The museistic valorization of the former political prisons fall within the anti-communist and pro-western discourse adopted and promoted after 1989 by the cultural and political elites, and which had as a climax, probably, the official conviction of the communism in 2007, based on a report realized by a presidential commission assigned with analyzing the communist dictatorship in Romania.[10]

Ignoring the blockhouses of the Second World War in Dobrogea contrasts with the attention given to the former communist political prisons. Aren't them also symbols of the resistance against the Soviet Union which, in the end, occupied Romania and imposed the communist regime? The contrast is even more striking as the presidential report of the conviction of the communism begins chronologically with the moment of the occupancy of the country by the Soviet forces and the deportation to the Gulag of about 100,000 Romanian soldiers and civilians captured on the front of Iaşi after ending the truce.[11] Also, on my visit at the memorial museum in Sighet, in a hall, were exposed several objects made of Romanian officers during the captivity in the Soviet Union: an anthology of poetry in French consisted by memory and written in blackberry ink, "Lectures of physiology" translated from German, and a French-Romanian and English-Romanian dictionary in two volumes made of wrapping paper (fig. 17). As mentioned in one of the explanatory notes, the group of the officers who translated "The lectures of physiology" was also incarcerated upon their return in the country in the Romanian communist prisons.

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[9]   *Raport* 2006, p. 19; *Raport* 2007, pp. 25-26.
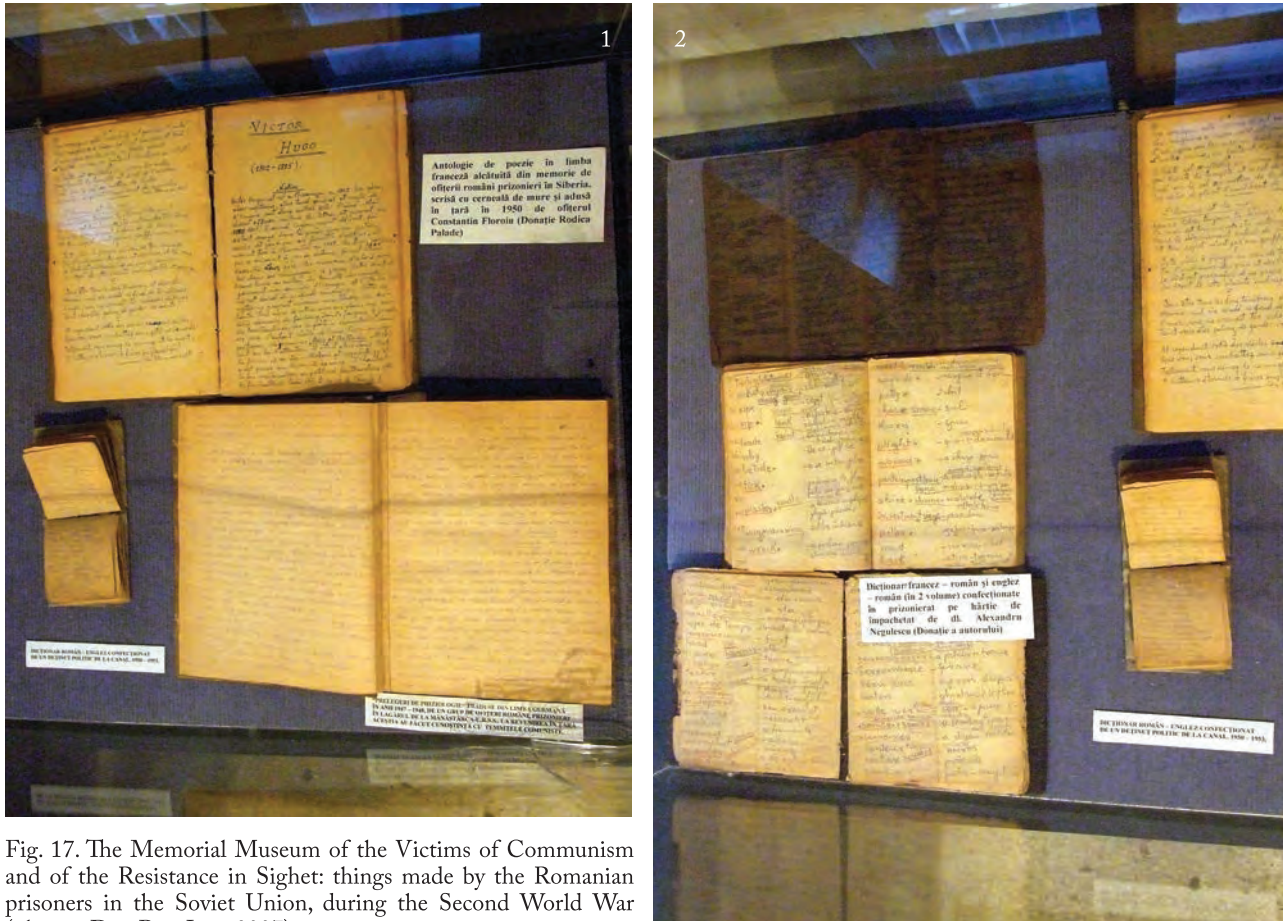[10]   Tismăneanu *et alli* 2007.
[11]   *Ibidem*, p. 460.

Fig. 17. The Memorial Museum of the Victims of Communism and of the Resistance in Sighet: things made by the Romanian prisoners in the Soviet Union, during the Second World War (photos: Dan Pop, June 2007).

The official attitude towards the blockhouses is similar both before and after 1989. Similar is the way of building the collective memory by the building of monuments on the Second World War: in the People's/ Socialist Republic of Romania, the power raised its own monuments to celebrate the "liberating" role of the Soviet armies and the Romania's participation to the "antifascist struggle" (Fig. 18); in Romania, a NATO member country, the Americans erected a monument to their soldiers who fought in World War II in Romania (fig. 19). The battles on the Eastern Front and the American bombings on Bucharest are reduced to silence.

Quite different is the attitude towards the military monuments in other countries involved in the Second World War. In Finland, on the eve of the Second World War, as a defensive measure against the Soviet Union, was built the Salpa Line, a strong defensive line composed of bunkers, fortifications and anti-tank barriers, comparable to the Maginot Line or the Atlantic Wall.[12] During the Winter War of 1940, when Soviet troops attacked Finland, along the defensive line battles were not fought. Like Romania, Finland also participated alongside Nazi Germany, between 1941 and 1944, at the war against the Soviet Union. Unlike the situation in Romania, after 1990, the Salpa Line became a national monument, entering under the protection of the heritage law.[13] Even in countries occupied by the Nazi Germany during the World War II, many of these

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[12] Kauppi 2002.
[13] *Ibidem.*

Fig. 18. Romanian and Soviet soldiers reproduced in a war memorial in Baia Mare (July 2012).

sites are protected as cultural heritage, and some of them have been converted into visitor centers.[14] For example, in the extreme North of Norway, the site of "Lasarettmoen" in Skoganvarre, which contains the ruins of one of the largest campaign hospitals built by the Germans in the North, is protected as part of the cultural heritage.[15] In the same spirit, I believe that at least a part of the blockhouses on the Black Sea shore, should be classified as historical monuments, consequently protected and restored.

Concluding remarks

Focusing on the anti-communist resistance, the official policy of the memory promotes a heroic vision, for which proofs are not only the names of the memorial museums, but also the use of the terms "heroes" or "martyr heroes", as can be seen, for example, in the case of the monuments raised by the state institutions in the memory of those killed during the revolution of 1989. Although the memory of the war, of the captivity and of the communist repression are closely related for some of the victims,[16] the blockhouses have been and continue to be ignored by the managers of the cultural heritage and considered irrelevant to the official policy of the memory. The cause of this attitude, most probably unintentional, lies in the memory contained in the blockhouses: the routine of the expectation has nothing heroic in it. At the same time, as symbols of the conflict with the Soviet Union in general, the blockhouses make reference to tragic historical events. For example, on the other side of the Romanian Black Sea coast, the Romanian troops along with the German ones, occupied for a while a part of the Caucasus, but at the

Fig. 19. Memorial in Bucharest dedicated to the Americans who have done their military service in Romania, during the Second World War (October 2011).

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[14]   Burström 2007-2008, p. 27.
[15]   Olsen 2010.
[16]   *E.g.* Bejan 2009; Mărculescu 2010.

Don Bend, in the Battle of Stalingrad (19 November 1942–7 January 1943), have suffered a disastrous defeat, losing two armies – about 155,010 people dead, wounded and missing, what means more than half of the active forces and a quarter of the troops sent to the Eastern Front.[17] Moreover, the idea of preserving the blockhouses seems politically incorrect in the context of Romania's integration into the Euro-Atlantic structures and especially of the military agreements with the United States (for example regarding the military bases in Dobrogea), because it cannot avoid the topic of the long and active alliance with the Nazi Germany during 1940-1944. Consequently, it also cannot be avoided the topic of the Holocaust in Romania.[18] In conclusion, from the communist era to the present day, the blockhouses were built in the material memory of a past considered to be useless for the socio-political projects of the moment.

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[17] Deletant 2010, pp. 109-110.
[18] *E.g.* Deletant 2010.

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