CHAPTER FOUR

MAKING FRIENDS AND FOES:
OCCUPIERS AND OCCUPIED IN FIRST WORLD WAR
ROMANIA, 1916–1918

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During the First World War, the Central Powers occupied extensive territories on the Eastern and Western Fronts, including approximately two-thirds of the Kingdom of Romania. The phenomenon of ‘occupation’ was thus an integral part of the war experience for numerous contemporaries. Yet this important aspect of the Great War has received little historical attention; apart from the interwar Carnegie studies, historical research ignored it until recently.1 The Romanian case is particularly interesting for three reasons. First, all three of Germany’s allies were involved in the occupation regime, adding further levels of tension to the occupier—occupied dichotomy. Romania therefore offers insights into how Germany and its allies interacted. Second, in Romania the Central Powers found a local elite, which, at least in part, was prepared to cooperate with the occupying forces to a greater extent than in other occupation zones. Third, partly as a result of the first two factors, the occupation of Romania proceeded relatively smoothly until the summer of 1918. It was only at this point that the Romanian population began to show signs of discontent, as the food situation worsened and it became clear that the Central Powers faced defeat.

Analysing the attitudes of occupiers and occupied towards one another, as well as the different attitudes that existed among the occupied population towards each other, reveals that the concepts of friend and foe were highly ambivalent during the occupation. Focusing

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1 This chapter was translated from German by Christoph Schmidt-Supprian and Heather Jones.

1 A selection of recent literature includes the following: on Northern France see Becker (1998); on Belgium see de Schaepdrijver (2004); on OberOst see Šulevičius (2000); on a number of different regions see Hull (2005); Roshwald and Stites (1999). The Carnegie studies include: Köhler (1927); Kerchnawe et al. (1928); for Romania see: Antipa (s.d.); Ionesco-Sisesti (s.d.). For Romania see also: Rădulescu-Zoner and Marinescu (1993); Răcilă (1981); Kirizescu (1934).
on the German occupiers, the following chapter will investigate how their relationship with the local population, as well as with their Austro-Hungarian allies, developed. It will first outline how, despite their limited influence, several Romanian opposition politicians tried to use their cooperation with the occupier to achieve their own political aims. Second, it will examine relations between the occupier and the occupied civilian population—relations which were largely determined by economic considerations. The third part of the chapter will explore the rivalries that existed between the occupying powers.

The occupiers saw their relatively successful cooperation with the local Romanian population as a means of ensuring the efficient economic exploitation of the country which had stayed out of the war until 1916. However, severe measures such as requisitions and forced labor were also part of daily life for the civilian population in the occupied Romanian territories. As in other occupied regions, such as Poland or Lithuania, the initial friendly reception which the German occupiers received rapidly disappeared in the face of the realities of the occupation, as escalating hardship and the impending defeat of the Central Powers during 1918 led to an increase in insubordination by the civilian population.

Before discussing the occupation in detail, it is necessary to provide a short summary of the main administrative features of the occupied territory, due to the complex structure of the occupation regime in Romania. The whole occupation administration was under the control of the Oberkommando Mackensen (OKM), the supreme command of the occupying Central Power troops in Romania, and was divided into five different administrative subdivisions, which had responsibility for managing the occupation in different parts of the country: the territory of the Military Administration comprising of most of Walachia, the Etappengebiet of the IX. Army in the North-East, the Etappowerverwaltung in Dobruja, and the operational areas of the IX. Army and the III. Bulgarian Army along the front in Moldova and Dobruja respectively. Southern Dobruja was intended for annexation by Bulgaria and was therefore administered separately from the rest of the occupied territory. In this chapter, I will focus on the territory of the Military Administration, although I will also include some references to the Etappengebiet of the IX. Army, where in general living conditions for the Romanian population were much harder.

The Military Administration subdivision was by far the largest entity: the area it controlled represented around half of Romanian state terri-