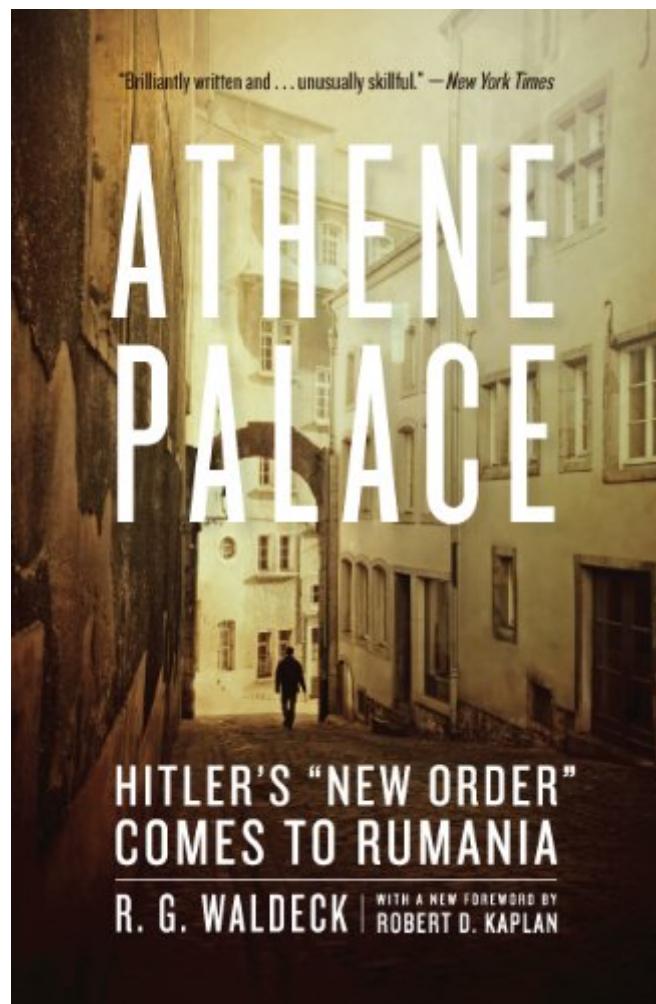


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Athene Palace: Hitler's "New Order" Comes To Rumania



Synopsis

On the day that Paris fell to the Nazis, R. G. Waldeck was checking into the swankiest hotel in Bucharest, the Athene Palace. A cosmopolitan center during the war, the hotel was populated by Italian and German oilmen hoping to secure new business opportunities in Romania, international spies cloaked in fake identities, and Nazi officers whom Waldeck discovered to be intelligent but utterly bloodless. A German Jew and a reporter for Newsweek, Waldeck became a close observer of the Nazi invasion. As King Carol first tried to placate the Nazis, then abdicated the throne in favor of his son, Waldeck was dressing for dinners with diplomats and cozying up to Nazi officers to get insight and information. From her unique vantage, she watched as Romania, a country with a pro-totalitarian elite and a deep strain of anti-Semitism, suffered civil unrest, a German invasion, and an earthquake, before turning against the Nazis. A striking combination of social intimacy and disinterest political analysis, Athene Palace evokes the elegance and excitement of the dynamic international community in Bucharest before the world had come to grips with the horrors of war and genocide. Waldeck's account strikingly presents the finely wrought surface of dinner parties, polite discourse, and charisma, while recognizing the undercurrents of violence and greed that ran through the denizens of Athene Palace.

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Customer Reviews

This is great first person, eyewitness history dressed up as fiction. To me as an American I have realized that I don't know how a police state really works. This book explains its cruel effectiveness and puts it into the context of depraved fundamentalist terror. It is all being repeated in Iraq and Syria today and in the prisons of America's allies across the Middle East. One can only hope the retreat from this barbarity comes soon.

Journalism, as they say, is the first draft of history, and though R.G. Waldeck's "first draft" depicting the early days of World War 2 in Romania is incomplete, as all first drafts are, it offers wonderful insight into contemporary views of the war and the future of totalitarianism in Europe and specifically Romania. Did German officers really have secret orders to abort the Anschluss and retreat from Austria in the event of Allied intervention? Would a German invasion of the Soviet Union be "good for [German] morale"? History, as we now know it, has reason to doubt these things, but it's fascinating to read the views - either commonly held or whispered in secret - that informed the actors of the time. Throughout the book, Waldeck returns to a theme that is very relevant to our time of insurgent far-right political parties; namely, does fascism have a future in Europe? In the guise of casual conversation, Waldeck interrogates Nazi officers and diplomats about totalitarianism as a system and a philosophy; against the backdrop of the fall of Paris and the rise of Iron Guard in Romania, these questions are shown to be not simply academic (that these Nazis were seldom aware of her Jewish background is also a source of amusement throughout the book). Waldeck's conclusions on the subject place her in the company of Hannah Arendt not simply as a journalist but a political scientist. The book is engagingly written, making you feel as though you too are in Romania in 1941. I was sorry when the book was over, with only the grim consolation that the times ahead for Romania were dark indeed.

A German friend (ha!) gave me an old edition of this book - and finally, as a Romanian - I had a clear understanding - from a smart, rational and impersonal (?) observer - of what the machinations, the lack of vision, the mysticism, and the egotism of my countryman did to my country: kept her in the dark - kept its inhabitants vampires of time; oh, well, it does seem that we were into making love

- but not sure we knew what love is - and maybe not knowing it now either... Very atmospheric book
- what a delight to see that they were mixing tzuica with vermouth - back in the 40s, lol

This book is not just an eye witnesses account of the comings and goings in Bucharest in WW2. It's also beautifully written, dry and often amusing. The Germans come out of it reasonably well. The Rumanians less so. The persecution of the Jews is orchestrated by the Rumanian Black Guard. An unusual read in that the civilised manners of the crowd at the Plaza Athenee is juxtaposed with horrors starting to take place on the streets. But a fascinating read for anyone curious about Rumania and its major players during the war.

very well written, a historical document (remember it was written about 1942) describing the meltdown of greater Rumania to a bout half its size. It touches me personally - I know some of it from personal experience.

A fascinating story of how the Nazis operated by taking over inch by inch. Also surprising to learn that Hitler's vision for Europe was not much different than what is being constructed today.

Very well written and very objective even for notorious criminals and anti-Semites. As a Romanian I recognized the customs of a time long passed away. It is very rare to find a book written on Romania, a small country in Europe under the German semi-occupation and under Soviet occupation.

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