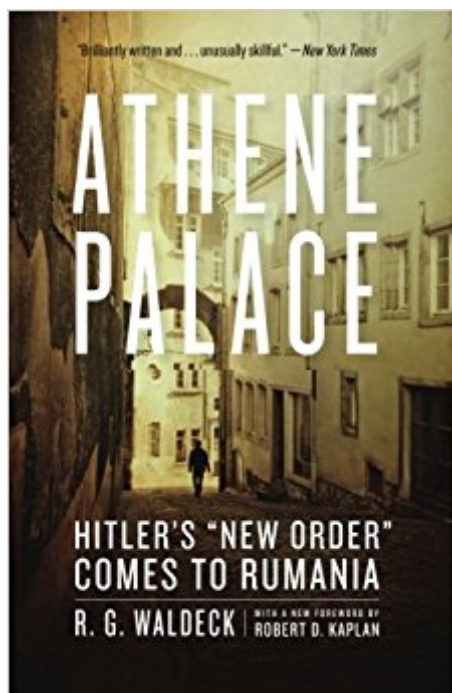


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# Athene Palace: Hitler's "New Order" Comes To Rumania



## 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 disinterested 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.

## Book Information

Paperback: 368 pages

Publisher: University Of Chicago Press; Reprint edition (August 22, 2013)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 022608633X

ISBN-13: 978-0226086330

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 1.4 x 8.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 15.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars 19 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,076,605 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #34 in [Books > History > Europe > Romania](#) #1756 in [Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Professionals & Academics > Journalists](#) #2496 in [Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Leaders & Notable People > Military > World War II](#)

## Customer Reviews

“Excellent description and shrewd observation.” (Times Literary Supplement) “The most vivid report, long or short, I have ever seen on Rumania . . .

brilliantly written and mercilessly barbed. An unusually skillful and readable book. (Ralph Thompson New York Times) "Well put together, always readable and often witty. . . . Countess Waldeck never protests too much; sometimes, one feels she might protest a little more. But all is forgiven in the end when her remarks are as shrewd as her conclusions are agreeable." (New Republic) "One might ask why a contemporary reader would bother with a book so old and outdated. The answer is clear. First, Waldeck is an uncommonly talented writer whose prose is a pleasure to read. Second, she writes authoritatively. Rumania lay on the fault line between Allied and Axis powers and was up for grabs, and Waldeck understood the dynamics of this power struggle. . . . In Athene Palace, she documents all these momentous developments with skill and panache, giving a reader an insider's view of a nation and a people in turmoil and transition." (Sheldon Kirshner) "There are many reasons why this book should be read. Those interested in the war will appreciate Waldeck's shrewdness as an observer of the political scene. . . . Athene Palace also merits appreciation for the entertaining vigour of its language, in which Waldeck's personality - catty, egotistical, mischievous and inquisitive - is constantly felt. She writes with acuity, élan and a sassiness that can border on the camp. . . . Waldeck's combination of political alertness and literary talent recommends Athene Palace to our age as surely as her own." (Steven Lovatt New Wales Review)

R. G. Waldeck (1898-1982) was a German-American journalist and author of several books, including *Prelude to the Past*.

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.

What an interesting perspective: That Hitler wasn't completely mad, that he had plans for all of Europe, and many people in place implementing (sometimes undermining) those plans; that the Palace provided back-channel opportunities for fraternization and communication amongst "frenemies

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.

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.

Relevant now as when it was written

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 the customs of a time long passed away. It is very rare to find a book written on Romania, a small counhtry in Europe under the German semi-occupation and under Soviet occupation.

An incredible insight of Romania's turn to Fascism . A great read all told from the lobby of one of last

Great European hotels.

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