

Builders and Martyrs of the Unification of Bessarabia with Romania



Lieutenant Murafa Simion

(1887-1917)

soldier, publicist and unionist patriot

Simion Murafa was born on May 24, 1887 in the village of Cotiujenii Mari, Soroca County, in a family of Moldovan well off yeomen. After a happy childhood in his native village, his parents wanted their son, Simion, to receive a good education therefore they sent him to study in Kiev. He studied law at the best university of the city. He graduated from the university in 1912, and in the same year he took his degree in law. In Kiev he met the patriot Alexei

Mateevich.

His parents advised him to deepen his studies in agriculture so in September the same year he enrolled at the Agricultural Academy in Moscow.

From his uncle's Andrei Murafa memories (in "Moldova de la Nistru", no. 1, 1920): "Simion, Senea as his parents and relatives used to call him, was a nimble and lithe youngster like a young oak with a pleasant and energetic face, then still without moustaches. Serious, smart and talkative, he made the best impression on me."

But the passion to write and collaborate with "Junimea literară" (Literary Youth) was more important than agriculture, so he abandoned his agronomy studies and returned to Kishinev. He associated with the editorial staff of the journal "Cuvântul Moldovenesc" (The Moldovan Word), he was appointed secretary, and for a while he was even the editor of this publication.

From 1915 he participated in the First World War on the Romanian Front. He enrolled in 1916 as a non-commissioned officer and commander of the sanitary group, and together with some Russian military units, took part in the battles in Galicia and Bukovina. With a mission in Moldova, the sub-lieutenant Simion Murafa succeeded to meet the famous writer Mihail Sadoveanu who wrote about Simion Murafa in his book "Orhei and Soroca", published in Kishinev, in 1921: "I was moved beyond words. I was looking at that sturdy and lively "Muscovite", with sparkling and vivid eyes..."

We conversed leisurely over that night of fraternity, opened the books of the chroniclers, and called to us, with our eyes in tears, the past of our beautiful and unhappy Moldova. Then we parted sadly, late at night, a dark rainy night...

Artillery columns passed through the darkness to the unknown. We did not see the soldiers, we could not see the horses – we heard only a tireless movement, the rough grinding of the road – and from time to time a sound, a command in the foreign language. "The Muscovite" shook my hand and left."

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In Onisifor Ghibu's article in the pages of the newspaper "România nouă" (New Romania) dated 19.08.1918, entitled "Three Martyrs of the Romanian Spirit in Bessarabia, Alexei Mateevici, Simion Murafa, A. Hodorogea", wrote: "Simion Murafa was the first Romanian Bessarabian I had met. It was in mid-October 1916, in these terrible days foretelling the fall of Bucharest. I met him in Iasi in the company of poet Goga. He came from Suceava, from Bukovina. Making his acquaintance fascinated me: a young man full of life and energy, with an amiable disposition dressed in a Russian officer's coat that at that time had something attractive for us – I felt even more attracted to him as he was from a country I did not know, and I thought it was lost, yet I loved it deeply. He said that he was heading to Bucharest with his military unit and from there to Transylvania. He felt happy that the war had given him the opportunity to see all the Romanian countries. And although the times were rather hard, he used to tell, to Goga and me: the war will come up well; you will get rid of the Hungarians, yet we do not know when we get rid of the Russians..."

As a publicist, he was supported and appreciated by Ștefan Ciobanu. A singer of great talent and a gifted animator of musical life, he organised the evening of the Moldovan song in Kishinev, in the hall of the Eparchial House.

Prior to his tragic death, he was appointed by the zemstvo of the County of Soroca as a justice of the peace in his native village.

We have another recollection regarding the poet Onisifor Ghibu, referred to in the press: "I saw him in March 1917, when the Moldovan National Party was beginning to take shape, then in Odessa, on April 18, when the powerful Movement of the Moldovan Soldiers was at its peak. Murafa was always talking like a fervent nationalist. The others talked as socialists do. Returning to his duty, he was looking for Moldovan soldiers on the Romanian front, held meetings and prepared them for the national struggle. Demobilised, he came to Bessarabia to fight there. He met the first Transylvanian battalion in Kishinev and gave them a tricolor flag to take it to Alba Iulia. He felt happier than never before."

A great service that Simion Murafa made for the Bessarabian Movement in 1917 was to fetch a printing press from Iași. Having their own printing press, the Moldovan National Party could unimpededly edit their newspapers, newsletters, brochures. Another important action was the anti-Bolshevik and national-patriotic propaganda of approaching and uniting the Moldovan soldiers with the Romanian Army. When none of the soldiers spoke of the union, he saw the real Union with Romania.

Precious lines about the patriot Simion Murafa wrote the brilliant scholar, historian and journalist Nicolae Iorga: "A fighter for justice, this Simion Murafa. I too have met this impressive man of our own nation. A Russian reserve officer, he had come to Iași for his service, and sought to know here people connected to our cultural movement, asking for books for him and for his own folk. Stout and handsome, perfectly confident in his attitude, look and speech, intelligent and energetic, full of frankness in examining his views even when he knew they could offend his discussion partner, deeply convinced of the justice of the plans he was pursuing, he made the greatest impression.

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You could see in him the man born to command, the initiator and leader of a national movement...”

At the Conference of the Moldovan National Party of 15-18 March 1917, where Moldovan soldiers from various garrisons of the Russian Army were also participating, he told the delegates: “Our Moldovans have always been the first to fight for Russian revolutionary ideas, but now it is high time to fight for our Moldovan needs. The Moldovans, who have so far filled up Siberia, have not done it for Moldovan national ideas but for Russian revolutionary ideas. We have been Russians for too long a time, let us now be Moldovans. It’s no time now to work for others, let us now work for us.” As Ion Stafi related, on April 5, the leadership of the Moldovan National Party was elected, reflecting correctly the structure of the social strata interested in the promotion of a national program: Vasile Stroescu, a landowner who was living in Odessa and who supported with all his might the national movement; the intellectuals and publicists P. Gore, Vl. Herța, Pan Halippa, the General of the Russian Army, the Bessarabian Donici, who had come from Russia and was interested in Moldovans in general, wherever they were living, Archimandrite Gurie Grosu, who had arrived from his Siberian exile, Mrs Alistar Elena, who was to mobilise women in the fight for the Union; the lawyer Moțoc alongside the jurists and solicitors Buruiană and Groppa (Groapă), the students Vlad Bogos of Kiev and C. Capă of Odessa, etc. Among them we find Simion Murafa too.

On August 20, 1917, a party attended also by Simion Murafa took place on the estate and vineyard of the agronomist engineer Andrei Hodorocea. On the grapevine plantation where the guests were feasting, some soldiers came up, some say they were a “band of Russian deserters”, not soldiers on duty. Others said they had been sent specifically to “spoil the party” or kill someone of “the bourgeois State officials.” It all started from some grapes, plucked by the soldiers from the peduncle. Murafa reprimanded them, pointing to a basket of grapes, chosen especially by the owner of the vineyard. But the gunmen, seeing his officer’s uniform, put the bayonets and bullets in motion ...they did not need the grapes, they had come for Murafa Simion, they had come obeying an order, followed him, and shot several bullets in the officer in uniform, Simion Murafa, and in his colleague Andrei Hodorocea. The command to shoot these two Moldovan patriots and nationalists had been given to the two soldiers by their commander, who vanished in no more than a second into the vineyard. This assassination shook all Bessarabia and Romania.

In 1933, in the park of the Cathedral of Kishinev, a monument was raised in memory of the three martyrs: Alexei Mateevici, Simion Murafa and Andrei Hodorocea. But seven years later, the stone of the monument was turned into powder by an explosion plotted by Soviet occupants in the 1940 as if to once again kill our national heroes... They tried to erase them from the memory of the nation, but they overlooked a simple and great truth: the heroes of the soul, national heroes, shall always be immortal...

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