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The Knights of the "Mihai Viteazul" Military Order Of War

The Historical-Documentary Analysis of the Decoration of Military Personnel and Units of the Romanian Army

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Abstract (EN)

The „Mihai Viteazul" (Michael the Brave) Military Order of War was and remains the highest Românian military decorație, having been established during the First World War. This study aims to analyze the evolution of the regulatory framework, the criteria for conferment, and the statistical distribution of this order between 1916 and 1947—covering both individual Românian and foreign officers, as well as military units. The methodology employed combines historicaldocumentary analysis (examining royal decrees, regulations, and military yearbooks) with descriptive and comparative statistical analysis of data pertaining to both World Wars. The research findings highlight a significant increase in the number of awards granted during the Second World War compared to the First World War, as well as the adaptation of the insignia and the conferment criteria to the geopolitical context—notably in light of changes that occurred in 1938, 1941, and 1944. Furthermore, the analysis reveals the dual role of this decorație: it served both as a means to reward individual or collective heroism on the battlefield and as an instrument of military diplomacy in relations with commanders of allied armies.

Keywords: Second World War, Romanian Army, battle flags, feats of arms, heroism, Romanian officers, military operations, „Mihai Viteazul" Military Order, First World War.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Romania's entry into the First World War, on 15 August 1916, on the side of the Entente, made it necessary to adapt the existing decorations system to the new requirements, since, under the regulations in force, the "Carol I" and "Crown of Romania" Orders did not provide for "war" insignia, as the "Star of Romania" Order did (Flondor and Moisil, 1938).

Deployed along a front that was far too long for its manpower, poorly equipped and without the support expected from its Entente allies, the Romanian Army, despite the enthusiasm with which it had begun the campaign, suffered a series of defeats, initially in Dobruja, but also on the Transylvanian front, beginning in the second half of September (Kirițescu, 1989).

In order to raise the morale of officers and troops, as well as to reward the bravery and heroism displayed on the battlefield, King Ferdinand instituted the "Mihai Viteazul" Military Order of War, the name of the order itself being eloquent of the ideal in whose name the war was being fought: the achievement of national unity (Presidency of Romania – Chancellery of Orders, n.d.).

The research aims to analyse the procedure and dynamics of the awarding of the "Mihai Viteazul" Military Order of War to Romanian and foreign officers, as well as to military units, during the period 1916–1947, examining the evolution of the decoration criteria, the distribution by classes, and the contribution of different categories of military personnel and military branches.

2. HISTORICAL AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The "Mihai Viteazul" Military Order of War was and has remained the most prestigious Romanian military distinction. The Order was established by King Ferdinand I, by Royal Decree No. 2968 of 26 September 1916 (subsequently ratified by High Decree No. 3,249 of 21 December 1916), and was intended to reward "exceptional acts of war by officers who distinguished themselves in the face of the enemy". According to the founding decree, the Order had three classes, expressly stipulating that "no one may obtain a higher class unless decorated with the third class."

The decree described the form of the decoration in very general terms. The insignia of the Order was presented as follows: a trefoil cross, enamelled blue and with gold edges; at its centre, the crowned

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gold cipher of King Ferdinand I, and above it, the gold royal crown. On the reverse, the cross was also enamelled blue and bore the date 1916. The ribbon was burgundy red, with gold stripes along its edges (Flondor and Moisil, 1938; General Staff – Army History Service, 2009).

Subsequently, through a special law promulgated by King Ferdinand on 12 May 1927, a series of material benefits were granted to officers decorated with the "Mihai Viteazul" Order, such as the free allocation of a 25-hectare plot of arable land, the allocation of a 500-squaremetre house plot, and free travel on state transport services.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Methods and documentary sources

The paper uses the historical-documentary research method for the period 1916–1947, corroborated by descriptive and comparative statistical analysis of military decorations.

The following primary and secondary sources were analysed to substantiate the research:

- Legislative acts and royal decrees:
  - Royal Decree No. 2968 of 26 September 1916 (subsequently ratified by High Decree No. 3249 of 21 December 1916);
  - The special law of 12 May 1927 concerning the material rights of the knights of the Order;
  - Royal decrees awarding distinctions, published in the Official Gazette (1916–1947);
  - Law No. 29/2000 on Romania's national decorations system; - Law No. 327/2003 on the "Mihai Viteazul" Order.
- Reference documents and works:
  - Yearbook of the Officers and Colours of the Romanian Army Who Were Awarded the "Mihai Viteazul" Order (Ministry of War, 1930);
  - Encyclopaedia of the Romanian Army (General Staff – Army History Service, 2009).

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3.2 Analysis criteria

The collected data were structured chronologically into two major historical periods – 1916–1929 (the First World War and post-war operations), and 1941–1947 (the Second World War and immediate post-war decorations) – and grouped according to the following criteria:

- Class of the distinction (Class I, Class II, Class III);
- Status of the recipients (Romanian officers, foreign officers, and the battle colours of military units);
- Military branch or speciality (infantry, chasseurs, cavalry, border guards, aviation, navy).

3.3 Methodological clarification regarding data quantification

In the statistical analysis, the total numerical values expressed by class represent the number of decorations awarded, since the regulations governing the award of the "Mihai Viteazul" Military Order of War required the hierarchical progression through the classes, starting with Class III, which resulted in some commanders being decorated two or three times during their military careers.

4. RESULTS OF THE ANALYSIS OF DECORATIONS DURING THE PERIOD 1916–1929

The "Mihai Viteazul" Military Order of War was awarded both to Romania's last three monarchs – Ferdinand I, Carol II and Michael I – and to the country's three marshals: Alexandru Averescu, Constantin Prezan and Ion Antonescu.

It should be noted that only one Romanian officer – General of Army Corps Constantin Prezan – was decorated with all three classes of the Order for acts of bravery on the battlefield, as follows:

- "Mihai Viteazul", Class III, on 14 October, when he held the rank of adjutant divisional general and commanded the 4th "Northern" Army – "for repeated acts of bravery and skill in commanding the troops";
- "Mihai Viteazul", Class II, on 21 July 1917, when he held the rank of adjutant general of army corps and the position of Chief of the General Headquarters, "for the manner in which he conceived and for the skill with which he prepared the operations in July 1917";

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- "Mihai Viteazul", Class I, on 5 February 1920, when he held the rank of adjutant general of army corps and the position of Chief of the General Headquarters, "for the competence with which he issued directives – even on the battlefield – in his capacity as Chief of Staff of the High Command, which resulted in the complete defeat of the Hungarians, as well as the occupation of Budapest in 1919". General of Army Corps Constantin Prezan was, moreover, the first officer decorated with Class I of the Order (Ministry of War, 1930).

The first officers decorated with Class II of the Order were Generals of Army Corps Constantin Prezan and Alexandru Averescu, on 21 July 1917 (High Decree No. 759 of 21 July 1917), for the way in which they organised and led the combat operations in the summer of 1917. The following were also decorated with the "Mihai Viteazul" Order, Class II: General Eremia Grigorescu and General Gheorghe Mărdărescu.

The first award of the Order took place on 28 September 1916, when the first 9 Romanian officers were decorated for the battles of Turtucaia. For acts of arms connected with Romania's participation in the First World War and post-war military operations, a total of 91 decorations were awarded to foreign officers and 319 decorations to Romanian officers, some of whom were decorated more than once. In addition, the battle colours of 39 regiments were decorated (Ministry of War, 1930).

The distribution of decorated officers across the Order's three classes was as follows:

- Foreign officers (91): 12 Class I, 7 Class II and 72 Class III;
- Romanian officers (319): 1 Class I, 4 Class II and 314 Class III.

The first foreign officer to be decorated was Captain Milenko Milicievici, of the Serbian Volunteer Division, on 1 October 1916 (High Decree No. 2990 of 1 October 1916), for acts of heroism during the battles of Cocargeaua.

The first foreign officer decorated with Class I of the Order was General Joseph Joffre, Supreme Commander of the French Army, on 26 November 1919 (High Decree No. 1090 of 26 November 1919).

4.1 Officers decorated with the "Mihai Viteazul" Order, Class I and Class II (1916–1929)

Foreign officers decorated with the "Mihai Viteazul" Order, Class I:

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- General Joseph Joffre – Supreme Commander of the French Army, by High Decree No. 1090 of 26 November 1919 – the first foreign officer decorated with Class I of the Order.
- General Louis Franchet d'Esperey – Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Armies in the East, by High Decree No. 2395 of 4 October 1928;
- General Henri Mathias Berthelot – Head of the French Military Mission in Romania, by High Decree No. 3490 of 18 October 1929;
- General John Pershing – Commander of the American Expeditionary Forces in Europe, by High Decree No. 343 of 30 January 1920;
- Field Marshal Douglas Haig – Commander of the British Expeditionary Force, by High Decree No. 371 of 5 February 1920;
- Marshal Philippe Pétain – Supreme Commander of the French Army, by High Decree No. 2597 of 14 June 1920;
- Admiral David Beatty – Commander of the "Grand Fleet" of the British Empire, by High Decree No. 3260 of 25 September 1924.

Romanian officers decorated with the "Mihai Viteazul" Order, Class I:

- General Constantin Prezan – Chief of the General Headquarters of the Romanian Army, by High Decree No. 372 of 5 February 1920.

Foreign officers decorated with the "Mihai Viteazul" Order, Class II:

- General Dmitri Shcherbachev – Commander of the Russian Army Group on the Romanian front, by High Decree No. 759 of 18 July 1917;
- General Henri Mathias Berthelot – Head of the French Military Mission in Romania, by High Decree No. 612 of 12 March 1918;
- General Joseph Joffre – Supreme Commander of the French Army, by High Decree No. 1099 of 22 September 1917;
- Marshal Ferdinand Foch – Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in France, by High Decree No. 1099 of 22 September 1917;

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- Marshal Philippe Pétain – Supreme Commander of the French Army, by High Decree No. 1099 of 22 September 1917.

Romanian officers decorated with the "Mihai Viteazul" Order, Class II:

- General Constantin Prezan – Chief of the General Headquarters of the Romanian Army, by High Decree No. 759 of 21 July 1917;
- General Alexandru Averescu – Commander of the Romanian 2nd Army, by High Decree No. 759 of 21 July 1917;
- General Eremia Grigorescu – Commander of the Romanian 1st Army, by High Decree No. 227 of 12 February 1918;
- General Gheorghe Mărdărescu – Commander of the Troops in Transylvania, by High Decree No. 17 of 2 January 1920.

4.2 Officers decorated with the "Mihai Viteazul" Order, Class III

Seventy-two foreign officers of Russian, French, American, English, Italian and Japanese nationality were decorated with the "Mihai Viteazul" Order, Class III.

Three hundred and fourteen Romanian officers were decorated with the "Mihai Viteazul" Order, Class III, including: Major General Constantin Prezan, Major General Alexandru

Averescu, Brigadier General Ioan Dragalina, Brigadier General Eremia Grigorescu, Brigadier General Paraschiv Vasilescu, Brigadier General Constantin Scărișoreanu, Brigadier General Traian Moșoiu, Major General Gheorghe Mărdărescu, Brigadier General Ștefan Panaitescu, Brigadier General Alexandru Constantinidi, Brigadier General David Praporgescu, Major General Ștefan Holban, Brigadier General Nicolae Arghirescu, Brigadier General Alexandru Mărgineanu, Brigadier General Dumitru Stratilescu, Major General Arthur Văitoianu, Crown Prince (Lt. Col.) Carol, Protosinghel (Lt.) Justin Șerbănescu, Colonel Ioan Florescu, Major Virgil Bădulescu, Captain Corneliu Dragalina, Captain Nicolae Macici, Captain (aviation) Grigore Gafencu, Captain (reserve) Ion Mihalache, Captain Traian Grigorescu, Captain Nicolae Magereanu, Lieutenant Nicolae Tonitza, and Second Lieutenant Mihai Hurmuzescu (Ministry of War, 1930).

4.3 Battle colours decorated with the "Mihai Viteazul" Order during the First World War

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During this period, the battle colours of 39 military units were decorated (all with Class III), grouped by military branch as follows (Ministry of War, 1930; "Regiments Whose Colours Are Decorated", 1921):

- Border guard units (2):
  - 1st Border Guard Regiment – for the fierce battles of 1916, by High Decree No. 1592 of 27 September 1918;
  - 2nd Border Guard Regiment – for the battles of Turtucaia, by High Decree No. 17 of 10 January 1917.
- Chasseur units (8):
  - 1st Chasseur Regiment, by High Decree No. 17 of 10 January 1917;
  - 2nd Chasseur Regiment, by High Decree No. 928 of 21 August 1917;
  - 3rd Chasseur Regiment, by High Decree No. 1171 of 9 October 1917;
  - 4th Chasseur Regiment, by High Decree No. 17 of 10 January 1917;
  - 8th Chasseur Regiment, by High Decree No. 17 of 10 January 1917;
  - 9th Chasseur Regiment, by High Decree No. 473 of 18 May 1917;
  - 10th Chasseur Regiment, by High Decree No. 902 of 16 April 1918;
  - Mountain Chasseur Battalion, by High Decree No. 323 of 22 January 1919.
- Infantry units (27):
  - Vâlcea Regiment No. 2, by High Decree No. 5218 of 13 December 1919;
  - Argeș Regiment No. 4, by High Decree No. 928 of 21 August 1917;
  - Prahova Regiment No. 7, by High Decree No. 902 of 16 April 1918;
  - Buzău Regiment No. 8, by High Decree No. 910 of 19 April 1918;
  - Ștefan cel Mare Regiment No. 13, by High Decree No. 17 of 10 January 1917;
  - 1st Mehedinți Regiment No. 17 "Știrbey Vodă", by High Decree No. 1373 of 21 November 1917;
  - Gorj Regiment No. 18, by High Decree No. 834 of 4 August 1917;
  - Dâmbovița Regiment No. 22, by High Decree No. 88 of 8 February 1917;
  - 6th Tecuci Regiment No. 24, by High Decree No. 448 of 29 January 1919;

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- 7th Racova Regiment No. 25, by High Decree No. 17 of 10 January 1917;
- Bacău Regiment No. 27, by High Decree No. 4351 of 22 October 1920;
- Radu Negru Regiment No. 28, by High Decree No. 3651 of 12 December 1918;
- Muscel Regiment No. 30, by High Decree No. 928 of 21 July 1917;
- Mircea Regiment No. 32, by High Decree No. 1171 of 9 October 1917;
- Tulcea Regiment No. 33, by High Decree No. 2658 of 19 June 1920;
- Constanța Regiment No. 34, by High Decree No. 3651 of 12 December 1918;
- Vasile Lupu Regiment No. 36, by High Decree No. 3643 of 12 December 1918;
- Petru Rareș Regiment No. 39, by High Decree No. 902 of 16 April 1918;
- Călugăreni Regiment No. 40, by High Decree No. 708 of 11 April 1918;
- 47th Infantry Regiment, by High Decree No. 1356 of 15 November 1917;
- 50th Infantry Regiment, by High Decree No. 1356 of 15 November 1917;
- 51st Infantry Regiment, by High Decree No. 1356 of 15 November 1917;
- 53rd Infantry Regiment, by High Decree No. 17 of 10 January 1917;
- 55th Infantry Regiment, by High Decree No. 1126 of 30 September 1917;
- 65th Infantry Regiment, by High Decree No. 17 of 10 January 1917;
- 70th Infantry Regiment, by High Decree No. 910 of 19 April 1918;
- 73rd Infantry Regiment, by High Decree No. 323 of 22 January 1919.

• Artillery units (2):

- 1st Mountain Artillery Regiment, by High Decree No. 1592 of 27 June 1918;
- 4th Artillery Regiment, by High Decree No. 3659 of 30 August 1920.

By Royal Decree No. 328 of 10 February 1931, regiments whose colours had been decorated with the "Mihai Viteazul", "Star of Romania" and "Aeronautical Virtue" Orders or with the "Military Virtue" Medal, as well as the military personnel serving in them, were granted the right to wear a specific aiguillette. The aiguillette or shoulder cord was a braided cord, often with metal-covered ends, used as an ornament or distinguishing mark on military ceremonial uniforms or on the uniforms of units decorated for acts of bravery (Alexe, 2008, p. 5). It was awarded by royal decree and worn on the left

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shoulder, at the end of the epaulette, by all members of the corps under all circumstances, for as long as they were serving in a unit decorated with one of the four distinctions, forming part of the corps' uniform (General Staff – Army History Service, 2009, p. 1036).

In 1936, King Carol II, who was fond of pomp, issued Royal Decree No. 2859, introducing the wearing of a special uniform for knights of the "Mihai Viteazul" Order. This consisted of a white cloak bearing the cross of the Order made of cloth, as well as a white lambskin cap. In 1938, the Regulations for the Law on National Orders and Medals Awarded in Wartime provided the first specifications concerning the form of the decoration for each of the three classes, also modifying the 1916 insignia by introducing two crossed swords between the arms of the cross.

In November 1940, the first Regulations of the "Mihai Viteazul" Military Order of War appeared, and, by Royal Decree No. 2787 of October 1941, the form of the 1916 decoration was modified, the new model being awarded for acts of arms on the Eastern Front. While retaining the previous shape and dimensions, it bore on the obverse, placed centrally, the crowned cipher of King Ferdinand and, on the lower arm, the year "1916"; on the reverse, the crowned cipher of King Michael and, on the lower arm, the year "1941" (General Staff – Army History Service, 2009, p. 150).

5. RESULTS OF THE ANALYSIS OF DECORATIONS, 1941–1947

5.1 Officers decorated with the "Mihai Viteazul" Order, Class I (1941–1947)

Foreign officers (Duțu, Dobre and Loghin, 1999; "Royal Messages and Communiqués", 1941):

- Reich Marshal Hermann Göring – Reich Minister of Aviation and Commander-in-Chief of the German Air Force (Royal Decree No. 2,868 of 14 October 1941);
- Grand Admiral Erich Raeder – Commander-in-Chief of the German Navy
- (Kriegsmarine) (Royal Decree No. 2,868 of 14 October 1941);
- Field Marshal Walther von Brauchitsch – Commander-in-Chief of the German Army (Heer) (Royal Decree No. 2,868 of 14 October 1941);
- Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel – Commander-in-Chief of the German Army (Royal Decree No. 2,868 of 14 October 1941);

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- Marshal Carl Gustaf Emil Mannerheim – Commander-in-Chief of the Finnish Armed Forces (Royal Decree No. 3,026 of 1 November 1941);
- Marshal Feodor Tolbukhin – Commander of the 3rd Ukrainian Front (Royal Decree No. 903 of 8 May 1947);
- Colonel General of Armoured Troops Ivan Susaikov – Member of the Military Council of the 2nd Ukrainian Front and deputy commander of Army Group South, then Vice-President of the Allied Control Commission in Romania (Royal Decree No. 904 of 8 May 1947).

Romanian officers:

- Marshal Michael I of Romania – King of Romania – according to the Journal of the Council of Ministers of 8 November 1941;
- Marshal Ion Antonescu – on 21 August 1941.

5.2 Officers decorated with the "Mihai Viteazul" Order, Class II Foreign Officers:

- Generalfeldmarschall Gerd von Rundstedt – Commander of Army Group South (Royal Decree No. 2,628 of 19 September 1941);
- General of the Army, Inspector Eugen Ritter von Schobert – Commander of the 11th Army (Royal Decree No. 2,786 of 8 October 1941);
- Reich Marshal Hermann Göring – Reich Minister of Aviation and Commander-in-Chief of the German Air Force (Royal Decree No. 2,868 of 14 October 1941);
- Grand Admiral Erich Raeder – Commander-in-Chief of the German Navy (Royal Decree No. 2,868 of 14 October 1941);
- Field Marshal Walther von Brauchitsch – Commander-in-Chief of the German Army (Heer) (Royal Decree No. 2,868 of 14 October 1941);
- Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel – Commander-in-Chief of the German Army (Royal Decree No. 2,868 of 14 October 1941);
- General of the Army Franz Halder – Chief of the General Staff of the German Army (Heer) (Royal Decree No. 2,868 of 14 October 1941);

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- Marshal Carl Gustaf Emil Mannerheim – Commander-in-Chief of the Finnish Armed Forces (Royal Decree No. 3,026 of 1 November 1941);
- Marshal Wilhelm List – former Commander of the 12th Army and military commander of the German Army in south-eastern Europe (Royal Decree No. 1,896 of 24 June 1942);
- Marshal Feodor Tolbukhin – Commander of the 3rd Ukrainian Front (Royal Decree No. 903 of 8 May 1947);
- Colonel General of Armoured Troops Ivan Susaikov – Member of the Military Council of the 2nd Ukrainian Front and deputy commander of Army Group South, then Vice-President of the Allied Control Commission in Romania (Royal Decree No. 904 of 8 May 1947).

Romanian officers (Duțu, Dobre and Loghin, 1999):

- Marshal Michael I of Romania – King of Romania;
- Marshal Ion Antonescu;
- Lieutenant Colonel Dumitru Cârlan – Commander of the 9th Mountain Chasseur Battalion (Royal Decree No. 445/2.02.1942);
- Colonel M. Radu Korne – Commander of the 6th Roșiori (Lancers) Regiment, mounted (Royal Decree No. 445/2.02.1942);
- Lieutenant Colonel M. Florin Rădulescu – Commander of the 7th Mountain Chasseur Group (Royal Decree No. 445/2.02.1942);
- General of Army Corps Gheorghe Avramescu – Commander of the Mountain Corps
- (Royal Decree No. 2549/1.09.1942);
- General of Army Corps Corneliu Dragalina – Commander of the 6th Army Corps (Royal Decree No. 2549/1.09.1942);
- Major General Mihail Lascăr – Commander of the 6th Infantry Division (Royal Decree No. 3822/31.12.1942);
- Major General Ioan Dumitrache – Commander of the 2nd Mountain Division (Royal Decree No. 353/15.02.1943);

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- Lieutenant Colonel M. Ioan Pălăghiță of the 94th Infantry Regiment, posthumously (Royal Decree No. 1366/13.05.1943);
- Brigadier General Corneliu Teodorini – Commander of the 6th Cavalry Division (Royal Decree No. 3267/20.12.1943);
- Major General Gheorghe Cialâk – Commander of the Cavalry Corps (Royal Decree No. 3267/20.12.1943);
- Major General G. Leonard Mociulschi – Commander of the 3rd Mountain Division
- (Royal Decree No. 382/19.02.1944);
- General of the Army I. Petre Dumitrescu – Commander of the 3rd Army (Royal Decree No. 382/19.02.1944).

5.3 Class III decorations and characteristics by military branch (1941–1947)

- Foreign officers (29):
  - 26 German officers: General of the Army, Inspector Eugen Ritter von Schobert (22 August 1941); General of Army Corps Erik Hansen (22 August 1941); Generalfeldmarschall Gerd von Rundstedt (19 September 1941); Colonel General Alexander Löhr (19 September 1941); Lieutenant General Wilhelm Speidel (19 September 1941); Lieutenant General Kurt Pflugbeil (19 September 1941); Colonel Gerhard Bassenge (19 September 1941); General of Infantry Joachim von Kortzfleisch (19 September 1941); General of Infantry Hans von Salmuth (19 September 1941); Major General Walter Wittke (19 September 1941); Lieutenant General Hans Graf von Sponeck (19 September 1941); Lieutenant General Maximilian de Angelis (19 September 1941); Lieutenant General Franz Mattenklott (19 September 1941); Lieutenant General Karl-Adolf Hollidt (19 September 1941); Lieutenant General Otto Roettig (19 September 1941); Lieutenant General Ferdinand Neuling (19 September 1941); Reich Marshal Hermann Göring (14 October 1941); Grand Admiral Erich Raeder (14 October 1941); Field Marshal Walther von Brauchitsch (14 October 1941); Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel (14 October 1941); General of the Army Franz Halder (14 October 1941); Major General Arthur Hauffe (14 October

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1941); General of Army Corps Hans Jeschonnek (7 November 1941); Colonel Otto Wöhler (21 November 1941); General of Infantry Erich von Levinski, known as von Manstein (25 November 1941); and Marshal Wilhelm List (24 June 1942);

- One Finnish officer: Marshal Carl Gustaf Emil Mannerheim (1 November 1941);
- Two Soviet officers: Marshal Feodor Tolbukhin (8 May 1947) and Colonel General of Armoured Troops Ivan Susaikov (8 May 1947).

• Romanian officers decorated – 395, among whom we mention Colonel Gheorghe Niculescu, Commander of the 12th Dorobanți Regiment – the first unit commander to fall in battle, on 9 July 1941, during the crossing of the Prut and the attack carried out on Epureni Hill, in the village of Țiganca, in the Republic of Moldova.

Among the decorated aviator officers, the aces of Romanian fighter aviation stand out:

- Flying Captain Constantin Bâzu Cantacuzino – with more than 600 combat air missions, 60 confirmed victories and 10 probable ones. In the autumn of 1944, he was proposed for decoration with the "Mihai Viteazul" Order, Class II (but did not receive the decoration);
- Flying Lieutenant General Ioan DiCezare – with more than 500 combat missions, 16 confirmed victories and 3 probable ones;
- Flying Commander Tudor Greceanu – a fighter pilot, with 960 combat air missions, 27 confirmed victories and 11 probable ones;
- Flying Captain Alexandru Șerbănescu – with more than 600 combat missions, in which he achieved 47 confirmed aerial victories. He distinguished himself both on the Eastern Front and in the battles fought on Romanian territory against American aviation. He fell on 18 August 1944, in an unequal confrontation with several American Mustang aircraft, while defending the Ploiești oil-producing region. His words remained in memory: "I cannot understand how an enemy, no matter how great and powerful, can enter my country as if it were a village without guard dogs and lay it waste";
- Flying Lieutenant Ion Milu – distinguished himself as a fighter pilot both on the Eastern Front and during the Western Campaign, having more than 600 combat missions and 40

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confirmed victories. He became the Romanian aviator with the highest number of aerial victories achieved in a single day.

Twenty-two officers from the Royal Romanian Navy were decorated, as follows:

- Colonel Constantin Buceleanu – from the Marine Infantry;
- 21 naval officers, among whom we mention Second Lieutenant (posthumously) Lupu Dinulescu and Rear Admiral Horia Măcelariu.

The following aspect that occurred after 23 August 1944 must be mentioned: since a decoration bearing the year 1941, the year in which the war with the Soviet Union began, could not be awarded, the first officers decorated with the "Mihai Viteazul" Order for operations conducted alongside the Allies received the old 1916 insignia. By Royal Decree No. 1935 of 18 October 1944, the insignia was modified once again through the establishment of the "Mihai Viteazul" Military Order with Swords, and the old 1916 model was discontinued for acts committed after 23 August. From that date onwards, all future decorations were to be made only with the new model, which bears on the obverse the crowned cipher of King Michael and, at the centre of the reverse, the date "1944", with two crossed swords placed between the arms of the cross (Royal Decree No. 1.935/1944; General Staff – Army History Service, 2009).

5.4 Battle colours decorated with the "Mihai Viteazul" Order during the period 1941–1947

- With the "1941 model" of the Order:
  - Class II – 13 military units;
  - Class III – 73 military units.
- With the "1944 model" of the Order, Class III – 45 units and large units.

The "Mihai Viteazul" Order with Swords continued to be awarded intermittently after the war, until December 1946, with most battle colours (35) being decorated in February 1947. The decoration was attached to the colour in the form of a ribbon bearing the insignia specific to the Order. Among the representative decorated units were:

- Infantry units: the 12th "Cantemir" Infantry Regiment – "Mihai Viteazul" Military Order of War, Class III (High Decree No. 3091 of 7 November 1941);

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- Cavalry units: the 2nd "Prunaru" Roșiori Regiment – "Mihai Viteazul" Military Order of War, Class III (High Decree No. 1362 of 15 May 1945) and the "Mihai Viteazul" Military Order of War, Class III, with Swords (High Decree No. 278 of 2 February 1947).

6. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

6.1 Data analysis

The data collected during the two world wars reflect the symbolic continuity of the "Mihai Viteazul" Military Order of War, but also the circumstantial transformations related to the awarding of this distinction from a statistical and political-diplomatic perspective.

Table 1. Comparative summary of the awarding of the "Mihai Viteazul" Military

Analysis criterion	Period 1916–1929	Period 1941–1947
Legal basis and insignia model	Royal Decree No. 2968/1916 (model without swords)	Regulations of 1940; 1941 model (Eastern Campaign) and 1944 model with swords (Western Campaign)
Romanian officers decorated (total)	319 decorations	821 (of whom 263 posthumously)
Foreign officers decorated (total)	91 decorations	48 decorations
Military units (battle colours)	39 regiments	131 units and large units, of which 86 with the 1941 model and 45 with the 1944 model

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Table 2. Distribution by class of the "Mihai Viteazul" Military Order of War awarded to Romanian officers

Order class	Period 1916–1929	Period 1941–1947	Total
Class I	1	2	3
Class II	4	14	18
Class III	314	395 (1941 model)	709
Total Romanian officers decorated	319	821 (of whom 293 posthumously)	1140

Table 3. Distribution of decorations awarded to the battle colours of military units and large military units with the "Mihai Viteazul" Military Order of War

Order class and model	Period 1916–1929	Period 1941–1947	Total
Class I	0	0	0
Class II (1941 model)	0	13	13
Class III (1916 model / 1941 model)	39	73	112
Class III with Swords (1944 model)	0	45	45
Total decorated units and large units	39 (regiments)	131 (units and large units)	170

Observation concerning the structure of the units:

- During the period 1916–1929, 27 infantry regiments, 8 chasseur and mountain chasseur units, 2 border guard regiments and 2 artillery regiments were decorated;

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- During the period 1941–1947, 86 units were decorated with the 1941 model (for the Eastern Campaign), and 45 units and large units with the 1644 model with swords (for the Western Campaign).

Table 4. Political-military alliances within which foreign officers were decorated

Period	Political-military alliance	Countries of origin of decorated officers	Total decorated officers
1916-1929	Entente and associated allies	France, Great Britain, Russia, USA, Italy, Japan, Serbia	91
1941-1945	Axis Powers	Germany (26 officers) and Finland (one officer: Marshal C.G.E. Mannerheim)	27 decorations (41 certificates)
Post-war – May 1947	USSR	Soviet Union: Marshal Feodor Tolbukhin and colonel General Ivan Susaikov	2 decorations (6 certificates)

Note: Certificates are the decorations awarded for each class: Class I, Class II and Class III.

6.2 Quantitative analysis of decorations

The tables show a statistical increase of 2.5 times in the number of Romanian officers decorated during the period 1941–1947 (821), compared with the period 1916–1929 (319), as well as an increase of more than three times in the number of battle colours awarded this distinction (131 compared with 39). This difference is explained by several factors, such as the longer duration of military campaigns, the geographical scale of combat missions, the much larger number of troops mobilised, more developed military technology, and the intensity of the confrontations. By contrast, the number of foreign officers decorated fell by almost half, reflecting a change in the approach to awarding the Order to foreign officers: whereas in the first period those directly involved in operations on the Romanian front (middle- and lower-ranking officers) were decorated, in the second period the distinction had a predominantly

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protocol and political-diplomatic character, being awarded – with the exclusive exception of Colonels Gerhard Bassenge and Otto Wöhler – to the senior commanders of the allied armies (German, Finnish and, subsequently, Soviet generals, field marshals, admirals and marshals).

6.3 Morphological evolution and adaptation to the political-military context

Unlike the period 1916–1929, during which the insignia of the Order remained unchanged (the 1916 model), between 1938 and 1944 the decoration underwent three successive modifications dictated by the political and military context. The first regulatory systematisation took place in 1938, through the introduction of swords. In 1941, the model distinguished the Eastern Campaign; then, following the change of alliances on 23 August 1944, there was a temporary return to the 1916 model, because the 1941 model had become politically incompatible with the new Soviet allies. This led to the creation of the 1944 model with swords by Royal Decree No. 1935/1944.

6.4 The diplomatic dimension and the evolution of decorations by military branch

The awarding of Classes I and II to foreign officers was, in most cases, intended to strengthen Romania's foreign relations. Thus, during the period 1916–1929, commanders of the Entente were decorated: Joffre, Foch, Berthelot, Haig, Pershing and Shcherbachev; while during the period 1941–1947, the highest commanders of Nazi Germany were decorated: Keitel, Göring, Raeder, von Brauchitsch, von Rundstedt and von Manstein; Marshal Mannerheim (Supreme Commander of the Finnish Armed Forces); and, in May 1947, the Soviet commanders Tolbukhin and Susaikov.

With regard to decorations by military branch, it can be observed that in the first period the decorations were concentrated in the infantry, chasseurs, border guards and artillery. As for the second period, characterised by modern technical branches, fighter aviation stands out in particular (mentioning in this respect Constantin Cantacuzino, Alexandru Șerbănescu, Tudor Greceanu, Ioan DiCesare and Ion Milu), as does the navy (22 officers decorated).

7. DISCUSSION Historical and institutional significance

In Law No. 29/2000, the "Mihai Viteazul" Military Order was designated as the highest distinction that may be awarded for acts of arms, and it was regulated by Law No. 327/2003.

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Compared with the previous provisions, the new law introduces certain amendments, in that at present, for exceptional acts, the Order may also be awarded to officers in peacetime, where, while participating in high-risk military operations conducted by multinational forces that include Romanian units, they have demonstrated heroism and outstanding competence.

The three classes of the Order have been retained, as in the past, while a star has been added to Class I, similar to the one used for the higher grades of other orders. This is because the simple insignia attached in the form of a brooch – as it was in all previous models – was entirely lacking the "pomp" befitting the most important war decoration that can be conferred by the Romanian state, especially in view of the possible awarding of this distinction to senior foreign military commanders.

True examples of heroism and sacrifice in defence of the sacred rights of the nation, the knights of the "Mihai Viteazul" Military Order of War fully deserve not only posthumous rehabilitation, statues or the naming of streets and ships after them, but also the full esteem and gratitude of present and future generations.

8. CONCLUSIONS

8.1 Summary of institutional evolution

The "Mihai Viteazul" Military Order of War underwent a major institutional transformation during the period of the two world wars, evolving from a distinction created under emergency conditions in 1916 – as a result of the absence of war insignia and the urgent need to raise army morale after the initial defeats – to its establishment as the supreme symbol of Romanian military valour and heroism.

8.2 The dual function of the Order

The awarding of this military order sought, on the one hand, to reward the heroism of military personnel on the battlefield (including through posthumous awards and the decoration of the colours of certain military units), while, on the other hand, the awarding of the higher classes (I and II) to foreign commanders also functioned as an instrument of protocol and military diplomacy in relation to the political-military alliances of each historical period.

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8.3 Historical continuity

Although the "Mihai Viteazul" Military Order of War was removed from the decorations system after the abdication of King Michael I, and did not exist during the communist regime from 1947 to 2000, its historical and symbolic importance led to the re-establishment of the distinction through Law No. 29 of 7 April 2000 on Romania's national decorations system (Articles 1 and 2) and Law No. 327/2003, which regulates the awarding and status of the "Mihai Viteazul" Order, through which it became the highest military war decoration of the Romanian state. Thus, its regulatory framework was adapted to contemporary military realities, including international missions conducted under the aegis of international organisations such as NATO or the UN.

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