

## THE ROYAL HOUSE, SUPPORTER OF THE NATIONAL SPIRIT IN ART

Radu Ionescu<sup>1</sup>

On the 8 May 1866 Prince Carol I set foot on the Romanian land. He was the foreign lord, waited by the country for so long, after the plebiscite. The first steps of Romania's modern destiny had been made by Alexandru Ioan Cuza in a fertile but ad-interim reign, as he himself had said at the investiture and in his speech from December 1865.

An exclamation and a question formulated by Prince Carol, are defining for the exact understanding of this crucial moment - May 1866 - of our history. "From the moment I put foot on Romania's land, I became Romanian" is defining the Prince's moral statute that he never failed. Led in the country's capital, where he received the officials homage in the old Gloescu House, he asked: "Where is the Palace?" He was coming from the Sigmaringen Castle and was familiar with the Europe's imperial and royal palaces and the Golescu House was disappointing.

In these conditions begun his reign Carol I who, barely crowned, despite some inherent adversities, started to visit the country in order to establish with great accuracy, the priorities. He was a great art lover with esthetic studies attended at the University from Bonn with the famous professor Springer. Carol I understood that, enlightening the past's culture, he could lucidly dream about the future.

Visiting the country, he was saddened by the serious degradation estate of our ancient architecture monuments, in which he recognized the artistic value distilled in centuries. Târgoviște, Iași, Curtea de Argeș, Craiova, are the first town to draw his attention.

The first measure was taken in 1869, when he recommended and effectuated a roof reparation at the Curtea de Argeș Monastery. In 1879 already 24 Romanian churches had been repaired. Soon, other five, considered important despite their high deterioration degree, will be restored. Recommended by Titu Maiorescu, Lecomte de Nouÿ, disciplo of Viollet-le-Duc, will restore, according to the times conceptions, Curtea de Argeș (consecrated in 1886) and Trei Ierarhi, and Sf. Dumitru, the Bishopric

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<sup>1</sup> Radu Ionescu (1930-2005), art critic and historian, one of the most competent, serious and kind specialists that the National History Museum ever had among its close colaborators. This paper should have been presented by he during the symposium "The royal family in the Romanian culture" organized at the National Museum on the 8 November 2005. Because of his health, Radu Ionescu could not participate, but he send us the text, and we consider its publishing in *Muzeul Național*, vol. XVIII, a duty of honour to the one who's presence was extremely agreeable also in the scientific life of our museum. Unfortunately the time didn't wait for him to prepare himself, for printing, the present material, to make corrections and annotations. We are publishing it the way the author wrote it, completing it, where we considered necessary, with brefe footnotes. (note Maria Ioniță).

of Târgoviștei and Sf. Nicolae from Iași will be completely rebuild. The Antim Church from Bucharest was restored with money from the Prince's private moneybox.

The Catholic Prince proved, once more, showing so much concern to these important relics from the past, his conviction that guarding the ancient Romanian cultural fond should be encouraged.

In the very year of his enthroning was founded the Romanian Academic Society<sup>2</sup>, the future Romanian Academy. Aside the members from Wallachia and Moldavia there were also members from Transylvania, Bessarabia, Basarabia, Bucovina and Macedonia who transformed the Academy into the representative of all the Romanians inside or outside the country. The main objective of the Academy was The Romanian Language Dictionary. On Prince's expense, the Academy will begin to publish *Etymologicum Magnum Romaniae*. Carol I, as honorary president of the Academy (like all the future sovereigns – n.a.), often participated at its meetings watched over it and left, by testament, an important pledge.

In His times, aside some important official buildings, build by foreign architects, (the Post, the Loan Bank, the Athenaeum etc.), the autochthonous architecture was marked by Mincu's personality. His work defines a modern style, inspired by our ancient buildings. The Romanian pavilion from the Parisian International Exposition, in 1889, and the building of the Central Girls School, are defining for this concept's success.

In the spirit of the same interest to preserve the popular creation and habits, the Romanian schools from Greece or Macedonia, generously subsidized, had the purpose to guard untouched the Romanian spirituality flame. Was it not a sign of admiration and encouraging of the popular creation the wedding gift made by the Prince to his wife? It was represented by national costumes. Few years later two popular rugs will leave to Germany as a gift offered by the Sovereign to the heir Prince.

In order to relieve the state's finances from the protocol and the royal family's expenses, it received, in administration only, unprofitable lots from the state domain. Shortly after that, being well exploited, not only that they became profitable, but became real cultural centers, so useful for the Romanian State. Schools, workshops for waving, pottery, wood sculpture, theatre and folkloric spectacle teams, were encouraging the preservation and perpetuation of the national traditions and creations. The projects for rustic houses, in traditional style, offered by the Administration of the Royal Domains, were trying to protect the Romanian village from the so unsuitable "import" of town architectural models. In the Crown Domain's activity we can mention the program of building the village museums with popular art objects, ancient icons, and, where it was the case, with local archaeological or mineralogical pieces. Interesting is also the circular letter which asked the Domains

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<sup>2</sup> Prince Carol of Hohenzollern Sigmaringen became ruler of Romania in May 1866. At 1/13 August 1867, changing the name of the Romanian Literary Society, came into being the Romanian Academic Society. Its first president was elected Ion Heliade Rădulescu, from 1867 until 1870 (note Maria Ioniță).

villagers to collect proverbs and sayings for Zane's anthology. In the same time conferences about the Romanian people's history or culture were educating the young from the villages. Until 1900, on these domains has been build village surgeries, workshops and agricultural, zootechnical, forest or piscicultural, education centers, primary schools, and others will add after the beginning of the century.

After the University's inauguration – in December 1869<sup>3</sup>, where there was also the Belle-Arte School, Carol founded *The Royal University Foundations*, endowed with a huge library for those times, which gave the students the chance to study in the country<sup>4</sup>. Not far away, also on the Victoria Street, the Academy's Library gathered laic and religious books, manuscripts and documents, in order to protect them and to give the youth the possibility to find the past's creations. The King knew his country very well and was aware of the popular creation's beauty and importance. The traditional Romanian domestic industry had a real success at the international expositions, starting with the one organized in Paris in 1868<sup>5</sup>, then in Viena etc., and especially the National Exposition from 1906. The King decided to create *The Museum of National Art* whose location, build later by the architect Ghica-Budești, shall be an example of Romanian style architecture<sup>6</sup>.

Great art lover, King Carol gathered an important collection, especially of foreign paintings. This didn't stop him to contact and encourage Romanian artists. Grigorescu, Aman, Szathmari, Mirea, Obedeanu were developed relationships with the King and the royal collections from Peleş, accessible even in those times for visitors, were without any doubt a good school for our painters.

In 1869 arrived in the country Princess of Wied, Prince Carol's wife. She didn't known much about her new country, but she had seen the beauty of our popular costumes, a wedding gift from her future husband. Fascinated by their skills, Princess, a poet and an artist, will often wear them at the Court, drawing attention to this field of the popular creation. As an answer of this admiration was

<sup>3</sup> The official inauguration of the University took place at 14/ 26 December 1869, after closing the construction works developed between 1857 and 1869, according to the plans made by the Romanian architect Alexandru Orăscu (note Maria Ioniță).

<sup>4</sup> It is possible that the author might have refed to the foundation of the Carol I University Foundation, created and financed by the King at 3/ 15 May 1891, with the occasion of the anniversary of 25 years of reign. It was mend to be "settlement for the good of all university youth from the faculties all over the country, whose purpose will be to give the students a meeting place, endowed with an always open library, where they can satisfy their love for study" (note Maria Ioniță).

<sup>5</sup> The first international exposition at which Romanian participated after the arrival of Carol I is that at Paris, organized in 1867. Here, for the first time, our country exposed in a pavilion which was separate from the Turkish one, the suzerain power, Romania not being yet independente. (note Maria Ioniță).

<sup>6</sup> During the Communist regime the building, made by the architect N. Ghica-Budești, whose construction lasted from 1912 until 1938, housed the Romanian Communist Party History Museum. Today it is fulfilling, in a way, the purpose predicted by Carol I, and it is housing the Romanian Peasant Museum. (note Maria Ioniță).

founded the “Furnica” association, mastered by the Princess, then by Queen Elisabeth, whose purpose was to encourage the domestic industry. Her example was to be followed by many ladies from the high class and at their manors there were workshops of popular weaving and embroidery. In Court it soon became a glory title to wear a popular costume and the example was followed in the monasteries, where the nuns were weaving carpets, often rewarded at expositions.

The Princess, then Queen Elisabeth, begun to write at the Vasile Alecsandri's insinences. The poet, so appreciated by the King and Queen, was often in their presence. The Queen, great admirer of the arts she herself was practicing, had always the door opened for the writers, poets, painters or musicians. Aman, Grigorescu, Odobescu, Dinicu, Aurelia Cionca, Elena Văcărescu, were familiar with her saloon, and George Enescu begun his career under Queen's protection. A touching proof is the stories volume published at Leipzig, “În luncă”, dedicated by the Queen “to the spiritual child”<sup>7</sup>.

As a writer, she published a play, “Meşterul Manole”, and a collection of Romanian popular tales, also translated in German. To present abroad the Romanian creations, she published a poetry collection from which, of course, didn't miss Eminescu.

During the building of Peleş, at the Queen's suggestions, the reading parlour's stained glass windows represented Romanian popular legends inspired from the Queen's writings and from other poets and prose writers.

This admiration for the popular art made the Queen to approach with even more love and compassion to the wounded soldiers in the 1877 war. For her devotion she got the surname of *Mother of the Wounded*. After the war in 1877 the country gained its independence. The soldier's heroism, most of them peasants, contributed at the appearance of an admiration current for all it mend land and country life. So we can explain the rising interest to the popular art and the fashion of the peasant costumes wore at Court and at balls. In the same spirit frames Grigorescu's paintings, who's thematic leads to the adoration of the peasant's diligence, taste and creative inventiveness. Meanwhile, thanks to Queen Elisabeth - – Carmen Sylva –, appeared, in Bucharest or Sinaia, an intense artistic life that will have great useful consequences on the entire Romanian society.

Under the Queen patronage, G. D. Chiriac will found Carmen Chore, whose repertory was composed of popular music, arrangements and compositions in popular style. Having a high class, Carmen Chore will make famous the popular music, preserving authentic forms, and protecting them of degradation or oblivion.

In 1892 the heir Prince Ferdinand married the beautiful Princess Maria of Edinburg. At the wedding she wore a national costume given by Carmen Sylva, her first contact with the Romanian popular art. Niece of Queen Victoria and of the Tsar, the young Princess brought the memory of the tales and legends from her native Scotland, the Russian Court glamour, Malta's the generous nature, where she

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<sup>7</sup> Queen Elisabeth used to call George Enescu “my spiritual child”.

spend all her childhood, the unforgettable impression left by the sermons from Petersburg's orthodox churches. She had nothing in common with the Protestant spirit.

Carol was disappointed by Her Highness's modesty. Princess Maria was disappointed too by the cold, impersonal solemnity of the German style in which her apartments had been arranged. Very disillusioned, the future queen will note in her memories: "[...] rich, dark, pompous, unfitted for daily living, all windows and mobile doors"<sup>8</sup>. There was so much difference between this environment and the simple one at Bran, with whitewashing rooms dominated by big fireplaces inspired after the peasant ones, with steps, niches and tile necklaces and in the other corners big pottery vases with flowers. Yellow-orange bed covers and popular textures will create to the Queen in national costume a pompous environment by its simplicity. But due to her strong personality, it is the same atmosphere we find in official circumstances in the sumptuous interiors in which the Byzantine memories will meet the Romanian traditional elements.

Her only refuge from the rigorous protocol imposed by King Carol I were the visits to the country, monasteries, where the popular costumes and the grave pomp of the religious services impressed her. Slowly, from these travels, from the tales and legends told by Carmen Sylva, from the past's memory and the Celtic art that had marked Scotland will rise a new style that will bear the strong fingerprint of Queen Maria. In the same time in Europe was appearing a new style, *Art Nouveau*, which she will immediately like. Crystallized in France, at Nancy, a town with a thistle as symbol – similar with the one from the Scotland emblem – this plant appeared more and more often in the Queen's drawings and paintings and embellished the walls of a room from Pelișor Castle.

Paintress, furniture creator and decorator, Maria, still far from the politics great preoccupations, impressed by what she had seen in the country, transformed the Cotroceni Palace. Guided by the Princess, the architect Grigore Cerchez added and exterior staircase and a tower (copied after the one at Hurez Monastery)<sup>9</sup>. The dining hall was arranged in Neo-Romanian style, inspired by the churchly furniture. A parlor was arranged in the same style and the frame of the door that led to the library was copied after the church Colțea portal. Slowly, among the paintings from King Carol's collection appeared paintings made by Romanian painters, bought by the Queen from expositions or even from their studios. Contrary to the protocol, the Queen accepted the Artistic Youth Society patronage and exposed, along with members of the society, paintings, watercolours, or neo-Romanian furniture projects. She also encouraged Her daughters, Ileana and Elisabeth, and Her sister, the Great Duchess of Hessa, to expose too. In other expositions also Her works could be seen and the money obtained after their acquisition got into the painters helping fund.

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<sup>8</sup> Maria, Regina României, *Povestea vieții mele*, vol. II, București, [1935], p. 26 (note Maria Ioniță).

<sup>9</sup> Queen Maria loved very much the Horezu Monastery, expressing, one time, the wish to be buried there (note Maria Ioniță).

She often wore the national costume, she took care of societies for the promotion of popular art („Furnica”, „Țesătoarea”), She draw models for the furniture of His Highness residences. In this way the Queen created a sympathy and interest current towards this lode of the Romanian art. From imitation spirit or esthetical convictions, the taste for these creations and for Romanian pottery begun to predominate in the Romanian interiors.

A spirit of such great intellectual mobility, like that of Queen Maria, could not stop to the world of the Romanian traditional creation. “The Queen’s Nest”<sup>10</sup>, build in the Park around Peleş Castle, was decorated with motifs of Indian inspiration. The Pelișor Castle remained until today one of the creations deeply marked by de *Art Nouveau*, and by Celtic or Norwegian elements. Bran Castle had rustic interiors inspired from the Ancient Kingdom and from Transylvania. The Castle from Balciș was inspired by eastern Mediteranean architecture and the modest country houses, where She often took refuge in the difficult war days were real rustic houses. Between the Byzantine splendor and the simplicity of the hovel build in Cotroceni Palace courtyard, Queen Maria had the same offhandedness, Her royal stature remaining always the same.

Following the model offered by Queen Elisabeth during the Independence War, when She had a great spiritual connection with the wounded soldiers She took care of, Queen Maria rightfully got, during the Union War, the name of *Queen Mother*. Her sympathy for these soldiers who were suffering for the country was amplified by the admiration for them and for their skill to build wonderful houses, carve wood or model clay, in times of peace.

Like Her predecessor, Carmen Sylva, Queen Maria wrote with great talent, novels, tales, short stories, some of them of Romanian inspiration. Her memories, diary and Confessions (*Casele mele de vis*) are worm appeals to the love for the country and for the Romanian people creations.

Along with Her politic lucidity, Her preoccupation the national art, manifested in the country and abroad, contributed enormously to our art and spirituality reviviscence and to their presentation abroad.

Discreet, shy, King Ferdinand, outside his vast and strong culture, was concerned mainly about politic affairs. Still, under His reign and protection, were created *Ferdinand Cultural Foundations*. *The Romanian Academy* was not only protected by the King, but also sponsored from His private moneybox. There were also founded *Transylvania’s Ethnographical Museum*, *the University of Dacia Superior*, the one from Cernăuți, *Filarmonica from București* and, under royal protectorate, were organized numerous and successful Romanian art expositions abroad, in the most important cultural centers. We can say that the age of King Ferdinand and Queen Maria was, mostly thanks to Her, the age of a large Romanian culture opening to Occident.

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<sup>10</sup> The author is speaking about “the Princess Nest”, build like a suspended hut between seven firs from the Park around Peleş Castle and which, unfortunately, dissapeared sweeped away by a strong storm, before World War One, around 1915 (note Maria Ioniță).

After the four years of minority of King Mihai, King Carol II, due to His great cultural vocation, gained the name of the Voivode of Culture. Even the most severe judges of His politics – often the ominous fruit of an unhappy European conjecture – can't deny His merits. The custom to wear at some occasions the national costume was so strong in Court, that sometimes even Queen Helen used to wear it. The pictures taken at Sinaia immediately after marriage are illustrative. *Prince Carol Cultural Foundations*, then *The Union of the Royal Cultural Foundations* had as purpose the cultural evolution of the villages. Houses of culture, magazines, conferences cycles wanted to preserve and continue the local traditions. The founding of the *Village Museum*, and the field research campaigns imposed our country as a model. The encouraging of writers, publishing their works at the Royal Foundations, the National Prizes, inviting the most important painters and sculptors to decorate the *Royal Palace* from Bucharest are only some of the numerous merits of this insufficiently known monarch. In His times appeared a new vision in the Romanian architectural style, a modern style that undertook autochthonous traditional elements. Some good examples are the Romanian pavilions at the international expositions in Paris and New York or those at *Luna Bucureștilor*. The publishing of a new translation of the *Bible* defined a contemporary Romanian language that brought to life words from the ancient Romanian speech and the publishing of the *Romania's Encyclopedia* founded a synthesis of the Romanian history, culture and science.

The last volume, appeared, despite the hard years of war, under the rule of M. S. King Mihai I, the founder of *The Royal Cultural Foundations King Mihai I* (where, in 1941, appeared the greatest work over the Romanian literature, *the History of Literature* by George Călinescu – n.a.), which, like all the other Romanian culture institutions, begun, after 1947, a rapid degradation imposed by the Communist regime.

King Mihai continued the tradition of His predecessors, despite the hard times and the few years of reign, despotic interrupted. His name is connected with some churches [founded by Him] from which we mention only the Cathedral from Timișoara and that from Bălți.

## CASA REGALĂ, SUSȚINĂTOAREA SPIRITULUI NAȚIONAL ÎN ARTĂ

- Rezumat -

În decembrie 2005 ne-a părăsit unul din cei mai agreabili și prețioși colaboratori ai Muzeului Național de Istorie a României, sfătuitor și furnizor de date și relații mai ales din domeniul vieții și istoriei familiei regale a României, cunoscutul și avizatul critic și istoric de artă Radu Ionescu (1930-2005). Domnia sa își anunțase participarea la simpozionul organizat în cadrul Muzeului Național pe 8 noiembrie 2005 pe tema „Familia regală în cultura românească”, cu intervenția

**Casa regală, susținătoarea spiritului național în artă.** Starea sănătății sale neîngăduindu-i să fie prezent la manifestarea menționată, ne-a trimis, spre a fi prezentat participanților la simpozion, textul intervenției cu titlul de mai sus. Din păcate timpul n-a mai avut răbdare pentru a-i îngădui să pregătească, personal, pentru tipar, materialul căruia să-i aducă, după caz, corecturile sau adăugirile de care ar fi avut nevoie. Am socotit că este o datorie de onoare să îl publicăm în „Muzeul Național”, vol. XVIII, așa cum l-a conceput autorul, completându-l, acolo unde s-a simțit nevoia, cu succinte note de subsol (de pregătirea pentru tipar a articolului s-a ocupat doamna Maria-Magdalena Ioniță, cercetător principal I, la Muzeul Național de Istorie a României).

Autorul face o pertinentă trecere în revistă a meritelor pe care le-a avut fiecare dintre membrii familiei regale în varii domenii ale artei, fie că este vorba de arhitectură, literatură, artă plastică și decorativă sau păstrarea, conservarea și perpetuarea tradițiilor artei populare, naționale a românilor.

Bineînțeles că începutul îl face marcând rolul întemeietorului dinastiei, Principele, apoi Regele Carol I, care, după venirea pe tronul României și dorind, după propria-i declarație să se identifice cu poporul ale cărui destine îi fuseseră încredințate a înțeles că „punând în lumină cultura trecutului, putea visa lucid la viitor”. Pe această linie se înscriu eforturile și inițiativele sale de a restaura sau chiar de a reconstrui, monumente istorice, mai ales religioase, precum biserica mănăstirii Curtea de Argeș, Biserica Trei Ierarhi, Biserica Sf. Dumitru, Episcopia Târgoviștei, Biserica Sf. Nicolae Domnesc din Iași, uneori folosind în acest scop bani din caseta personală, cum se întâmplă în cazul Bisericii Antim din București. În ceea ce privește arhitectura laică, pe lângă aducerea unor arhitecți francezi, germani, italien sau elvețieni care au proiectat clădiri ce definesc și astăzi Bucureștii, ca și alte localități din țară – Craiova, Iași, Constanța – , a încurajat arhitecții români din școala lui Ion Mincu, promotori ai stilului neoromânesc. Carol I a fost inițiatorul monumentalei lucrări *Etymologicum Magnum Romaniae* încredințată lui Bogdan Petriceicu Hașdeu și apărută sub egida Academiei Române de a cărei înființare s-a preocupat, de asemenea. Nu este neglijată nici contribuția lui Carol I în promovarea stilului tradițional, popular, în artă, lucru evident în mod special pe Domeniile Coroanei prin înființarea unor ateliere de țesătorie, de ceramică, sculptură în lemn, echipe de teatru și dansuri folclorice, încurajarea construirii unor locuințe la sate, în stil tradițional. Nu sunt uitate alte două mari realizări culturale ale lui „Carol der Weise” (Carol cel Înțelept – n.n.), anume *Fundația Universitară Carol I* și proiectarea și începerea construirii *Muzeului de Artă Națională* (astăzi Muzeul Țăranului Român- n.n.). Contribuția Reginei Elisabeta la încurajarea artei naționale românești și protejarea oamenilor români de cultură, fie că este vorba de scriitori, muzicieni sau pictori, nu s-a situat mai prejos decât cea a soțului ei. Pe rând George Enescu, Elena Văcărescu, Th. Aman, Nicolae Grigorescu, Alexandru Odobescu, Mihai Eminescu și mulți alții s-au bucurat de protecția și sprijinul ei. Ea însăși autoare de poezie și proză sub



pseudonimul literar Carmen Sylva, a făcut numeroase traduceri în limba germană din Vasile Alecsandri, George Coșbuc și Mihai Eminescu. A încurajat arta populară tradițională românească instituind la curte și, prin imitație, și în înalta societate de la noi, moda purtării costumului popular femeiesc, iar pentru încurajarea industriei casnice a înființat Societatea „Furnica”, așa cum, pentru promovarea muzicii corale și folclorului autentic a patronat înființarea corului „Carmen”.

Epoca domniei Regelui Ferdinand și a Reginei Maria a fost epoca deschiderii culturii românești către Occident, mai ales datorită acestuia din urmă. Regelui Ferdinand, spirit cultivat, enciclopedic și luminat i se datorează înființarea *Fundațiilor Culturale Ferdinand*, a *Muzeului Etnografic al Transilvaniei*, *Universității Daciei Superioare* și a *Filarmonicii din București*, dar și finanțarea din caseta personală a unor proiecte ale Academiei Române. În cea ce o privește pe Regina Maria autorul insistă asupra înclinațiilor sale artistice în domeniul literaturii, a artei plastice, mai ales a picturii, dar și în arta decorativă, ea fiind adepta curentului Art Nouveau și dovedindu-se o bună creatoare de mobilă, dar și o excelentă decoratoare.

Regele Carol al II-lea a fost numit, pe bună dreptate, Voievodul Culturii, de numele lui fiind legate existența *Fundației Culturale Principele Carol*, a *Uniunii Fundațiilor Culturale Regale*, organizarea și inaugurarea *Muzeului Satului*, inițierea *Lunii Bucureștilor*, dar și apariția unei noi traduceri a *Bibliei* și a unei bune părți din *Enciclopedia României*. Ultimul volum al acesteia a apărut în timpul scurtei și încercatei domnii a Regelui Mihai I și tot atunci, la *Fundația Culturală Regală Regele Mihai I* apărea monumentală lucrare a lui George Călinescu, *Istoria Literaturii Române*.