

## THE DEATH OF QUEEN MARY AS REPORTED IN THE CONTEMPORARY NEWSPAPERS

### DESPRE MOARTEA REGINEI MARIA ÎN PRESA CONTEMPORANĂ

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#### Abstract

Queen Mary was one of the most beloved of the Romanian queens. Although she was not born in Romania, she charmed everyone with her beauty, bravery and the charity of her heart. Hence her death, in 1938 caused great sadness. Newspapers, writers, politicians, and royalty, both foreign and domestic all sent their sympathies to the royal family.

**Keys words:** Queen, remember, newspapers, royalty.

In 1893 Maria Saxa Goburg Gotha the future Queen of the country above Danube arrived in Romania. Originally a British Princess she won the love of the Romanian people with her charm and beauty.

Unfortunately, after 1930 she lost the favor of her son, Carol the II - and retired from the public life, traveling between two places very dear to her heart, Bran and Balcic. In 1932, at 20:08 Eugeniu Arthur Buhman, the manager of the private Secretariat of the king Carol the II, wrote on his journal that "The Queen Mary received the advice to have treatment at Karlsbad. She has troubles with her liver. I am very surprised about it because she always ate sensibly". At the beginning of 1938, German newspapers had already spread the news that the Queen was unwell. The diagnosis was hepatic cirrhosis. In the spring of 1938 Mary went to the sanatorium at Merano, in northern Italy, near to Dresda.

All the treatments failed to have any beneficial effect so The Queen returned to Romania, to Peleş castle. Here her health continued to deteriorate. The press releases from 18 July gave alarming news, in press release no 79, the minister of the Royal House informed after the medical check at 11:00, at the Pelișor castle, the doctors said: "The health of Her Majesty, Queen Mary has become very serious. Today there was a new and heavy blood loss. Her Majesty is suffering from heavy bleeding. The pulse is 120, the respiration 28<sup>1</sup>. A few hours later the Minister of

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<sup>1</sup> "Universul Literar", 19 July 1938. The document collection "Regina Maria", The National Military Museum.

the Royal House stated “The health of the Queen Mary is getting worse. The bleeding continues. She is getting weaker. The pulse is 140, the respirations 36”<sup>2</sup>. The new press release of the Royal House announced the death of the Queen Mary “Her Majesty, Queen Mary died today, 18 July 1938, 17:38 at Pelișor castle. In her presence were: His Majesty The King, Her Royal Highness the Princess Elena and His Royal Highness Mihai Lord of Alba Iulia. The Patriarch and the premier of Romania Miron, Dr Störmer, Dr Hortolomei, Mr Lascăr and Dr Iliescu, were also in attendance, 18 July 1938”<sup>3</sup>.

The same day the newspapers announced the funeral ceremony “From High Command the funeral schedule was decided like this. In 19 July, 11:00 the body of Queen Mary will be taken to Peleş castle. The citizens can view the Royal casket, between 14:00 and 19:00 and on 20 July, from 10:00 till 19:00. On 21 July, the body of Queen Mary will be transported by royal train to Cotroceni palace, Bucharest. On 24<sup>th</sup> July 08:00, the convoy will proceed from Cotroceni palace Royal Trains Station, where a royal train will go to Curtea de Argeș.

The burial will be in the afternoon of the same day. The detailed schedule will be publish later. In sign of respect to the Queen, The Royal Court will be in mourning for the next 6 months.

After that, the condolence letters arrived. The cabinet members sent to the King the following telegram: With deep sorrow, in front of the coffin where your glorious Mother rests, we send you, as a cold comfort, the expression of our dutiful loyalty”<sup>4</sup>.

The telegram was signed by: Miron Cristea - the Premier, G. Ionescu-Sisești - the Secretary of Agriculture, Victor Iamandi - the Secretary of Justice, Mircea Cancicov - the Chancellor of Exchequer, Armand Călinescu - the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, the Bishop N. Colan- the Secretary of Culture and Arts and Mihail Ralea - the Secretary of Work etc.

It is well known the mutual attachment between Queen Mary and the Romanian army. So is not surprising that the Division General Gheorghe Argeșeanu, the Secretary of Defense, sent to the King Carol the telegram “The Army, is in deep sorrow because of the lost of the good Queen, of “The Wounded Mother”, how she was named during the big war, when everybody admired her for her bravery and her concern for the ones who were in pain, ask your Majesty to willing receive from all the soldiers the assurance that they share your deepest sorrows and they will always remember, with great love, the personality of the great Queen”<sup>5</sup>.

The news of the Queen’s passing determined reactions abroad, the ambassadors of many countries giving their condolences. The Secretary of State for Foreign

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem.*

Affairs of United States of America, sent to the Nicolae Petrescu-Comnen, the Secretary of Foreign Affairs of Romania the next telegram: "Excellency, my government asked me to express the terrible sorrow that we all feel at the said news of the death of Queen Mary. I also wish to pass on my personal condolence for this said event"<sup>6</sup>. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Greece, Italy, Egypt, Poland and France expressed their sorrow for the great lost to the Romanian dynasty as did the Mayors of Prague, Belgrade, Athens, Verdun sur Meuse.

The last wish of the Queen Mary was related in the news papers: "The last wish of Her Majesty Queen Mary was to receive red flowers after her death. Her catafalque and coffin were covered with masses of flowers. Most distinguished by their beauty were the wreaths of gladiolus and carnations, brought by the government members. Thus the last wish of Queen Mary came true"<sup>7</sup>.

The Premier, Miron Cristea and the members of government were at Peleş, with the Queen's body. There, in the front of the Royal family Miron Cristea gave the next speech, "The government and all the country address, with a feeling of deep loyalty, the occasion of the passing to immortality of your beloved Mother and the beloved Grandmother of the Great Lord Mihai. We pray to God to make you stronger, physically and mentally, so you could bear easier this great pain, who touch the hearts of sons when they lost the dearest being on Earth: the mother!"<sup>8</sup>. Apart from members of government at Peleş a lot of visitors came also, the fact proving again the Queens popularity "The crowd waiting since the morning, on the path around the castle, so that they could bring a last homage to the body of the Queen. At 2 o'clock the cordons of custodians from the castle bridge open and the crowd ascended the main path to the Peleş castle, a marvel of architecture and of decorative art. People glided past, in an imposing silence. To the honour lobby, up, on wood stairs with grace-notes, in the main lobby, whose walls dressed in woods, shows biblique scenes.

The pilgrims take a bow in front of the coffin, wishing to stay longer in this religious atmosphere, next to the face of their beloved Queen. But the array coming from behind force them onward to the lateral door, to pass the arms room and leave on the opposite side of the castle. On the evening the numbers of pilgrims grew. Trains and cars delivered hundreds of people to the castle. The peasants, in their traditional costumes coming from Breaza and Comarnic by train to bring the last greeting to the august dead. The pilgrimage lasted late into the evening and continue in the next day"<sup>9</sup>.

At the request of the King Carol the II, the Queen was dressed for the last trip, with a white dress, the fact confirmed by the news paper "Universul Literar",

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>9</sup> *Idem*, 20 July 1938, The document collection "Regina Maria", The National Military Museum.

where it was written: "Dressed up in white, the great Queen with her hands crossed on her chest, keeping in her fine fingers a red lily and above her the icon of the Saint Virgin Mary. The pallour of death did not burst her classic beauty. Her face seems to sleep in the light, between immense wreath of gladiolus and violas. In the four corners of her catafalque, officers of each army service, stand over by relieve. During the lunch gentlewomen stand over"<sup>10</sup>.

As I wrote earlier, the Queen was very popular with the Romanian Army and deservedly: she was the honorary commander of the Regiment 4 Roşiori and was personally involved in the care of the wounded during Second World War. This fact was confirmed by the Gheorghe Argeşeanu, in the address to the army from 19 July 1938, „Officers, under-officers, corporals and soldiers, Our Great Queen, the one who used to animate us, with her courage and presence in the front lines, the One who used to ride in the front of cavalry, the One who used to come in the middle of the choleric with no fear, the One who used to console and attend the wounded, with a big devotion, being named, The Mother of the wounded, left to eternity, where the Great King Ferdinand and his heroes waiting for her. In this moment of big pain of our beloved King, we can comfort him only taking part by all our heart his pain, show him the love we have for him and keeping forever the memory of our good Queen. May she rest in peace!”<sup>11</sup>.

Some of the European courts decided to do more than send condolences to King Carol the II. The Romanian Legation from Stockholm informed, by telegraph, the Minister of Foreign Affairs that as follow the death of Queen Mary, the Swedish court has started a mourning for three months.

After Peleş the Queens body was moved at Cotroceni palace. The funeral train arrived at Cotroceni palace at 12 o'clock, being welcomed with 75 canon shots.

With the Whole country was in mourning, the news papers published special measures like “All the institutions, public or private, the shops and markets will be closed. There will be no exceptions. Everybody will go into mourning. It is not obligatory to wear: dress coat, black gloves and decorations. The judiciary will wear robes. The ladies taking part at the ceremony will go into great mourning with voila de crêpe”<sup>12</sup>.

Meanwhile, the royal family opened the will of Queen Mary, which was written in 29 June 1933. In it she requested that her heart to be placed in an urn at the chapel of the Balcic palace. Eugeniu Arthur Buhman said that: “The valuable jewellery were distribute by the Queen when she was still alive. She left to the Mircea Society 500000 lei. The Queens maids Elisa Karl, Ana Thiele and Elena Kopkow received 50.000 lei, 40.000 lei and 60.000 lei respectively. The prince Nicolae received two Grigorescu paintings and covers which Queen Mary had from her family. And most of the dresses were distributed to the princesses. At the

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*.

dividing of the different objects a big fight started between the heirs. A spectator at the scene said about it "Like the gypsy!" I have been told that the Habsburg archduke took so many things in his pockets that a lot of it dropped on the floor, being collected by the Elena Kopkow"<sup>13</sup>.

A month after the Queen's death, the newspaper "România Ilustrată" published a special edition dedicated to the memory of Queen Mary. There were enumerated here all the virtues that made Queen Mary so special for the Romanian people. One of the episodes told here mentioned the courage that the Queen inspired to her people during the First World War and especially to the Regiment 4 Roșiori "She is the first soldier. She got up and went to encourage the Regiment. Here there is Flămânda și Robănești, the first painful fight of the Regiment 4 Roșiori. Robanesti, 10 November 1916, will remain legendary by the heroic and medieval attack, sustained by the cavalier of the Queen, Davidoglu, the commander of the Regiment, who, caught by the explosion of a shell losing his horse but continued the attack by foot, crossing the lawn, under enemy fire"<sup>14</sup>. In the same edition of the newspaper, it described the tragedy that marked the Queen's life "...The death of her baby made the Queen start a new and noble duty: taking care of the babies! One night her beloved baby appeared in her dream and told her to go between the children who were suffering from hunger, who have no clothes, no home, no parents <<Build them a home, dear mother! Homes where they can have food, where they can be happy and above each house put the name of your baby!>><sup>15</sup>. So, following the efforts of the Queen, Principele Mircea society has born and opened branches across the country, with dispensaries, hospitals etc.

Hans Kelling, a contemporary journalist, told about the love which the Queen had for the peasants "I love the Romanian people and I feel for all their needs, even I cannot help them with everything, as I wish I could! I think about them a lot, they have been suffering for hundreds of years, they are so connected to nature that you get an idea about their character! Their houses are so small that only a quiet happiness would fit in it, their rustic bridges are so fragile that you have the feeling that only happiness could cross over it. There is no modest and patient a man than the Romanian peasant!" confessed the Queen to the journalist<sup>16</sup>.

Nicolae Iorga used to say about the love the Queen had for the Romanian people "The frequent travels to Ardeal, Bucovina and Basarabia showed her how deep her heart is connected with the heart of the people. The royalty of her bravery and her compassion to the people made her wear forever an invisible crown, which was more precious than all the jewellery in the world"<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> Eugeniu Arthur Buhman, *Patru decenii în serviciul Casei regale a României, memorii 1898-1940*, 2006, Bucharest, p. 441.

<sup>14</sup> "România Ilustrată", 27 August 1938, The document collection "Regina Maria", The National Military Museum.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*.

Elena Văcărescu, one of the Queen's closest friends, wrote in July 1938 "Tonight, from my Parisian balcony, I listen to the murmur of the stars. I am thinking about the Carpathian shepherds who said, when they see a falling star <<A Queen died!>> and indeed a Queen left but she was ours and she will be immortal in Romanian hearts!"<sup>18</sup>.

Cezar Petrescu wrote also that "by a mystical heavenly will Queen Mary was sent to us. When the Heavens took her back, the legend already existed: the time and the death have nothing more to bring to the aura that deluged her white face...Her presence is so alive and hallucinatory that it is hard to believe that with a gravestone pressing on her chest and her heart forever held in an urn that not just once we put the question <<When will she return?>>. Like she had left for a few days somewhere at Balcic or Bran". "Let's just say that she left from us. 40 days ago we believed it. After 40 days, against the laws of life and death, the time proved that she is still among us, walking with us with unheard steps, being everywhere she was. This page is dedicated to this presence!"<sup>19</sup>.

The echo of the Queens death continued for the next few years. In 1941 a poet, Alex Șcepkin wrote a poem named "At the death of Queen Mary!"<sup>20</sup>. One year later, a journalist Traian Chelariu, published an article in the news paper "Adevărul" where he remembered the Queen's love for the Romanian army. "It has been three years since the death of the most beloved Queen, Mary of Romania. She encouraged us when there was despair everywhere. Her faith kept her strong when the dark and heavy doubts were among us...And now, when a lot of heroes are dying on the country's battlefields, it is ought to bring her an homage more then ever, because she was the one who knew best to comfort all the pain. She was "The Mother of the wounded!"<sup>21</sup>.

Two years later Cella Delavrancea wrote in an article about the memory the queen left behind named 'The portrait of a soul' "Three years have passed since the beginning of the emptiness left behind by the Queen Mary death. All meanness disappeared in her presence, because she was perfect, you have faith in perfection, you were optimistic because she was healthy and she knew to enjoy every moment of life"<sup>22</sup>.

The Princess and then Queen Mary received great appreciation from her contemporaries during and after her life. Indifferent to the ideological and political conflicts writers, journalist and politicians had deep admiration for the one who succeeded to win the heart of the Romanian people like nobody before.

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>20</sup> "Cuget Clar", nov. 12, 1940, The document collection "Regina Maria", The National Military Museum.

<sup>21</sup> "Universul Literar", 19 July 1941.

<sup>22</sup> "Curentul", 19 July 1943.