

Keith HITCHINS, *Ion I. C. Brătianu: Romania* (London: Haus Histories, 2011), XIII + 219 pp.

This volume is part of a series dealing with „Makers of the Modern World: The Peace Conferences of 1919–23 and Their Aftermath”, designed to present a comprehensive look at the peace conferences using a biographical approach. The choice for Romania was easy: Ion I. C. „Ionel” Brătianu (1864–1927) was the chief Romanian negotiator at the Paris Peace Conference, was head of Romanian’s leading political party, the National Liberal Party, several times Prime Minister, and had been the man primarily responsible for Romania’s participation and conduct in World War I. The choice of author for this volume was easy as well: Keith Hitchins probably knows more about Romanian history in the 19th and 20th centuries than anyone. His two volume history, *The Romanians, 1774–1866* (1996) and *Romania, 1866–1947* (1994), will be the standard works for a long time to come, and provide the basis and context for this welcome treatment of one of the most significant Romanian leaders of the 20th century.

The book is organized into three sections: 1) five chapters dealing with Brătianu’s background and political activities from 1895 to 1918; 2) two chapters on his activity at the Paris Peace Conference and its impact on Romanian history between 1919–1927; and 3) a brief concluding chapter on his legacy and Romania between 1927–1944. There is also a lengthy comparative chronology of some forty pages and a note on further reading.

The author rightly stresses the continuity between Ionel Brătianu’s career and ideas and those of his father, Ion C. Brătianu (1821–1891), one of the founders of the Romanian liberal tradition, himself several times prime minister, a leading nationalist, and a central figure in most of the key events and issues that were involved in Romanian development in his lifetime. Prof. Hitchins singles out modernization/Westernization, agrarian reform, and widening of the electorate as the driving concerns for Ionel Brătianu, as he, too, was a central figure in most of the historically important developments in Romanian history during his lifetime.

One of the author’s premises is that „Ionel Brătianu was an engineer by training, a politician by vocation, and a historian by avocation. These occupations complemented one another” (p. XII). He convincingly demonstrates that this provides the key to understanding the younger Brătianu’s ideas and life. He also argues that Brătianu and his father were pragmatists, which meant that the „national” in National Liberal Party „was the supreme ideal which gave meaning to all his endeavours”, (p. XIII). This, unfortunately, trumped all other considerations.

Ionel Brătianu was a Westernizer and second generation party builder who wanted to broaden the National Liberal Party’s base. This amounted to a transformation of Romanian liberalism as protectionist liberalism (as articulated by P.S. Aurelian) became part of the party platform along with agrarian reform and education. Prof. Hitchins notes that Brătianu often used Bismarckian analogies in promoting statist solutions to these problems and saw Cavour as a role model. When he became Prime Minister from January 1909 to January 1911 (which he combined with the jobs of Foreign Minister and Minister of the Interior for much of that time), he was able to begin implementation of these policies. Hugh Seton-Watson’s question – whether agrarian reform could ever be economically viable – apparently never occurred to Brătianu or almost anyone else. The author points out that by the early 20th century, Romanian liberalism has transmuted itself into „neo-liberalism”, something quite different from the classical liberalism of the 19th century. Interestingly, Ionel Brătianu was also confronted by outsiders over Romania’s treatment of the Jews. He seems to have learned little from his father on this count other than the lame argument that Romanian anti-Semitism was not really anti-Semitism because it was economic not racial. Finally, and unlike his father, Ionel was a ladies man, whose personal conduct mirrored the casual morality of the Romanian ruling class.

Internationally, Prof. Hitchins emphasizes Ionel’s continued support for the 1883 secret alliance between Romania, Germany, and Austria-Hungary, though he was increasingly afraid that Vienna was losing control of the Hungarians (It should be noted that this „secret alliance” was one of the poorest kept secrets in a country not noted for keeping secrets). The Austro-Hungarian annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1908 and the Balkan Wars of 1912–1913 fatally weakened his commitment to the Triple Alliance. The Balkan Wars, in which Brătianu saw service, was also an eye opener for Romanian peasant soldiers who were astonished at the prosperity of their Bulgarian counterparts and

were radicalized as a result. Franz Ferdinand was Brătianu's last hope; his assassination in 1914 was a blow in more ways than one.

At the outbreak of the war, Brătianu pursued neutrality. Prof. Hitchins finds his dogged adherence to what he saw as Romania's interests in the face of intense internal and external pressure between 1914–1916 „remarkable” (p. 71). Unlike most foreign commentators, the writer does not make it a point of stressing Ionel Brătianu's oft-cited Machiavellian politics. His father has been double-crossed by the Russians in 1878. In World War I, Brătianu similarly „felt not only abandoned but betrayed. He could forgive neither the Allies for making promises which it now [1916] appeared they had little intention of fulfilling... He found in the present circumstances confirmation of his often-repeated observations that small states could hope at best to be treated as tools by the Great Powers and must therefore be prepared at every turn to defend their legitimate aspirations without compromise” (p. 87). Indeed, why should it be less reprehensible for big countries to lie and deceive?

And so it went at the Paris Peace Conference, with Brătianu bluntly confronting the patronizing arrogance and hypocrisy of Great Power leaders Clemenceau, Lloyd-George, and Wilson toward small countries. That honey might catch more flies than vinegar could be argued, since the pacific Alexandru Vaida managed to wring more concessions out of the Paris conference than Brătianu did. And it is also the case that the advent of the Bela Kun Communist regime in Hungary was „a god send” for Brătianu as it allowed him to flout the will of the conference and occupy much of Hungary in 1919. In the end, Brătianu (and Vaida) got almost all that Romania wanted in 1919–1920, more than doubling its territories and nearly the same for its population. This came with costs, not least of which was the increase of Romania's minorities populations from 8% to over 25%.

Though the National Liberal Party lost the 1919 elections they had conducted, it returned to power from January 1922 to August 1926. Steps were taken to consolidate Greater Romania (a new constitution in 1923, dramatically increased centralization, and rigid control of minorities); to promote economic modernization (through protectionism and agrarian reform); and to defend the security of its new borders (through the Little Entente, created as a counter to Great Power assertion in the area). The Brătianu era came to a close rather abruptly with the death of King Ferdinand in July 1927, followed by that of Ionel Brătianu in November 1927, aged 63.

Though Romanian economic development after 1930 continued to follow the general path laid out by Brătianu and the National Liberals, Romanian political life rapidly deteriorated in a period in European history aptly named by Élie Halévy „The Era of Tyrannies”. Dictatorship, World War, and finally occupation and takeover by the USSR followed, and all the things „characteristic of the Romania that Ionel Brătianu had striven to put into place were swept away” (p. 157).

In addition to a few well-chosen pictures and several maps, the book includes a number of useful „insert” biographical notes on individuals relevant to Romanian history in the 19th and 20th centuries. Prof. Hitchins' study is an excellent introduction to Ion I. C. Brătianu and his times and makes the career of this crucial figure in Romanian development accessible to English speakers in a deeply scholarly fashion for the first time. It is well worth reading.

Paul E. Michelson

Bernard LORY, *La ville balkanissime. Bitola. 1800–1918*, Les Cahiers du Bosphore, LX, Les Éditions Isis, Istanbul, 2011, 888 p.

An impressive work dealing with the heyday of a Balkan city which now can only surprise its visitors with its melancholy-ridden air. A couple of years after the release of a great book on a city that made history through its cosmopolite past (Mark Mazower, *Salonica: City of Ghosts, Christians, Muslims and Jews, 1430–1950*, Harper Collins, London, 2004, 525 p.), we welcome the equivalent on Bitola – „the consuls' city”, as it was called a century ago. Bitola for Macedonians, Bitolja for Bulgarians, Bitolj for Serbs, Monastiri for Greeks, Bitule for Aromanians, Monastir for the French, Manastir for Turks and Albanians, the city is only second to Thessaloniki as the largest metropolis of the 19th century in the Ottoman Balkans: nearly 50,000 inhabitants around 1913. As a multi-denominational,