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DOCTORAL THESIS

**The Limits of Dynastic Loyalty: Joseph II as Portrayed by the
Romanians in Transylvania (1790-1918)**

–Summary–

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ARGUMENT/ 10

INTRODUCTION/ 13

1. Historiographical preliminaries/ 13
2. Structure, sources, and methodology/ 17

CHAPTER I

THE HISTORICAL PATH OF TRANSYLVANIA (1699-1918) .

GENERAL ASPECTS/ 22

1. Transylvania in the first century of Habsburg domination. From the Peace of Karlowitz to Supplex Libellus Valachorum (1699-1791)/ 23
2. Transylvania from the beginning of the nineteenth century to the Revolution of 1848/ 31
3. From the "Springtime of the Peoples" to the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (1848-1867)/34
4. From Austro-Hungarian dualism to the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand (1867-1914)/ 41
5. First World War and the union of Transylvania with Romania (1914-1918)/ 46

CHAPTER II

JOSEPH II: CO-RULER AND EMPEROR/ 51

1. Limited power (1740-1780)/ 51
 - 1.1. The House of Habsburg before the birth of Joseph II/ 51
 - 1.2. First years of life/ 53
 - 1.3. Mariage and disappointment/ 55
 - 1.4. The travels throughout the empire: Transylvania/ 58
 - 1.5. Co-regency and formation/ 63
2. Absolute power (1780-1790) 67
 - 2.1. The ascension to the throne and the first reforms/ 67
 - 2.2. Intrigue and music at the Court of Vienna/ 71
 - 2.3. The Revolt of Horea/ 73
 - 2.4. Josephinism and the death of the "philosopher monarch"/ 75

CHAPTER III

THE PORTRAYAL OF JOSEPH II IN THE HISTORY TEXTBOOKS FROM TRANSYLVANIA (1790-1918)/ 83

1. Dynastic loyalty from the death of the enlightened monarch to the Revolution of 1848/ 87
2. Dynastic loyalty from after the "Springtime of the Peoples" to the Austro-Hungarian compromise/ 97
3. The image of Joseph II after the Austro-Hungarian dualism/ 102

CHAPTER IV

THE PORTRAYAL OF JOSEPH II IN THE ROMANIAN PRESS FROM TRANSYLVANIA (1790-1918)/ 122

1. Joseph II's death and the remembrance of his spirit until the years of the Revolution of 1848/ 124
2. The remembrance of Joseph II between the Revolution of 1848 and the Austro-Hungarian compromise of 1867/ 140
3. The depiction of Joseph II from the formation of the dual state to the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand (1867-1914)/ 149
4. The reiteration of Joseph II from the assassination of Franz Ferdinand to the end of the First World War/ 164

CHAPTER V

THE PORTRAYAL OF JOSEPH II IN THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF TRANSYLVANIA (1790-1918)/ 177

1. Joseph II from *Supplex Libellus Valachorum* to the "Springtime of the Peoples"/ 178
2. The portrayal of Joseph II between the Revolution of 1848 and the formation of the Austro-Hungarian dual state in 1867/ 198
3. The portrayal of Joseph II between the formation of the Austro-Hungarian dual state and 1914, the outbreak of the First World War/ 213
4. From dynastic loyalty to national loyalty. The image of Joseph II between 1914-1918/ 243

INSTEAD OF CONCLUSION: JOSEPH II BETWEEN MYTH AND REALITY.../ 256

BIBLIOGRAPHY/ 262

ANNEXES/ 279

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In 1773, on the account of Joseph II's visit to Transylvania, Samuel Brukenthal described in a report the situation of the Romanian nation in the 18th century. Firstly, he highlighted an important fact, reinforced by the Romanians in their memoirs, historical writings or in the press of the time, namely the demographic factor. Secondly, their social situation was depicted. The text outlines the image of the Romanians seen through the prism of the governing bodies in the local government. During his visit to Transylvania, Joseph II himself would observe what the governor of the Grand Principality detailed in his above-mentioned report. The visit of the first Austrian emperor to the territory inhabited by Romanians would establish his image as a favourable one and perpetuate it in relation to all the leaders who sat on the throne in Vienna. The contact the people had with Joseph in different contexts lead to the proliferation of a positive image of the Austrian emperor in the collective mentality of the Romanians.

Dynastic loyalty will consolidate around the figure of the enlightened monarch, but at the same time it is him who will determine the development of a national sentiment. The intermingling of these two principles becomes more evident after his death. Joseph's reformism made education and accessing information possible for Romanians, fact which altered the perception of an incredulous nation, giving the people hope that their life in the province can change. This is also the reason that, until 1918, Romanians kept his image alive through narrative representations employed as term of comparison for contemporary events. Romanians maintained their loyalty to the throne in Vienna even in less favourable times, without losing hope. Nonetheless, in those crucial moments, there was need of a figure who could generate hope and maintain dynastic loyalty alive in the collective memory of the Romanians. And this figure could not have been other than an Austrian emperor, and even more precisely, other than Joseph II, the one who gave the serfs their freedom, religious freedom and, moreover, was personally involved in all that concerned the fate and needs of his people.

A material manifestation of loyalism (monuments, obelisks, statues dedicated to the monarch after his death) in as far as Joseph II is concerned is not to be considered in the Transylvanian region. Even though in other places which were under Habsburg rule, such as Bohemia, Moravia or Austria, one might indeed encounter homages paid in the form of monuments, Transylvania, which did not have this possibility, kept his memory alive through

narrative representations. In a time in which the national spirit gained contour all over the European continent, dynastic loyalism underwent a struggle for survival in the face of national loyalty. Schemes were various, the two currents, dynastic and national, often intermingling in the historical context of the time. The element that helped maintain dynastic loyalty in this competition was always the monarch, and hope was permanently fuelled by the return to the past.

The present research has, first and foremost, an interpretative quality, and secondly, it represents a bibliographical catalogue of works which have Joseph II as protagonist or in which he is briefly mentioned. The incursion through the historiography of the 19th and early 20th centuries established a comprehensive portrayal of the emperor, based on the opinions of historians and intellectuals from those times, mainly Romanian, but also Hungarian, German, French, English or American. The historical transition from dynastic loyalty to national loyalty, through the prism of Joseph II's depiction, represents a different approach to the subject. The intermingling of specialized literature and literary or anecdotal texts gave shape to a complex portrait of the enlightened monarch in the imaginary of the Romanians in Transylvania. The contextualization of the subject of research and its inclusion in a temporal space is the first step on which the paper is based. The historical space chosen for research begins with the death of Joseph II, year 1790, and ends more than a century later, in 1918. Throughout this period the image of the enlightened monarch ranged from humane to legendary, but also vice versa, from supernatural figure to his eventual humanization.

The first chapter is dedicated to historical events, their unfolding moving from the larger European context to the smaller, regional one – Transylvania. The general historical aspects record the events ranging from Transylvania being taken under the administrative rule of the Habsburg Empire and all the implications generated by this fact to the end of the First World War and the Great Principality joining the Kingdom of Romania. From the reign of Maria Theresa, aspects concerned with bishop Inochentie Micu Klein, the Revolt of Horea, Supplex Libellus Valachorum, the Revolution of 1848/1849, Austro-Hungarian dualism, to the renowned Memorandum of the Romanians in Transylvania, the assassination of Franz Ferdinand and the First World War, everything is equally connected to the smaller events which changed and influenced Transylvania in the 19th century and early 20th century. A brief historical presentation is necessary for the location of the subject on a chronological axis.

A depiction of Joseph II's life and the most important aspects of his reign is inevitable due to the fact that he is the main subject of the paper. The biographic presentation in the second

chapter is divided into two parts, the period of co-regency and the period of absolute power. Beginning with 1741, the year of the emperor's birth, to 1780, the death of his mother, the monarch's life, his adolescence, aspects of his education, his appointment as co-ruler after his father's (Francisc de Lorena) death, and, certainly, his travels throughout the empire are outlined. From 1780 and Joseph's ascension to the throne, the emphasis falls on the reforms adopted by the emperor, measures taken to improve the life of his subjects, but also on references to court life, the emperor's daily life, concluding the chapter with the last moments of his life and his death in 1790.

History textbooks published in the 19th century, together with the ones edited between 1900 and 1918, served as another documentary source. We attempted to represent Joseph II in the way pupils studying the above-mentioned textbooks would have imagined him. The scholastic environment was an important propagandistic part of dynastic loyalism. Educational institutions were meant to instill patriotic love into students. The manner in which textbooks were written, in the form of personal biographies, had the function of developing an attachment to the House of Habsburg and its leader. Joseph II's portrayal in the textbooks is a combination of real and unreal, of historical reality and fiction.

The following part of the research focuses on the image of Joseph II in the collective consciousness of the Romanians in Transylvania, as reflected in the press. Romanian periodicals, not always objective in their depictions, approached the subject more seldom after the emperor's death, but it was regularly done at crucial points. When the crisis was on the verge of breaking out and provoking a rupture in as far as dynastic loyalty was concerned, newspapers were publishing articles about different moments in Joseph II's life or about his ideas. Most of the times, the perspective from which the monarch was presented was legendary, highlighting his superiority and perfection in relation to those who have succeeded to the throne. In the case of remembering in the form of anecdotes, the legend about Joseph II absorbs history and not vice versa. Each time, the story was shaped around reality, reforms, decrees or visits he made both in Transylvania or other parts of the empire.

The last chapter, based on a comparison between Romanian and Hungarian, German, and English historiographies in the interval 1790-1918, focuses on the image of Joseph II in relation with the defining elements of dynastic loyalty and national identity. The common denominator of both, emperor Joseph II, evolves from his reiteration in historical texts to character in fiction (novels or historical novellas). A different approach concerning the portrayal of Joseph II in this

final chapter is also due to romanticized literature. The interweaving of documentary sources and those that appeal to the imagination or fiction expose the subject from a different perspective.

After his death in 1790, free rein was given to imagination all across the Holy Roman Empire, and the image which was gaining contour mirrored an intermingling of reality and fiction. Starting from real facts mentioned in both historiography and the sources of the time, a fairy-tale type of character was created, a legendary figure who belonged to another world, where good always prevails upon evil. Each time, the positive character took over the wisdom of biblical kings, David or Solomon, the courage of great leaders of ancient times, Alexander the Great or Trajan, to finally become phantasm or Messiah.

The reign of Joseph II remained imprinted in the minds of the Romanians primarily because of the Patent of Toleration and the abolishment of serfdom. These reforms reflected the monarch's wish to integrate the Romanian people within the empire, as a nation capable of affirming itself. Moreover, the Joseph II's reign governed the other monarchs. The one who best acknowledges this fact is Franz Joseph, who, as it can be noticed, also borrows his name and tries to create a homogeneous empire, faithful to the way Joseph tried to implement. He does not succeed, concluding as proof the agreement with Hungary in 1897, time at which Romanians feel betrayed, but nevertheless do not lose hope. They continue to keep Joseph II's memory alive through the memoirs they send to Vienna, through speeches, newspaper articles and to promote his legacy in history textbooks. With this reiteration of the enlightened despot, dynastic loyalism will be strengthened, being previously fragmented and eroded due to the policy of Franz Joseph. The dynastic loyalism of Romanians in Transylvania was the mechanism of hope for an autonomous province and for a representation of the Romanian nation that was consistent with the demographic factor, and Joseph II was the solution for any obstacle in the smooth functioning of this mechanism.

The fact that Joseph II's legacy governed all the key moments of Transylvania's history, from the 19th century and culminating with the assassination of Franz Ferdinand in the early 20th century, is unquestionable. The archduke, seen as a new hope for the rebirth of the Romanians as accepted nation, was assassinated in 1914. As the saying went at the time, it was not necessarily a man who passed away, but more of an idea. This fact can be deduced from the Romanians' reaction to the news of the assassination, namely that the dynastic loyalty of Romanians in Transylvania revolved around a vicious circle of hope. When it faded away, a shift to national loyalty took its place. What made Joseph II, as well as Franz Ferdinand, special was their place in the perspective towards their subjects. Due to their personal lives and conceptions, they both

oscillated between the curse of loving nothing and the error of loving everything. In other words, Joseph II renounces his personal life in favour of the state, while Franz Ferdinand is willing to sacrifice monarchy for a fulfilled personal life. This was the climax in the remembrance of the enlightened emperor, as from this moment dynastic loyalism decreases in order to make way for national loyalism in 1918, due to the consequences of the First World War. The transition was not sudden, national loyalism existing already during Joseph II's reign, but in an incipient form. It developed gradually, until it reached completion and replaced the dynastic one.

The present research outlines the issues which gave rise to dynastic loyalism, having Joseph II as promoter, the temporal points that marked his remembrance, but also the attitude and the position of Romanians towards the House of Habsburg and the monarch during the unfolding of historical events in Transylvania. Taken chronologically, all occurrences of the monarch in textbooks, press or historiography since his death and until 1918 coincide with the transition which dynastic loyalism undergoes in parallel with the consolidation of national loyalism. The main emphasis falls on the depiction of the emperor, but nonetheless the ramifications of this subject involve the historical events of the period in question. The connection between Romanians and Joseph II turned the latter into an important pillar in the history of the Romanians in Transylvania. Perhaps his impact on the society of the late 18th century and up until the early 20th century was due to the short period of actual reign, considering that from 1765 to 1780 he was co-ruler under the reign of his mother, Maria Theresa.

The pragmatism of the Romanians in Transylvania developed in parallel with the perseverance that Joseph II displayed with regard to the implementation of his reforms and eventually coalesced in the sense of devotion to the House of Habsburg. The interplay between reality and fiction in the representation of the monarch endowed him with a mythical quality, which was of great help in maintaining loyalty to the throne. The dual loyalty of Romanians in Transylvania developed almost concomitantly, but the balance tilted in favour of the national one, which took shape behind the dynastic cover and due to imperial politics. Among these oscillations in mentality and perspective a single fact remains clear: Joseph II, despite his death, managed not to disappear for a century and several decades from the memory of the Romanians in Transylvania.